# Indian Hemp



1855

### The Narcotics We Indulge In:

### Indian Hemp

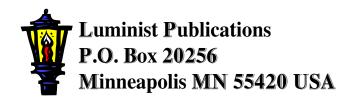
by

### James F. Johnston

M.A., F.R.S., F.G.S., etc., etc. Author of *Lectures on Agricultural Chemistry and Geology* 

#### with

### Cannabis Indica Poisoning by J. C. O'Day



#### The Narcotics We Indulge In: Indian Hemp by James F. Johnston is reprinted from *The Chemistry of Common Life* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855)

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### Indian Hemp

ittle is popularly and practically known in northern Europe of the use of hemp as a narcotic indulgence; yet in the East it is as familiar to the sensual voluptuary as opium.

Our common European hemp (Cannabis sativa), so extensively cultivated for its fibre, is the same plant with the Indian hemp (Cannabis indica), which from the remotest times has been celebrated among Eastern nations for its narcotic virtues. The plant came to Europe from Persia, and is supposed by many to be a native of India; but, like tobacco and the potato, it has a wonderful power of adapting itself to differences in soil and climate. Hence it is now cultivated, not merely on the plains of Persia, India, and Arabia, but in Africa, from its northern to its southern extremities; in America, all over its north-eastern states and provinces, and on the flats of Brazil; and in Europe, in almost every kingdom and country. In northern Russia it is an important article of culture, even as far north as Archangel, and from that region our manufacturers have been accustomed to receive large supplies of its valuable fibre.

In the sap of this plant—probably in all countries—there exists a peculiar resinous substance, in which the esteemed narcotic virtue resides. In northern climates, the proportion of this resin in the several parts of the plant is so small as to have escaped general observation. The whole plant, indeed, has a peculiar smell, even when

grown in Europe, which, though not unpleasant to every one, often gives headache and giddiness to persons who remain long in a hemp field. This probably arises from an escape into the air of a small quantity of a volatile narcotic principle.

But in the warmer regions of the East, the resinous substance is so abundant as to exude naturally, and in sensible quantity, from the flowers, from the leaves, and from the young twigs of the hemp-plant. We have already seen that climate modifies considerably the proportions of the active ingredients contained in the dried leaf of tobacco, and in the dried juice of the poppy. The hemp-plant exhibits a still more striking illustration of the influence of climate upon the chemical changes which take place in the interior of living vegetables. It grows well, and produces abundance of excellent fibre in the north, but no sensible proportion of narcotic resin. It grows still better, and more magnificently, in tropical regions; but there its fibre is worthless and unheeded, while for the resin it spontaneously yields it is prized and cultivated.

Mode of Collecting the resin and plant. — In India the resinous exudation of the hemp-plant is collected in various ways. In Nepaul it is gathered by the hand in the same way as opium. This variety is very pure, and much prized. It is called *momeea*, or waxen *churrus*. It remains soft, even after continued drying; has a fragrant narcotic odour, which becomes strong and aromatic on heating. Its taste is slightly hot, bitterish, and acrid, yet balsamic. In Central India, men covered

with leather aprons run backwards and forwards through the hemp-fields, beating the plants violently. By this means the resin is detached and adheres to the leather. This is scraped off, and is the ordinary churrus of Cabul. It does not bring so high a price as the momeea. In other places the leather aprons are dispensed with, and the resin is collected on the naked skins of the coolies. In Persia it is collected by pressing the resinous plant on coarse cloths, and afterwards scraping the resin from these, and melting it in a little warm water. The churrus, or "kirs," of Herat is considered one of the best and most powerful varieties of the drug.

The plant itself is often collected and dried for the sake of the resin it contains. The whole plant gathered when in flower, and dried without the removal of the resin, is called *qunjah*. In this form it is sold in the markets of Calcutta in bundles about three inches in diameter, and containing each twenty-four plants. The larger leaves and seed capsules separated from the stalks are called bang, subjee, or sidhee. This form is less esteemed than the gunjah. 1 The tops or tender parts of the plant, the flowers, and even the pistils of the flowers, are separated, and when dried alone are very powerful, and much esteemed. The seeds, I believe, are never used as a narcotic indulgence. In some medical works they are spoken of as cramp-stilling and pain-removing; but if they really possess these virtues, it must be in a very inferior degree; and they probably reside in

<sup>1.</sup> Pharmaceutical Journal, vol. i. p. 490.

the husk, <sup>2</sup> and not in the body of the seed itself.

