

Dr. Hamilton Wright, Opium Commissioner, Says We Use More of That Drug Per Capita Than the Chinese.

Hamilton Wright, United States Opium Commissioner, is 44 years old, and a native of Ohio. He was appointed to his present office July 1, 1908, and was American delegate to the International Opium Commission, which met at Shanghai in February, 1909. He began his education in Boston, and was graduated M. D. C. M., with first-class honors, from McGill University, in Montreal, in 1885. He served there for a year in a hospital, then spent two years in China and Japan, studying scientific, social, and economic conditions. In 1897 he received the British Medical Association Studentship for researches on the nervous system, and elsewhere in Europe, won high academic honors. In 1900-1903 he served on a special mission in Further India, studying tropical diseases, especially beri-beri, malaria, and plague. After other official medical service of the highest importance in India he returned to the United States in 1903. Since the adjournment of the International Opium Commission he has been attached to the Department of State, preparing for the coming conference at The Hague this Spring. He is the author of many scientific articles and monographs on the nervous system, social and economic problems in the tropics, and the history, sociology, and economics of the opium problem.

By Edward Marshall.

READ this paragraph and gasp. "Of all the nations of the world," Dr. Hamilton Wright, who knows more of the subject than any other living man, told me the other day, "the United States consumes the most habit-forming drug per capita. Opium, the most pernicious drug known to humanity, is surrounded, in this country, with far fewer safeguards than any nation in all Europe fences it with. China now guards it with much greater care than we do; Japan preserves her people from it more intelligently than we do, our who can buy it, in almost any form, in every tenth one of our drug stores. Our physicians use it recklessly in remedies and thus become responsible for making numberless 'dope fiends,' and in uncounted nostrums offered everywhere for sale in this country, in making quantities, without restriction. Even in Russia medical practitioners, recognizing the great Sydenham's declaration that without opium their profession would go limping, have guarded it as one might guard a pearl, for use and against abuse. A physician there would not even give a child a habit-forming drug, but in this country it is so common that a child can get it himself because he had a trifling pain or felt a little worry. Here physicians often are addicted to the habit, and they continually prescribe opium for insufficient causes or without any real excuse. The contrast between European and American professional ethics in this matter is deplorable, and the dark side of the picture is America's. A proportion of our doctors and a much larger ratio of our druggists regard their liberty to prescribe and sell as license to advise and furnish to its victims the narcotic curse upon demand."

Dr. Wright is earnest, energetic, nervous and magnetic; throughout official circles he is spoken of, in Washington, as "Opium Doctor" Wright, and is proud of it. He has done more, perhaps, for the curbing of the opium habit in this country, and the fruit of his enthusiasm has not been confined to the United States. He is an important leader in a world-wide crusade, and almost from world's end to world's end his fame is known. Everywhere he is regarded as the one man whose name, through individual effort along the lines which he has chosen, has accomplished most. On the 30th of May, this year, he will be upon the firing line again in still another battle with the evil as one, and, probably, the chief of the American delegation to the Opium Conference at The Hague, where, with associates appointed by twelve of the nations, he will, as he has devoutly hoped, give to the world a real solution of this mightiest of its narcotic problems. Few people realize how serious the opium habit has become in the United States. Ask most men where most opium is used and they will answer, "China," without the slightest hesitation; but the fact is definitely established that per capita consumption equals and probably exceeds that of the Dragon Empire, and there the habit is intelligently being killed, while here it is increasing with so great a speed that we may well stand startled at the contemplation of its spread.

The Story of the Opium Fight.

"The history of the opium fight forms a queer illustration of our National blindness toward our own sins. As I have explained to me, "and emphasizes our National tendency to see, with an amazing clarity, the sins of others, while remaining blind to our own viciousness. The habit has this Nation in its grip to an astonishing extent. Our prisons and our hospitals are full of victims of it. It has robbed ten thousand business men of moral sense and made them beasts who prey upon their fellows, unidentified it has become one of the most fertile causes of unhappiness and sin in the United States, if not that cause which can be charged with more of both than any other."

