

EDITORIAL

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THE NARCOTIC EVIL AND LEGISLATION.

There can be but little difference of opinion in regard to the grave menace which the narcotic drug habits at this time constitute. Public health and police records in every American city show that in spite of measures taken to curtail it the narcotic evil is becoming more prevalent. While the conditions are most aggravated in the seaports and cities near international boundary lines, scarcely a hamlet but has yielded its victim.

Sad as the condition is, there is some cause for satisfaction in the knowledge that of the narcotic drugs distributed through legitimate channels but very small amounts, relatively, escape into the illicit trade. The Harrison Act of 1914, amended in 1918, the provisions of which have been carried out in good faith by the overwhelming majority of pharmacists and physicians, has proved as effective as such a measure could be expected to be.

The great quantities of morphine and cocaine which are being sold by "dope" peddlers are not obtained, directly or indirectly, from the wholesale or retail drug trade of this country. These goods are smuggled in, either through the seaports or over the Canadian or Mexican borders. Nor is this due to carelessness or lack of good faith on the part of customs officials. Seizures of narcotics are being made constantly, but undoubtedly much larger quantities escape the vigilance of customs inspectors. The packages are small and easily concealed. The price of narcotics in regular channels is high, but the price which the illicit dealer can afford to pay is much higher. A member of the crew of a freighter may walk ashore in a Pacific Coast port with enough morphine in the lining of his coat to yield him a rich reward once he delivers it to the dealer, whom he generally knows how to find. Both Americans and Canadians have found it easy to bring narcotics over the boundary line. Those engaged in this traffic do not always follow the main-traveled highways. The boundary line is long and the customs officers are but few.

Undoubtedly the narcotic evil is one which requires the constant vigilance of municipal, state and federal officials in every section of the country. However, in considering the evil we must never forget that it is a world problem, and that it must be dealt with as such. The nations have for some years recognized this as a matter which required concentrated action. The International Opium Convention, held at The Hague in 1912, reached an agreement which was signed by nearly all of the powers, including the United States. This instrument pledged the contracting powers to regulate the importation, manufacture and distribution of narcotics within their own territories, and to prohibit the exportation of these except to persons having authority under laws of the importing countries.

In 1914 the Congress of the United States passed two laws designed to fulfill the pledges made at The Hague in 1912. One of these, the Harrison Act of December 17, 1914, was intended to regulate the distribution of narcotics within our own borders. Earlier in the year there had been passed a law designed to

regulate the importation and exportation. In regard to importation this act provided that narcotics could be brought into the country for medicinal purposes only. It forbade exportation of narcotics except to those countries whose laws placed suitable restrictions upon their entry and distribution. In order that information might be available concerning the laws of the various nations as these concerned narcotic drugs, our law of 1914 directed the Secretary of State to request all foreign governments to communicate their laws and regulations governing the importation of narcotics. Our act also provided that after copies of the laws and regulations of the various nations had been received the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Commerce should jointly make and publish proper regulations for carrying the provisions of the law into effect.

There was a long delay in the issuance by the three Secretaries of the regulations provided for in the law, and it was not until May 1, 1920, that the regulations finally went into effect. During this period of delay the exportation of narcotics from the United States reached enormous proportions, especially during 1919 and the early months of 1920. From one Pacific Coast port alone, during the period between July first and December first, 1919, there were exported to Japan, opium, morphine salts and cocaine which amounted to 550 million U. S. P. doses of these narcotics. This did not include large shipments through the same port of British narcotics, sent across United States territory in bond enroute to Japan. There is every reason to believe that by far the greater part of these purchases of narcotics made by Japan were distributed in China in direct violation by Japan of international agreement. It is also certain that at least some small quantities of these narcotics of American manufacturers recrossed the Pacific to be smuggled into the United States. When the regulations issued jointly by the three Secretaries went into effect in May 1920, the exportation of opium, opium alkaloids and cocaine to Japan was prohibited.

Some who have discussed the international phases of the narcotic evil have taken the ground that since the regulations have stopped the flow of narcotics to Japan, the nation which was the worst offender in improper distribution, no further action is necessary. However, it was not only the narcotics sent to Japan which entered illicit trade. The report of the Special Narcotic Committee appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury, which report was made in June 1919, calls attention to the fact that the exports of opium and morphine to Canada greatly increased between 1913 and 1918. The Committee believes this an indication that "considerable quantities of these smuggled goods are exported from this country for the purpose of re-entry through illicit channels."

Those who have studied the matter most carefully are convinced that further legislation is necessary. The Jones-Miller Bill (H. R. 2193 or S. 206) now before Congress is intended to remedy some of the defects in the law of January 17, 1914. While the original law provides that narcotics may be exported to those countries where laws provide suitable regulations for entry, the proposed law requires that these goods may be shipped only to those persons who furnish adequate proof that the drugs are to be applied exclusively to medicinal and legitimate uses, that they will not be reexported, and that there is a shortage of the drug ordered.

While the present law says that opium, coca leaves and their derivatives and preparations may be imported into this country for medicinal use only, the Jones-Miller Bill would limit importation to the amounts which the Secretaries of State, Treasury and Commerce may consider necessary to supply legitimate demands. The proposed law also forbids, as far as the narcotic drugs are concerned, the privilege of "in transit" shipments across United States territory.

Surely the provisions of the Jones-Miller Bill are not too drastic. Any legitimate dealer in a foreign country can furnish proof that the narcotic drugs he is ordering are needed, and that they are for legitimate use. Certainly it is only reasonable that the proper authorities should have supervision over the amounts of opium and coca leaves imported into this country. If this had been exercised earlier certain American firms would not have been able to export hundreds of thousands of ounces of morphine salts to Japan in 1919 and 1920. This would have prevented America's participation on an enormous scale in the drugging of China. No one will question the desirability of stopping "in transit" shipments across the United States, a privilege which has given British firms opportunity to sell narcotics in Japan in evasion of British laws.

The Jones-Miller Bill of the 66th Congress was objected to, even by some friends of anti-narcotic legislation, because it absolutely prohibited exportation of opium, morphine and cocaine. This was unfair, because it would have made it impossible for American firms to supply the legitimate demand for these agents for medicinal use. If they had been forced to refuse orders for the narcotic alkaloids and opium preparations, undoubtedly their general business would have suffered. However, the Jones-Miller Bill as now before Congress provides for exportation of the drugs in question for medicinal use, and it would seem that every reasonable objection to the Bill has been removed.

The Jones-Miller Bill, if passed, will not end the world's narcotic traffic. Much will remain to be done by the other nations, some of which may be slow to act. But the passage of the Bill will show the world that America is wholly sincere in carrying out the pledges made at The Hague Convention, and will undoubtedly stimulate other nations to emulate our example. Just as it was necessary for the United States to act as a leader in the limitation of armaments, so it is in this matter. The standards of morality and fair dealing prevailing among the nations are not likely to be higher than those maintained by the United States.

The Jones-Miller Bill has been held in committee pending the disposal of administration measures of the greatest importance. It is probable that the Bill will be reported out in January or February. Public opinion, as far as it has been attracted to the measure, is strongly in favor of its passage. Pharmacists, who know all too well the supreme importance of curtailing the narcotic traffic, should unitedly support the Bill. Communications from associations, colleges, and individuals, to Senators and Congressmen, urging support of the Bill, will help.

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