When boiled in alcohol the gunjah yields as much as one-fifth of its weight of resinous extract, and hence this method of preparing the drug in a pure state has been recommended as the most efficient and economical. I am not aware, however, that it is anywhere adopted in the East.

Forms in which hemp is used. — Among the ancient Saracens and the modern Arabs, in some parts of Turkey, and generally throughout Syria, the preparations of hemp in common use were, and are still, known by the names of haschisch, hashash, or husheesh. The most common form of haschisch, and that which is the basis of all others, is prepared by boiling the leaves and flowers of the hemp with water, to which a certain quantity of fresh butter has been added, evaporating the decoction to the thickness of a syrup, and then straining it through cloth. The butter thus becomes charged with the active resinous principle of the plant, and acquires a greenish colour. This preparation retains its properties for many years, only becoming a little rancid. Its taste, however, is very disagreeable, and hence it is seldom taken alone, but is mixed with confections and aromatics—camphor, cloves, nutmegs, mace, and not unfrequently ambergris and musk-so as to form a sort of electuary. The confection used among the Moors is called el mogen, and is sold at an enormous price.

<sup>2.</sup> As is the case with the Syrian rue, Peganum harmala..

Dawamesc is the name given by the Arabs to that which they most commonly use. This is frequently mingled, however, with other substances of reputed aphrodisiac virtues, to enable it to administer more effectually to the sensual gratifications, which are the grand object of life among many of the Orientals.

The Turks give the names of hadschy, malach and madjoun to the compositions they use for purposes of excitement. According to Dr. Madden, the madjoun of Constantinople is composed of the pistils of the flowers of the hemp plant ground to powder, and mixed in honey with powdered cloves, nutmegs, and saffron.

Thus the Indian hemp and its products are used in one or other of four different forms:

First, The whole plant dried and known by the name of gunjah; or the larger leaves and capsules dried and known as bang, subjee, or sidhee; or the tops and tender parts of the plants collected after they have been in flower, and which in some places are called haschisch; or the dried flowers, called in Morocco kief, a pipe of which, scarcely the size of an English pipe, is sufficient to intoxicate; or the dried pistils of the flower as they enter into the composition of the madjoun of the Turks. These several parts of the dried plant, when newly gathered, have a rapid and energetic action. Their efficacy diminishes, however, by keeping.

Second, The resin which naturally exudes from the leaves and flowers, and is, when collected by the hand, called momeea; or the same beaten off with sticks, and sold by the name of churrus. Third, The extract obtained by the use of butter, which, when mixed with spices, forms the dawamesc of the Arabs, and is the foundation of the haschisch of many Eastern countries and districts.

Fourth, The extract obtained by means of alcohol from the gunjah. This is said to be very active, but I am not aware of its being in use in the East.

The dried plant is smoked and sometimes chewed. Five or ten grains reduced to powder are smoked from a common pipe alone or with ordinary tobacco, or from a water pape (*narghilé*), with a variety of tobacco called tombeki.<sup>3</sup> The resin and resinous extract are generally swallowed in the form of pills or boluses.

Antiquity and extent of its use. — In one or other of the forms above mentioned the hempplant appears to have been used from very remote times. The ancient Scythians are said by to have excited themselves Herodotus "inhaling its vapour." Homer makes Helen administer to Telemachus, in the house of Menelaus, a potion prepared from the nepenthes, which made him forget his sorrows. This plant had been given to her by a woman of Egyptian Thebes; and Diodorus Siculus states that the Egyptians laid much stress on this circumstance, arguing that Homer must have lived among them, since the women of Thebes were actually noted for possessing a secret by which they could dissipate an-

<sup>3.</sup> The tombeki is said to be the leaf of a species of Lobelia. It is smoked in a narghilé, and is exceedingly narcotic; so much so that it is usually steeped in water for a few hours, to weaken it before it is used, and the pipe is charged with it while it is still wet.

ger or melancholy. This secret is supposed to have been a knowledge of the qualities of hemp. Under the name of *beng* it is also mentioned in the Arabian Nights, translated by Lane, as the narcotic used by Haroun al Raschid and other heroes of the tales.

