

"The Insane Root." 304

Opium has been called, by the most famous of its victims, "just, subtle, and mighty." The articles by Mr. C. F. ANDREWS on its influence in India which we have published in the last three days confirm with horrible emphasis the justice of DE QUINCEY'S two last adjectives. In the British possessions in the East the drug is both subtle and mighty. It lures British subjects to doom by its sinister fascination, and it hypnotises British authorities by its revenue-making powers. Mr. ANDREWS showed particularly the evil that is being done in the growing industrial areas of India. People at home will learn with astonishment that opium bought from the Government monopoly shops is used by women employed in the cotton factories to dope their babies. This ghastly habit, it seems, is so widespread that the wife of the present Governor of Bombay has stated that 98 per cent of the mothers give their babies the dope before starting their day's work, and Mr. ANDREWS is inclined to accept her figure. He describes from his own experience the children in Bombay "looking like persons who had suddenly grown old," and he adds that infant mortality in the city was recently 666 in the 1,000, and that even in ordinary years it is

because there the strong sanctions of the Hindu and Moslem religions are still effective, but in the industrial cities the old religious sanctions are breaking down. Evidently it is the plain duty of those who have introduced factories into India to guard her from the inevitable evils of her new way of life. But Mr. ANDREWS makes it only too clear that what has been done is not enough. There have been regulation, control, and reduction. There has not been any attempt to stamp out the traffic altogether. That has been left to private zeal, notably to Mr. GANDHI, and when we seek for the reason why the Government has so neglected what seems so obvious a social duty we are at once brought up against money. The Indian revenues, 3 per cent of which are drawn from the drug traffic, are the real defenders of Indian opium.

Much has, it is true, already been sacrificed. The Government of India, for instance, finally ceased exporting to China in 1913, although an extremely profitable trade could be done with that Empire of addicts. But our internal and external policy nevertheless remains sadly discreditable. It was over the second of these, the question of export, that the American Delegation withdrew from Geneva in February. When that conference met most of the countries concerned had been pledged since 1912 by the Hague Convention to prohibit the export of prepared opium

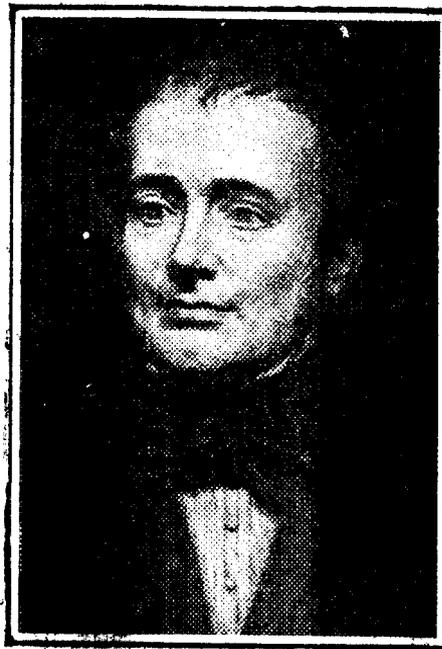
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vision of traffic in all other drugs was expressly entrusted to the League of Nations by the Covenant, it became the duty of Geneva to make more effective the indeterminate Hague Convention. The Americans who attended the Conference, summoned with this object, crossed the Atlantic eager for a root-and-branch crusade. They retired after having bluntly accused the British delegates of bad faith. The Americans wanted the prohibition of prepared opium to be brought into force in fifteen years. Great Britain offered instead fifteen years from the time that China should go "dry." So long, it was argued, as China continues to be vastly the largest producing country in the world, traffic in opium cannot be checked. This being so, why should India give up revenue merely to enrich less deserving people? Besides, it was said, not an ounce of opium grown on British soil goes to the drug-fiends of the United States—British export is all licensed and above board, so what was America's complaint? America, it is as well to say, is not hurt by British traffic. But what of ourselves? The Indian Government sells to other British possessions in the Far East opium for smoking, although in India smoking is forbidden and is, of course, a deadly habit. So we have the sad picture of one British Government taking revenue from another for a trade that it brands as a vice. We have, moreover, the several consuming British territories like the Malay

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TO-DAY'S ANNIVERSARY.