"When Champ Clark, before the Ways and Means Committee, asked me what effect of the restrictive legislation which I favored would be, I said that it would be to drive out of the business not less than 10 per cent. of all the retail druggists in the country, because, in the United States, at least one druggist out of every ten exists by means of profits from the sale of habit-forming drugs, of which, of course, opium and its derivatives are most important. Most people will, with Mr. Clark, be much surprised to read this, but it is less than truth. If opium were rightly safeguarded in the United States far more than a full tenth of all the druggists would be immediately forced from business, and many, many a competent doctor, willing to prescribe the drug upon demand of any patient's hurtful craving for it, would find his practice, now, really, a mere detail of one of the world's most vicious habits, dwindling quickly into nothing."

"As the result of the illicit traffic in these drugs the pharmaceutical profession in this country has lost much of its dignity, and this is fully justified by facts; the medical profession must include within its ranks a multitude of arrant knaves, the greater number of them, possibly, themselves the victims of the drug and robbed by it of all sense of their responsibility to their patients and society."

"Our people, through these facts, and carelessness, ignorance, and want of foresight by the Federal Government, and, too, I think, as the result of mental and physical exhaustion following the civil war, have become the greatest drug

fiends in the world, not excluding the Chinese. We are literally the world's opium eaters."

"And no efforts!"

Opposition to Efforts at Reform.

"Oh, yes, very definite efforts have been made looking toward reform, and they will win, but the opposition has been strenuous. A restrictive bill, proposed this Winter, provided for the regulation by the Federal Government of every person—importer, manufacturer, druggist, or physician—who in any manner handles habit-forming drugs, and that all sales and transactions in those drugs must be recorded and such records kept quite open to inspection by the accredited authorities of States and municipalities charged with the enforcement of anti-narcotic laws. Against this bill was brought an opposition representing aggregated capital of quite \$100,000,000, and with an annual turnover of at least five times that sum."

"And is there, in no other country, so strong an opposition to restrictive measures?"

"No other country in the world, today, is either faced by such an opium problem, or finds its efforts to dissolve the one it has so viciously opposed. China is involved to the extent of annual duties amounting to \$6,000,000, or, roughly, \$90,000,000; India's financial interests do not amount to more than \$50,000,000 annually, counting tariff and internal revenue, and counting her whole Bengal opium monopoly, her Chinese traffic and her excise income from the sale of opium in India. There has been talk, lots of it, in this country, in criticism of the British attitude toward opium, but we might, with much more profit, talk in criticism of our own, for, in comparison with ours the sins of England are small matters. There are open, ours are hidden. That is why we hear so much about Great Britain's and so little of our own; and the hidden vice is ever far more dangerous than the unconcealed wrongdoing."

"Has no other country than America a similar problem among druggists and physicians?"

We Stand Alone in Our Indifference.

"All have had, but, except for us, they all have brought their evils under some control. Canada, for instance, has passed a splendid law. Germany has good laws, and so have Russia, France, and England. Even the Crown Colony of Hongkong has a law which puts this country to the blush. I have spoken about Canada. She has not only cleared her own skirts, but has held an unmasking helping hand out toward us. Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King has had a bill passed there which forbids the exportation to this country of opium prepared for smoking, thereby protecting us from smuggled opium from that direction, almost against our will, apparently. In the past not less than 20,000 pounds, and, probably, quite 30,000 pounds per annum have been smuggled into the United States across our northern boundary."

"And how about our southern border?"

