

## Aleister Crowley

### Synopsis of Six Articles on Drugs

<HB> These articles were never written -- a great loss since Crowley succinctly anticipates (by at least thirty years) the main trends in sociological and psychopharmacological thought as they developed, often painfully, in the 1960s and 1970s. Although this synopsis appears to have been written in mid-to-late 1920s (possibly the early 1930s), the articles could well have appeared in *The Psychedelic Review* or *The Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*. Aside from underscoring Crowley's pioneering work in this field, this synopsis remains valuable as an outline of Crowley's mature view of drugs later in his life -- their use and abuse. Explanatory notes are provided for this publication.

#### I. General Survey

- A. Almost universal ignorance of the true facts about Drugs. Wild statements on both sides; delights and dangers exaggerated.
- B. General account of the principal drugs which have a psychical interest: Alcohol, Ether, Chloroform, Hashish, Anhalonium Lewinii, [1] Opium (various forms), Atropine (Belladonna), [2] Stramonium, [3] Opium derivatives: Cocaine, [4] Morphine, Heroin.
- C. Two main types of drug: ``One man's meat is another man's poison."''
- D. Need to distinguish between the various forms of intoxication, and to identify the true cause of the action of any given drug.
- E. The general use of each drug, and the reason in each case of any tendency to abuse. The action of a certain drug upon a certain person in good health totally different to that upon a sick one.

#### II. Historical Survey

- A. Ethnographical and climatic distribution.
- B. Connection of intoxication, mania, and religious ecstasy. Ceremonious use of drugs by various cults.
- C. My own researches since 1899. Why I took up the study. The personal equation. Summary of my results. Importance of the technique of administration. Experiments on other people.

### III. The Abuse of Drugs

#### A. Why people resort to drugs.

1. Personal idiosyncrasy.
2. The search for new sensations.
3. Failure to fit environment.
4. Ignorance.
5. Economy.
6. Hypocrisy. (Where Public Opinion condemns pleasure, those who fear it resort to secret vices.)
7. Ambition to obtain praeterhuman power or knowledge.
8. The stress of modern life.
9. Excess of imagination.
10. Excess of sensitiveness.
11. Ennui.
12. Pain.
13. Moral weakness.
14. Vice.

#### B. Commoner results of abuse.

Alcohol: well known.

Hashish: insanity.

Chloroform: few cases known.

Opium (smoking): bad results rare.

Morphine: nervous collapse, madness, insomnia, digestive trouble.

Ether: the alcohol plus paralysis.

Anhalonium Lewinii: insanity.

Cocaine: nervous collapse, insanity.

Laudanum: see De Quincey, Coleridge, and Wilkie Collins.[5]

Heroin: like Morphine, with great dullness and depression.

#### C. Conditions which lead from use to abuse.

#### D. Difficulties in the way of stopping. Nature of the temptation to go on.

In the case of Alcohol and Ether I find no inclination to do so, I take either quite casually, but instinctively avoid frequent repetition.

With Hashish and Anhalonium, I have a powerful repulsion and can only force myself to take them by a stern sense of duty.

With Opium smoking, I indulge very mildly when the company is attractive; I have tried long and vainly to acquire the habit.

With Morphine, I dislike the effect subconsciously; no temptation to repeat.

With Cocaine, the first few sniffs produce an impatient uneasiness; I am almost irresistably driven to go on to my physiological limit for that time; but privation causes neither suffering nor regret.

With Heroin over-indulgence always causes vomiting. I have succeeded in acquiring enough of a habit to make it hard to break off. The symptoms are severe; but now that I know how to employ palliatives, I can break away sharply and survive the craving with four days moderate discomfort at most. Suppression causes fear, which induces resumption; and fills the mind with specious arguments in favour of taking `one last dose.'

#### IV. Commercial Aspects

##### A. Effects of repressive legislation. Enormous profits to

1. Pedlars and smugglers.
2. Policemen.
3. Blackmailers.
4. Quack doctors.
5. Sanitarium sharks.
6. Secret nostrum vendors.
7. Sensational journalists.
8. Spies and officials.

These would vanish if prohibition became effective or the laws were abolished.

##### B. Cost to nation.

1. Loss of `victims" economic value.
2. Maintenance of machinery of prohibition; inspectors, spies etc., support of convicts.
3. Loss of dignity, by making physicians and pharmacists subject to police degrades those professions, keeps away the best class of men from them, and so destroys the nation's health.