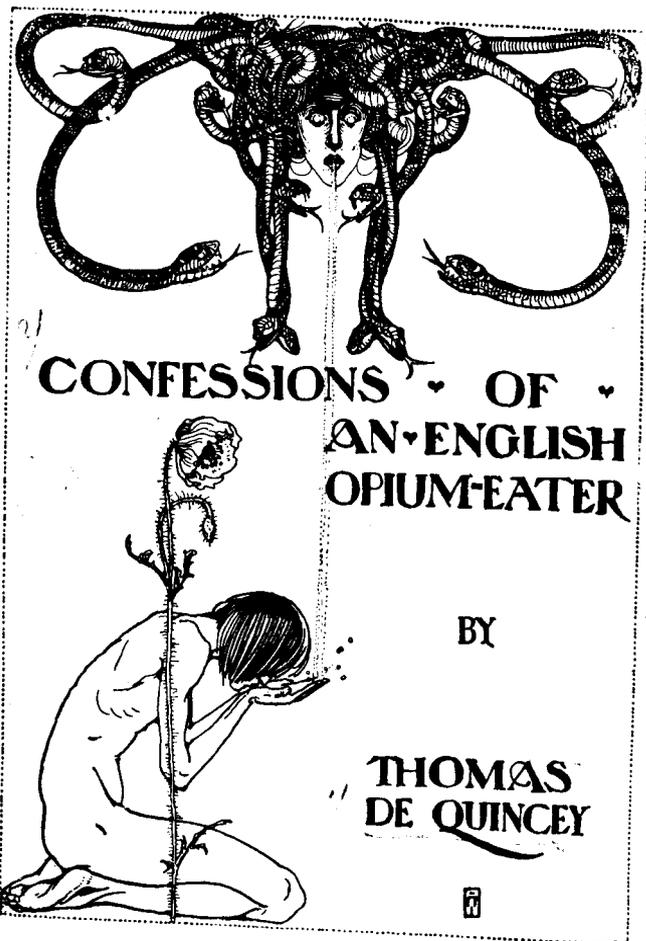


THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

Born Aug. 15, 1785. -1859

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CONFESIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER

BY THOMAS DE QUINCEY

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 ILLUSTRATIONS by WILLY POGANY



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might compensate, by a vast overbalance, any violence done to the feelings I have noticed, and justify a breach of the general rule. Infirmity and misery do not, of necessity, imply guilt. They approach, or recede from, the shades of that dark alliance, in proportion to the probable motives and prospects of the offender, and to the palliations, known or secret, of the offence; in proportion as the temptations to it were potent from the first, and as the resistance to it, in act or in effort, was earnest to the last. For my own part, without breach of truth or modesty, I may affirm that my life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher: from my birth, I was made an intellectual creature; and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my schoolboy days. If opium-eating be a sensual pleasure, and if I am bound to confess that I have indulged in it to an excess not yet recorded of any other man, it is no less true that I have struggled against this fascination with a fervent zeal, and have at length accomplished what I never yet heard attributed to any other man, have untwisted, almost to its final links, the chain which fettered me. Such a self-conquest may reasonably be set off in counterbalance to any kind or degree of self-indulgence. Not to insist that, in my case, the self-conquest was unquestionable, but the self-indulgence open to doubts of casuistry, according as that name shall be extended to acts aiming at the bare relief of pain, or shall be restricted to such as aim at the excitement of superfluous pleasure.

Guilt, therefore, I do not acknowledge; and, if I did,

it is possible that I might still resolve on the present act of confession, in consideration of the service which I may thereby render to the whole class of opium-eaters. But who are they? Reader, I am bound to say, a very numerous class indeed. Of this I became convinced, some years ago, by computing, at that time, the number of those in one small class of English society (the class of men distinguished for talent and notoriety) who were known to me, directly or indirectly, as opium-eaters; such, for instance, as the eloquent and benevolent William Wilberforce; the late Dean of Carlisle, Dr. Isaac Milner;* the first Lord

* "*Isaac Milner*":—He was nominally known to the public as Dean of Carlisle, being colloquially always called *Dean Milner*; but virtually he was best known in his own circle as the head of Queen's College, Cambridge, where he usually resided. In common with his brother, Joseph of Hull, he was substantially a Wesleyan Methodist; and in that character, as regarded principles and the general direction of his sympathies, he pursued his deceased brother's History of the Christian Church down to the era of Luther. In these days, he would perhaps not be styled a Methodist, but simply a Low-Churchman. By whatever title described, it is meantime remarkable that a man confessedly so conscientious as Dean Milner could have reconciled to his moral views the holding of Church preferment so important as this deanery in combination with the headship of an important college. One or other must have been consciously neglected. Such a record, meantime, powerfully illustrates the advances made by the Church during the last generation in practical homage to self-denying religious scruples. A very lax man would not in these days allow himself to do that which thirty years ago a severe Church-Methodist (regarded by many even as a fanatic) persisted in doing, without feeling himself called on for apology. If I have not misapprehended its tenor, this case serves most vividly to illustrate the