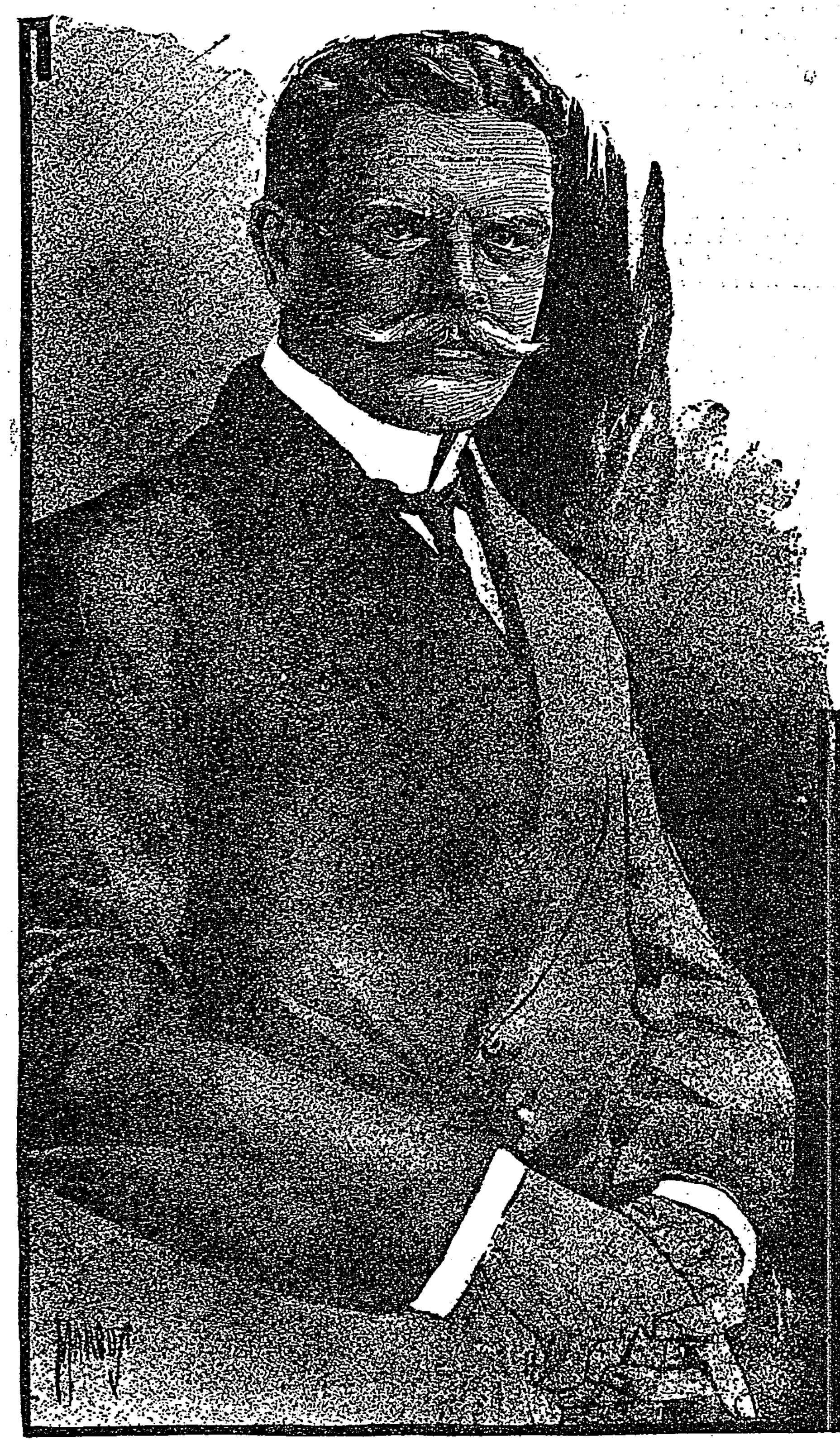
"I know less about the Mexican frontier. We are sure that large amounts of opium prepared for smoking are imported into Mexico, and that most of it is not consumed there. The natural inference is that it comes across our boundary—smuggled—but, for one reason or another, we lack detailed knowledge."

"That matter will adjust itself, however. Larger phases of the subject have demanded and are still demanding our attention. There are the Philippines, for instance."