It is curious how common and familiar words sometimes connect themselves with things and customs of which we know absolutely nothing. The word assassin—a foreign importation now long naturalized among us—is of this kind. M. Sylvester de Sacy, the well-known orientalist, says that this word was derived from the Arabic name of hemp. It was originally used in Syria to designate the followers of "the old man of the mountain," who were called *Haschischins*, because among them the haschisch was in frequent use, especially during the performance of certain of their mysterious rites.

Others say that, during the wars of the Crusaders, certain of the Saracen army, intoxicated with the drug, were in the habit of rushing into the camps of the Christians and committing great havoc, being themselves totally regardless of death; that these men were known by the name of *hashasheens*, and that thence came our word "assassin." The oriental term was probably in use long before the time of the Crusades, though the English form and use of the word may have been introduced into Europe at that period.

Nor is the use of hemp less extended than it is ancient. In the plains of India it is consumed in every form, and on the slopes of the Himalayas, it is cultivated for smoking, as high up as the valleys of Sikkim. In Persia, in the east of Europe, and in Mahommedan countries, it is in extensive use. In Northern Africa it is largely employed by the Moors. In central and tropical Africa it is almost everywhere known as a powerful medicine and a desired indulgence. In Southern Africa the Hottentots use it under the name of dacha, for purposes of intoxication; and when the Bushmen were in London, they smoked the dried plant in short pipes made of the tusks or teeth of animals. And what is more astonishing, when we consider the broad seas which intervene, even the native Indians of Brazil know its value, and delight in its use; so that over the hotter parts of the globe generally, wherever the plant produces in abundance its peculiar narcotic principle, its virtues may be said to be known, and more or less extensively made use of.

Effects of hemp on the system. — This wide use of the plant implies that the effects of hemp upon the system are generally very agreeable. In India it is spoken of as the increaser of pleasure, the exciter of desire, the cementer of friendship, the laughter-mover, and the causer of the reeling gait — all epithets indicative of its peculiar effects. Linnæus describes its power as "narcotica, phantastica, dementens, anodyna et repellens;" while in the words of Endlicher, "Emollitum exhilarat animum, impotentibus desideriis tristem, stultam lætitiam provocat, et jucundissima somniorum conciliat phantasmata."

a. The effects of the *churrus* or natural resin have been carefully studied in India by Dr.

O'Shaughnessy. He states that when taken in moderation it produces increase of appetite and great mental cheerfulness, while in excess it causes a peculiar kind of delirium and catalepsy. This last effect is very remarkable, and we quote his description of the results of one of his experiments with what is considered a large dose for an Indian patient:

"At two PM a grain of the resin of hemp was given to a rheumatic patient; at four PM he was very talkative, sang, called loudly for an extra supply of food, and declared himself in perfect health. At six PM he was asleep. At eight PM he was found insensible, but breathing with perfect regularity. His pulse and skin were natural, and the pupils freely contracted on the approach of light. Happening by chance to lift up the patient's arm, the professional reader will judge of my astonishment when I found it remained in the posture in which I placed it. It required but a very brief examination of the limbs to find that by the influence of this narcotic the patient had been thrown into the strangest and most extraordinary of all nervous conditions, which so few have seen, and the existence of which so many still discredit — the genuine catalepsy of the nosologist. We raised him to a sitting posture, and placed his arms and limbs in every imaginable attitude. A waxen figure could not be more pliant or more stationary in each position, no matter how contrary to the natural influence of gravity on the part! To all impressions he was meanwhile almost insensible."

This extraordinary influence he subsequently

found to be exercised by the hemp extract upon other animals as well as upon man. After a time it passes off entirely, leaving the patient altogether uninjured.

In this effect of the hemp in India we see a counterpart of many of the wonderful feats performed by the fakeers and other religious devotees of that country. It indicates probably the true means also by which they are enabled to produce them.