##### C. Cheapness of drugs tends to drive out alcohol. Most drugs can be

made synthetically from 'harmless' ingredients.

## V. The Treatment of Drug Habits

A. Some drugs, e.g. Opium, produce a physical craving due to the chronic poisoning of the tissues. Suppression may therefore be fatal. The symptoms of suppression may be so severe that even strong willed people need assistance in stopping. Others, e.g. Cocaine, present little physical obstacle to suppression; the pull is mainly moral.

B. Each patient needs special treatment. This depends on

1. The original cause of the habit.
2. His constitution.
3. His environment.
4. His prospects for the future.

C. Various theories of cure; the main objection to each.

D. My own theory and practice.

The Law of Thelema is the cure. Each patient must be analysed until he discovers for himself the true purpose for which he came into the world. He will then resolve firmly to stop drugs as hindrances to his doing his will. He is assisted by palliatives when any physical symptoms tend to overcome his resolution.

E. Palliatives useful in various crises.

## VI. The Mastery of Drugs

A. Man must be trained to use drugs with impunity.

B. Experiments must be made to discover how the undoubted physical and moral assistance of drugs may be turned to the best advantage.

C. Results of my own researches in this direction.

Alcohol. Too general in its action to be useful.

Ether. Invaluable for mental analysis; also to discover one's own final judgment on any matter. Gives the power to appreciate the elements of which sensation is made up. Example: Feeling one's finger move in detail.

Hashish. Good for mental analysis. Aids imagination and builds up

courage. One can trace the genesis of ideas, solution sometimes given in a series of pictures. Example: How property began.

Anhalonium Lewinii. Like Hashish. (All three excellent for enabling one to get behind one's superficial ideas and discover the roots of one's thoughts.)

Morphine, Opium etc. Aids concentration. Relieves pressure of worrying thoughts; aids creative imagination. Objection: Injures executive ability, so that ideas are sterile.

Cocaine. Prevents fatigue, enabling one to work at full pressure for an indefinite time. Example: My New Orleans method and work done at Cefalu.[6]

Heroin. Combines the virtues of Opium and Cocaine. Excites imagination; helps concentration and calm; increases executive power and endurance. Example: [The Diary of a] Drug Fiend.[7]

D. The Technique of Administration. Select proper drug by experiment. Dosage. The Opsonic curve.[8] The weather and other conditions.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

1. The peyote cactus, *Lophophora williamsii* in modern taxonomy (sometimes referred to as ``31" in Crowley's diaries - the gematria of ``A.L." ). Crowley refers to a Parke, Davis & Co. liquid preparation in which the chief alkaloid mescaline was more concentrated than in mescal buttons. Crowley consulted with Parke, Davis in Detroit on its preparation (Confessions, p. ???).
2. Atropine is not now considered a natural component of *Atropa belladonna*, but rather a byproduct of chemical or heat extraction during which the chief alkaloid hyoscyamine partly changes to atropine. Neither alkaloid is reported to be hallucinogenic in non-toxic quantities, unlike scopolamine, another alkaloid present in smaller amounts. See R.E. Schultes and A. Hofmann, *The Botany and Chemistry of Hallucinogens*, (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1973), p. 161.
3. Stramonium is one of four divisions of the genus *Datura*, and has three species. Crowley probably refers to thorn apple, also called jimson weed, whose principal active component is scopolamine. Ibid, p. 167.
4. Cocaine is not an opium derivative -- this may be a copyist's error.

5. Laudanum is a tincture of opium. See Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, (London: Cresset Press, 1950); Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan", *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.H. Coleridge, vol. I, pp. 295-298, (London: Oxford University Press, 1912); and Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, (London: Collins, 1925).
6. Crowley describes the "New Orleans Method" as "exciting the mind by morphine and then steadying it by cocaine" in *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, ed. Symonds & Grant (Montreal: 93 Publishing, 1972), p. ???, which also records much of Crowley's work at Cefalu.
7. Crowley, *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, (London: Collins, 1922 and New York: Dutton, 1923), currently available in paperback from Samuel Weiser, Inc.
8. The opsonic curve is probably a drug-tolerance curve, plotting dosage, time (frequency) and an opsonic index (of the levels of opsonin in the blood). Opsonin is a component of blood serum that renders foreign matter and toxins (such as some drug molecules) - susceptible to attack by phagocytes. Thus, as the opsonic index rose, dosage would need to be increased (according to an "opsonic curve") in order to overcome increasing drug tolerance and maintain the same level of intoxication.