"When we found that we had captured, with the Philippines, an opium problem, we set to work to solve it as intelligently as we could, and, at first, it was thought best to gradually abolish the drug's use there. The islands needed revenue and needed it acutely, so it was deemed by some expedient, if not entirely wise, to countenance restricted sale, beneath a heavy tax, and use the income for necessary, worthy purposes, such as, for instance, schools. But further study proved the trade to be a threat to everything we held of value in the islands, so Mr. Taft, who then was Governor, sent out his experts to investigate through the whole East and come back with full information and suggestions. This commission also advised gradual abolition of the traffic, not its instantaneous prohibition, and, therefore, for a time this was again considered, but it soon became apparent that the measures they suggested were too mild to suit the sentiment of the home people, who protested until Congress passed an act of prohibition at the request of Mr. Roosevelt and of Mr. Root."

The Islands in the Grip of Opium.

"The vice had gained strong foothold



U. S. Opium Commissioner Hamilton Wright.

in the islands. Unchecked, it surely would have utterly destroyed their people. It had been Mr. Taft's recognition of this when he was Governor of the islands which started the whole movement, and Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. Taft, Mr. Root, and Mr. Knox all deserve enormous credit for effective work."

"Well, this situation on the islands, with the study it gave rise to, led us toward some appreciation of our own domestic faults and earnest efforts to correct them, so, after all, even the worst enemies of the Pacific islands must acknowledge that they have been beneficial in their general effect on us. Without the work which their necessities demanded it is doubtful if we would to-day be so near to general appreciation of the hold which drug habits have taken on us as a nation."

"Our action in the islands, too, was destined to prove beneficial, not to us, alone, but to the world at large, for the traffic in the islands was not only very rapidly suppressed, but the attention of the great community of nations was attracted, by our discoveries and action, to the problem and, later, to the possibilities of its solution."

"Did the islands take the prohibition without protest?"

"No prohibition of a vice is ever taken without protest," Mr. Wright replied. "Our Government met many difficulties, but by solving them it decreased crime upon the islands, encouraged thrift and doubtless raised the general intelligence."

"His general hint of difficulties was confirmed to me, the same day he made it, by an ex-officer of Filipino scouts who talked with me about the matter. His story is worth interpolation here. Lee Clotworthy, his name is, and his fame is very great. He has traveled far and well met many men of many kinds, including cowmen in Montana, where he has a ranch and where he learned the

cattle business. At present he is counted one of this country's ablest military writers, experts, critics, but one day at Manila only his keen knowledge of the cow kind counted."

Clever Smugglers of Opium.

The Secret Service men were sure that day that on a cattle boat from Hongkong opium was being smuggled, but they could not learn just how. Elaborate search was made without results, but without convincing the officials that they would be wrong in their surmise. Clotworthy happened to be near, and he was called in consultation. He proceeded to the dock and watched the cattle as they came down through the chute from off the ship. His practiced eye saw something wrong with one cow's horn, and he had her separated from the herd. Then he studied that queer horn. Investigation showed that it had been removed, and, by clever fingers, fitted with an inner thread and screwed in place again after it had been filled with raw opium. And in the herd upon the boat it soon developed that there were a lot of opium-bearing cows. In that manner, it was discovered, tremendous quantities of the drug had been smuggled in."

But to go back to Dr. Wright.

"The almost instantaneously beneficial effects of our repressive legislation in the Philippines," he continued, "attracted the attention of the Chinese Government. The leading Chinese statesmen were delighted by what they thought our friendly act in the suppression of vice in territory neighboring them; and Tong Shao Ye, with Yuan Shi Ki, men of great breadth of mind and influence, decided that the time had come for China, also, to take action. For two centuries the vice had held her spellbound. Accordingly the Emperor abolished all inferior production of the poppy and ordered the prohibition of opium smoking in all parts of the em-

pire by a gradual process extending over ten years. His course has been surprisingly effective."

The Calling of the Conference.

"Then it was that Mr. Roosevelt, acting through Mr. Root, invited all the powers having possessions in the East to come together in a conference looking to the full suppression of the traffic in that portion of the world. That was before we realized the vast importance of our great home problem—the mighty problem which we hope during the impending meeting at The Hague to find some measure to control."