How much power a little knowledge gives to the dishonest and designing of every country, over the ignorant and unsuspecting masses!

b. Again, the effects of the haschisch of the Arabians, which probably differ little from those of hemp taken in any of its forms, have been described to us from his own personal experience by a French physician, M. Moreau. When taken in small doses, its effect, he says, is simply to produce a moderate exhilaration of spirits, or at most a tendency to unseasonable laughter. Taken in doses sufficient to induce the fantasia, as its more remarkable effects are called in the Levant. its first influence is the same as when taken in a small dose; but this is followed by an intense feeling of happiness, which attends all the operations of the mind. The sun shines upon every thought that passes through the brain, and every movement of the body is a source of enjoyment. M. Moreau made many experiments with it upon his own person — appears indeed to have fallen into the habit of using it even after his return to France — and he describes and reasons upon its effects as follows:

"It is really *happiness* which is produced by the haschisch; and by this I mean an enjoyment entirely moral, and by no means sensual, as might be supposed. This is a very curious circumstance, and some remarkable inferences might be drawn from it. For the haschisch-eater is happy, not like the gourmand, or the famishing man when satisfying his appetite, or the voluptuary in the gratification of his amative desires — but like him who hears tidings which fill him with joy, or like the miser counting his treasures, the gambler who is successful at play, or the ambitious man who is intoxicated with success."

This glowing description of the effects of the haschisch, though given by one who had often used it, is on that very account, like the pictures of the opium-eater, open to suspicion. We feel as if it were intended as a kind of excuse or justification of the indulgence on the part of the writer.

When first it begins to act, the peculiar effects of the haschisch may be considerably diminished, or altogether checked, by a firm exertion of the will, "just as we master the passion of anger by a strong voluntary effort." By degrees, however, the power of controlling at will and directing the thoughts diminishes, till finally all power of fixing the attention is lost, and the mind becomes the sport of every idea which either arises within itself, or is forced upon it from without.

"We become the sport of impressions of every kind. The course of our ideas may be broken by the slightest cause. We are turned, so to speak, by every wind. By a word or a gesture, our thoughts may be successively directed to a multitude of different subjects with a rapidity and lucidity which are truly marvelous. The mind becomes possessed with a feeling of pride, corresponding to the exaltation of its faculties, which it is conscious have increased in energy and power. The slightest impulse carries it along. Hence those who make use of the haschisch in the East. when they wish to give themselves up to the intoxication of the fantasia, withdraw themselves carefully from everything which could give to their delirium a tendency to melancholy, or excite anything but feelings of pleasurable enjoyment. They profit by all the means which the dissolute manners of the East place at their disposal. It is in the midst of the harem, surrounded by their women, under the charm of music and of lascivious dances performed by the almees, that they enjoy the intoxicating dawamese; and, with the aid of superstition, they find themselves almost transported to the scene of the numberless marvels which the Prophet has collected in his paradise."

The errors of perception, in regard to time and place, to which the patient is liable during the period of fantasia, are remarkable. Minutes seem hours, and hours are prolonged into years, till at last all idea of time seems obliterated, and the past and the present are confounded together. Every notion, in this curious condition, seems to partake of a certain degree of exaggeration. One evening M. Moreau was traversing the passage of the opera when under the influence of a moderate dose of haschisch. He had made but a few steps when it seemed to him as if he had been there for

two or three hours; and as he advanced, the passage seemed interminable, its extremity receding as he pressed forward.

The effect produced by hemp in its different forms varies, like that of opium, both in kind and in degree, with the race of men who use it, and with the individual to whom it is administered. Upon Orientals, its general effect is of an agreeable and cheerful character, exciting them to laugh, dance, and sing, and to commit various extravagances—acting as an aphrodisiac, and increasing the appetite for food. Some, however, it renders excitable and quarrelsome, and disposes to acts of violence. It is from the extravagant behaviour of individuals of this latter temperament that the use and meaning of our word assassin have most probably arisen. It is from such effects of this substance also that we obtain a solution of the extravagances and barbarous cruelties which we read of as practised occasionally by Eastern despots.

Yet, even among Orientals, according to Dr. Moreau, there are some on whom the drug produces no effect whatever—upon whom, at least, doses are powerless which are usually followed by well-marked phenomena. As is the case with opium, long use also makes larger doses necessary. To some even a drachm of the churrus becomes a moderate dose, though sufficient to operate upon twenty ordinary men.

Upon Europeans generally, at least in Europe, its effects have been found to be considerably less in degree than upon Orientals. In India Dr. O'Shaughnessy had seen marked effects from

half a grain of the extract, or even less, and had been accustomed to consider one grain and a half a large dose; in England he had given ten or twelve or more grains, to produce the desired effect.<sup>4</sup>

In kind, also, its effects upon Europeans differ somewhat from those produced upon Asiatics. It has never been known, for example, to produce that remarkable cataleptic state, described in a previous page as having been observed in India even from a comparatively small dose of the hemp extract; nor, so far as I am aware, has it ever obtained a footing in any part of Europe as a narcotic indulgence.