"The powers gladly acquiesced in the idea of the first great conference. France, Russia, Portugal, Holland, Great Britain, and Japan sent delegates. They were nearly all directly interested in the trade, and had watched with interest our Philippine experiments. France had a large colony in Indo-China, in which a great part of her revenue was drawn from opium, of which the Government had a monopoly of importation, manufacture, and sale; Holland drew much of her revenue from opium and had a smaller source; Japan, which had an effective prohibitory law in Japan proper, still derived a large part of her Formosan revenues from the opium trade; China, from the internal production of opium and the importation of the drug from India, had 150,000,000 or about \$90,000,000 annually to consider; Russia gained no revenue from the trade, and in 1881 had made it contraband; Portugal's colony on the Macao coast subsisted almost wholly on its opium revenue; in Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Germany the problem had been practically solved, but it existed; Persia had a problem; Turkey, which had one of great importance, was invited, but could not accept."

"The conference was held and stimulated interest throughout the nations of the earth. We had become leaders in a real world-movement looking to a great reform and had just reason to be proud of this; but we had gone to Shanghai, fresh from our achievements in the islands, with a feeling that we were a righteous crowd, licensed to feel superior."

"A little study showed us the grave folly of our position, for the matter of our own consumption of the drug arose and was to some extent, investigated. The results appalled our delegates."

Controlling a Vast Peril.

"It has been said that at that Shanghai conference little was accomplished. That is not true in any sense, but if nothing more had been done by it than the awakening of interest in our own great problem it still would have remained among the most immensely useful of world-meetings. The coming conference is its direct outgrowth, and that is something, isn't it? Much real good has already been achieved. Great Britain is co-operating with us in the mighty movement for control of the vast peril, and she now declared her firm intention of abolishing gradually her Indian opium traffic and the revenues derived from it. She has, indeed, begun upon the work, and this is of enormous moment as an indication of her earnestness, for the financial problem which the situation offered her was one of the most difficult which any nation ever has been called upon to solve. She recognizes, though, that the opium traffic, while it is not exactly a parallel to the slave traffic, is, after all, analogous to it, and she is arranging to destroy the one as she destroyed the other. The edict in China abolishing the traffic and the habit in ten years is a direct outgrowth of the conference and our studies in the Philippines, and the benefit that nation has derived already is tremendous. Our own avoidance of the creation of a problem in the Philippines similar to England's in India is a subject for congratulation."

"And also as an outgrowth of this conference has come the other movement which is vastly more important than the one which brought about the conference—the movement toward the cleansing of our own household. You see, the whole world had regarded with a shudder China's flat prostration underneath the curse of the drug habit, and our shudders were, perhaps, most vigorous of all. Of all those interested in reforming her we showed, I think, the most acute and busy signs. The Shanghai conference, in 1909, was really designed particularly for study of the dreadful things the Chinese had been doing to themselves with opium."

Uncovered Our Relation to the Traffic.

"The results of the investigation were not quite what we expected. They uncovered our relations to the traffic. You see, we had suggested the whole thing, primarily with the idea of guarding life and weak morals of the Chinaman, against his will, perhaps, and at the expense of

his own pocket; but it soon developed that we were importing into the United States, and legally importing, in our selfish greed to fill our own fat purses, undreamed of quantities of the same drug which we believed the Chinaman should cease to use. Thus, as an outgrowth of the conference there was begun a movement which has probably been even more important than the conference itself in its results, starting out to learn the dangers of the foreign opium traffic, we learned that dangers also lie in the home trade, and suggested general domestic investigation by the powers. This was generally agreed to, and the study, it was granted, should include the study of the morphine habit and the vices allied to it. That this would show us as the world's worst sinners few people, if any, suspected, but this has proved to be the case."

"Of all the nations of the world, America consumes most opium, in one form or another. Surprised by these facts as we are and as the nations of the world must be, we now understand our grave delinquency and realize that in some way the greediest drug takers in the universe, and have begun to suffer from it, as, of course, was quite inevitable."

"We use more smoking opium per annum than six great European nations put together, for, in this matter, of our great consumption of the drug, a detail of our Chinese problem, if you will, we have brought the habit home to our shores, and many of the Chinese here undoubtedly use opium, but its consumption has grown far beyond the widest estimate of the capacity of our comparatively small Chinese population. At the coming conference the report of the United States production of opium and the importation of the drug from India, had 150,000,000 or about \$90,000,000 annually to consider; Russia gained no revenue from the trade, and in 1881 had made it contraband; Portugal's colony on the Macao coast subsisted almost wholly on its opium revenue; in Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Germany the problem had been practically solved, but it existed; Persia had a problem; Turkey, which had one of great importance, was invited, but could not accept."

Our Vast Consumption.

"Every year we manage to consume 500,000 pounds of the drug, while they, in combination use less than 40,000 pounds. Nor are these startling figures the most startling which we must present before that conference and consider carefully ourselves. Our consumption of this greatest curse which humanity has ever known since humanity began is growing constantly, despite the passage of new laws and the continual efforts of the scientists and moralists to teach its dangers. Since 1800 the population of this country has grown 133 per cent., while the amazing fact is plainly on the records that our opium consumption has increased 351 per cent."

"That has been done to check this in the past."

"Our Congress," Mr. Wright replied, "from the beginning of our Government, legalized the importation into the United States of smoking-opium by the imposition on it of various import duties, ranging from \$6 on the pound to twice as much. Thus, you will observe, we recognized it as an evil promptly and, quite as promptly, arranged not to prohibit it but to make a profit out of it. Not quite high-minded, possibly, but precisely what we did and what we have from time to time criticized other nations for."

"And the drug gained in favor with a thoughtless people, through their carelessness and the venality of those who served them, to a degree which now has become appalling. Not only are we now the greatest of the world's drug takers, and been forced to make acknowledgment of it, but we must now admit, in the forthcoming conference, that our consumption of raw opium is growing twice as fast to-day as grows our population. The drug habit has spread throughout America until it threatens us with very serious disaster."

Spreaders of the Vicious Habit.

"A dozen mediums have helped to spread it, of which the conscienceless or ignorant physician, the law-defying retail druggist, and the manufacturers of nostrums largely founded on narcotics have been chief. The opium and morphine habits have become a National curse, and in some way they must certainly be checked, if we wish to maintain our high place among the nations of the world and any elevated standard of intelligence and morality among ourselves."

"That, at the conference, we must confess our viciousness, we all regret, but more acutely still we hope that from that conference we shall bring ideas which will help us in destruction of the evil. The final movement will quite surely come, I think, through National legislation. Almost all State Legislatures have passed laws dealing with the subject in one way or another—some bad, some good—but notwithstanding these the importers and manufacturers of the drug have sold it where they would, to whomsoever wished to buy. They have been conscienceless and greedy and almost wholly unrestrained. The Federal Government must take hold now, and doubtless will, after the coming conference has added to the aggregate of knowledge of the subject. Until the situation is made pressing by the scorn of

nations, as it is sure to be after the ports are in, it is not reasonable to look for competent legislation. Mr. Knox and Mr. Taft have shown much interest, and for two years have pressed Congress for wise laws, but little has been done. A powerful lobby has worked constantly against us, and, besides, the situation is not clearly understood, even at the Capitol. The Federal Government will, undoubtedly, however, eventually have laws at its disposal to control the importation, manufacture, and inter-State traffic in all habit-forming drugs, and then good work will be quite possible."

"We have made ourselves a great amusing by the blithe way in which we called a conference to study others' sins, only to discover through it that we were ourselves the greatest sinners; but we have made good. We started in the conference with the idea of guarding, possibly, the morals of our neighbors at the expense of their pocketbooks and comfort, while our own it seems were more in need of conservation than the worst of theirs; but we have not deserted the great objective. We were importing in great quantities other nations' sins, and we were guilty of opium which could not but debauch the community."

Prompt Action May Save Us.