It requires, indeed, a long and gradual training to its use before its boasted effects can be fully experienced, and this fortunately is not attempted yet in Europe. While in Jerusalem, M. de Sauley, with the view of passing pleasantly a tedious evening, indulged himself in a dose of haschisch, which, upon his uninitiated constitution, produced only unpleasant results. He thus speaks of it:

"The experiment to which we had recourse for passing our time, turned out so utterly disagreeable, that I may safely say not one of us will ever be tempted to try it again. The *haschisch* is an abominable poison, which the dregs of the population alone drink and smoke in the East, and which we were silly enough to take in too large a dose on the eve of New Year's Day. We fancied we were going to have an evening of enjoyment, but we nearly died through our imprudence. As I had

<sup>4.</sup> Pereria, Materia Medica, p. 1242.

taken a larger dose of this pernicious drug than my companions, I remained almost insensible for more than twenty-four hours; after which I found myself completely broken down, with nervous spasms, and incoherent dreams, which seemed to have endured a hundred years at least."<sup>5</sup>

#### Chemical constituents of the Indian Hemp.

Of the chemistry of the Indian hemp comparatively little is yet known. Had it been as long familiar to Europeans, or used as extensively by them, as it is in the East, it would probably, like opium, have already been the subject of repeated chemical investigations. The volatile oil and the resin of hemp are the only two substances which chemists have yet extracted from this remarkable plant.

- a. The volatile oil.—When distilled with water, the dried leaves and flowers, like those of the hop, yield a volatile oil in small quantity. The properties of this volatile oil, and its action upon the system, have not been studied. It is not supposed, however, to have any important connection with the remarkable effects of the plant upon the living animal.
- b. The natural resin.—But the whole hemp plant is impregnated, especially in warm climates, with a resinous substance in which most active virtues reside. When collected as it naturally exudes, this resin forms the churrus of India. It is extracted when the leaves are boiled with butter to form the basis of the haschisch, or when the dried plant is treated with alcohol to ob-

<sup>5.</sup> Journey Round the Dead Sea by F. de Saulcy. Vol. I, p. 140.

tain the hemp extract. It is soft, dissolves readily both in alcohol and ether, and is separated from these liquids in the form of a white powder when the solutions are mixed with water. It has a warm, bitterish, acrid, somewhat balsamic taste, and a fragrant odour, especially when heated.

Both the resin which naturally exudes from the hemp plant, and the extract it yields to spiritous liquids, are probably mixtures of several substances possessed of different properties and relations to animal life. The remarkably complex composition of opium justifies such an opinion. And the analogy of the same substance makes it probable that the produce of the plant will differ in different localities and countries — so that the churrus of India and the haschisch of Syria may produce very different effects on the same constitution. But these points have not as yet been investigated either chemically or physiologically. This substance, therefore, holds out the promise of a rich and interesting harvest to future experimenters.

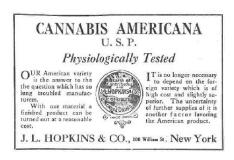
Hemp compared with opium.— The extract of hemp differs considerably from opium, not only in its sensible properties, but in its effects upon the system. It does not lessen but rather excites the appetite. It does not occasion nausea, dryness of tongue, constipation, or lessening of the secretions, and is not usually followed by that melancholy state of depression to which the opiumeater is subject.

It differs also in causing dilatation of the pupil, and sometimes catalepsy, in stilling pain less than opium does, in less constantly producing sleep, in the peculiar inebriating quality it possesses, in the phantasmata it awakens, and in its aphrodisiac effects.

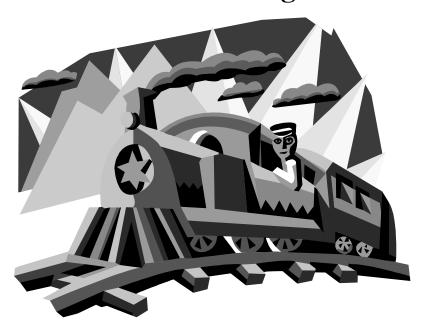
It operates likewise in a smaller dose, and does not produce that apathy to external impressions by which opium is characterised. On the contrary, to the intellectual activity imparted by opium it adds a corresponding sensitiveness and activity of all the feelings, and of the senses both internal and external.