"But the minute this was realized, Mr. Root urged Congress to pass an act before the meeting of the commission, excluding from the Nation all but medicinal opium, and this was done in February, 1909. This saved our faces and had a beneficial influence upon the work of the commission. It showed the powers that a prompt business, as a result of the deliberations of the conference, nine fundamental conclusions were unanimously passed, commendatory of the traffic. This of itself was a step forward. Condemnation of the drug had in the past been frequently, but this one came officially from all the nations which could act to best advantage, and the step was thus arrived at by the United States to propose a future conference to conventionalize the Shanghai resolutions and the colonies derived therefrom."

"We made the proposition in September, 1909. It was at once accepted, and the Dutch Government was invited to make The Hague our meeting place. We are promised that all Governments who will be represented there will heartily co-operate with us in efforts to stamp out this worldwide evil, and Great Britain has gone to the greater length of proposing that we deal not only with these drugs, but with all other habit-forming drugs which may become a menace, suggesting that these be made at least the subjects of investigation."

New Conference Most Powerful.

"It has been stated that the Shanghai Conference did not accomplish what had been expected of it. It should be clearly understood that it was not a conference with full power, but an international commission along the lines of international commissions at The Hague, rather to study and report than to frame legislation. The conference, which is now a sequence, will be composed of delegates with full power to sign, and referendum, an agreement to bring the production and use of opium and other habit-forming drugs under control."

"It is a great step forward in the march of civilization."

"One is apt to think one's own worst most important, but when it is remembered that opium is charged in history with at least one wrong in standing that we have all admit that it held that mighty nation in real thralldom for two centuries, that it still holds large populations, elsewhere, in inertia, that, here in the United States, it has gained a terrifying foothold which it has been advancing with appalling speed until it threatens to become a national disaster, that it has hamper our triumphant march of progress, one must, it seems to me, find the question quite as great as any that the powers have, in the past, considered jointly. If the conference does not disband before it has accomplished all the work it has to do, man will witness a great step toward removing from the shoulders of humanity one of the greatest burdens which have ever, by unwisdom, greed and wickedness, been fastened on mankind."

"And opium is not the only habit-forming drug. We are called on to fight it, and some are far wiser in stating that we have the largest per capita consumption of narcotics and anodynes of any people in the world. Take the question of cocaine, for instance. It is a generally known fact that during the last twenty years cocaine has been diverted from its original use by the surgeon as a local anesthetic to the supposed needs of large numbers of addicts. It is estimated, after a wide consultation, that 15,000 or 20,000 ounces of this drug are sufficient to satisfy the demands of surgery in the United States. To-day there are manufactured in the United States at least 150,000 ounces of the drug, the large part of which is put to improper uses."

"It is the unanimous opinion of every State and municipal organization having to do with the enforcement of State and municipal pharmacy laws that the misuse of cocaine is a direct incentive to crime; that it is perhaps of all factors a singular one in augmenting the criminal rank of a community. The illicit use of the drug is most difficult to cope with, and the habitual use of it temporarily raises the power of a criminal to a point where in resisting arrest there is no hesitation to murder."

"It is really more appalling in its effects than any other habit-forming drug in use in the United States. In the South the use of cocaine among the lower order of working negroes is quite common. It is current knowledge throughout the South that on many public works, levees and railroad construction, and in other working camps where large numbers of negroes congregate, cocaine is peddled pretty openly. In all of our large cities the drug is compounded with low grades of spirit, which make a 'maddening compound. Inquiries have shown that contractors of labor in the South, under the impression that cocaine stimulates the negro laborers to a greater output of work, wink at the distribution of the drug to them. There is no doubt that this drug, perhaps more than any other, is used by those concerned in the white slave traffic to corrupt young girls, and that when the habit of using the drug has been established, it is but a short time before such girls fall to the ranks of prostitution."

"To illustrate the insidious spread of the cocaine habit, you should know that an ever increasing number of our soldiers and sailors are falling into the grip of it. It was, found recently that some of the Legion guards at Peking were cocaine fiends, and the Chinese Government found it necessary to ask the treaty powers to permit her to prohibit the importation of cocaine except for medicinal purposes. India is also threatened with the vice. But the United States is, pre-eminently the country in which there is an abuse of cocaine."

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