From the effects of opium a man must be roused by shaking and bodily movement. Those of haschisch are allayed by gentle soothing, and bodily stillness. This drug seems, in fact, to be to the oriental a source of exquisite and peculiar enjoyment, which unfits him for the ordinary affairs of this rough life, and with which happily we are, in this part of the world, still altogether unacquainted.

It is impossible to form any estimate of the quantity of hemp, of hemp resin, or of the artificial extract which is now used in different parts of the world for purposes of indulgence. It must, however, be very large, since the plant is so employed in one form or another by probably not less than two or three hundred millions of the human race.



## A Case of Cannabis Indica "Poisoning"



Some few years prior to my taking up the study of medicine, I was employed in northwestern Pennsylvania as locomotive engineer on the Bradford, Bordell & Kinzua Railway.

One day I pulled into Bradford suffering with an attack of acute bronchitis, and, having a few minutes to spare, ran over to a corner drugstore to consult the clerk about my cough. He recommended Piso's Cure for Consumption, and I bought a bottle and returned to my engine.

Taking a mouthful of the cure, I completed the shifting of the freight cars in the yard and made up my train for the trip out. This consumed about one-half hour. Before leaving the yard the conductor came to the engine, telling me we had two car loads of cin-

ders in our train, and instructed me to stop at "Hard Scrable" that the Italian section hands might unload the cinders.

My cough was very distressing, and so, as we sped along, I made frequent requisition on the bottle. The more I partook, the more I had need to partake.

We had covered about seven miles of the road when I suddenly became aware that I had been dreaming, and that I had forgotten that the responsibility for the safety of the engine and the train rested on my shoulders. The realization of this responsibility shocked me, but did not dispel an illusion that one of my legs was larger than the top of the smoke-stack, my arms like ponderous levers and my hands capable of encircling a flour barrel.

Just then my fireman yelled, "O'Day, what is the matter with you?" and the conductor came clambering over the tender, calling to me to know why I had not stopped at Hard Scrable to allow the unloading of the cinders. About this time I began to realize that I had been imbibing too freely of Piso's Cure, and made a desperate effort to concentrate my mind on my work. I reversed my engine and backed away toward the dumping spot. Looking back, I was astonished to find that my train appeared to be more than a mile long, and that the Italian shovelers on the loads of cinders were expanding into enormous misty phantoms.

The sight unnerved me, and I again forgot to stop at Hard Scrable. So wrapped up in the novelty of my new surroundings was I that I forgot my place at the lever until the conductor came forward the second time and told the fireman I must be going crazy. This sobered me somewhat and the ashes were at last dumped at the desired place.

Before starting again I began to wander away into a land of giants and monsters, and fearing that some

erratic impulse might seize me, I told the fireman to watch me closely and to take charge of the engine if he saw anything wrong with me.

As I responded to the signal to go ahead, I noticed the great length of my engine. The telegraph poles shot upward until their cross arms pierced the blue vault above. Dogs as large as Durham bulls ran out and barked at us as we passed. Flocks of English sparrows with spread of wing greater than the condor rose from the road-bed and flew away. I had run over the road day and night for some years, until I knew every whistling post, but things did not have the old familiar look, and I could not tell whether I was running up grade or down, and was curious to see what the next curve would reveal. The cab grew to enormous proportions, and the fireman stood at his post more than one hundred feet away.

After what seemed to be days of running, and when we had covered what seemed hundreds of miles of track, I began to realize that we were nearing Kinzua Junction, and I slowed up.

The effects of the drug were wearing away and were soon gone, so that I knew how to handle my engine, and persons and objects shrank down to their old proportions.

The intoxication did not last more than three quarters of an hour.

When a student of medicine in Baltimore, I ran across Prof. H. C. Wood's classic description of Cannabis Indica intoxication, as experienced by himself, and immediately attributed my peculiar sensations and illusions to hemp in the Cure for Consumption.

A medical journal published in India has recently made very free use of Dr. Wood's article in describing the effect of the drug on habitués, who, it claims, are becoming very numerous in that country. •

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enjoyment entirely moral, and by no means sensual, as might be supposed.... For the haschisch-eater is happy, not like the gourmand, or the famishing man when satisfying his appetite, or the voluptuary in the gratification of his amative desires—but like him who hears tidings which fill him with joy, or like the miser counting his treasures, the gambler who is successful at play, or the ambitious man who is intoxicated with success."