

# The Vision of Hasheesh



Orgies of the Hemp Eaters



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**by Bayard Taylor**

*with*

**Orgies of the Hemp Eaters**



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# The Vision of Hasheesh

by Bayard Taylor (1854)

**D**uring my stay in Damascus, that insatiable curiosity which leads me to prefer the acquisition of all lawful knowledge through the channels of my own personal experience, rather than in less satisfactory and less laborious ways, induced me to make a trial of the celebrated Hash-eesh—that remarkable drug which supplies the luxurious Syrian with dreams more alluring and more gorgeous than the Chinese extracts from his darling opium pipe. The use of Hasheesh—which is a preparation of the dried leaves of the *Cannabis indica*—has been familiar to the East for many centuries. During the Crusades, it was frequently used by the Saracen warriors to stimulate them to the work of slaughter, and from the Arabic term of “Hashasheên” or Eaters of Hasheesh, as applied to them, the word “assassin” has been naturally derived. An infusion of the same plant gives to the drink called “bhang” which is in common use throughout India and Malaysia, its peculiar properties. Thus prepared, it is a more fierce and fatal stimulant than the paste of sugar and spices to which the Turk resorts, as the food of his voluptuous evening reveries. While its immediate effects seem to be more potent than those of opium, its habitual use, though attended with ultimate and permanent injury to the system, rarely results in such utter wreck of mind and body as that to which the votaries of the latter drug inevitably condemn themselves.

A previous experience of the effects of hasheesh—which I took once, and in a very mild form, while in Egypt—was so peculiar in its character, that my curiosity, instead of being satisfied, only prompted me the more to throw myself, for once, wholly under its influence. The sensations it then produced were those, physically, of exquisite lightness and airiness—mentally, of a wonderfully keen perception of the ludicrous, in the most simple and familiar

objects. During the half hour in which it lasted, I was at no time so far under its control, that I could not, with the clearest perception, study the changes through which I passed. I noted, with careful attention, the fine sensations which spread throughout the whole tissue of my nervous fibre, each thrill helping, to divest my frame of its earthly and material nature, until my substance appeared to me no grosser than the vapors of the atmosphere, and while sitting in the calm of the Egyptian twilight, I expected to be lifted up and carried away by the first breeze that should ruffle the Nile. While this process was going on, the objects by which I was surrounded assumed a strange and whimsical expression. My pipe, the oars which my boatmen plied, the turban worn by the captain, the water-jars and culinary implements, became in themselves so inexpressibly absurd and comical, that I was provoked into a long fit of laughter. The hallucination died away as gradually as it came, leaving me overcome with a soft and pleasant drowsiness from which I sank into a deep, refreshing sleep.

My companion and an English gentleman, who, with his wife, was also residing in Antonio's pleasant caravan-serai, agreed to join me in the experiment. The dragoman of the latter was deputed to procure a sufficient quantity of the drug. He was a dark Egyptian, speaking only the lingua franca of the East, and asked me, as he took the money and departed on his mission, whether he should get hasheesh "*per ridere, o per dormire?*"

"Oh, *per ridere*, of course," I answered; "and see that it be strong and fresh."

It is customary with the Syrians to take a small portion immediately before the evening meal, as it is thus diffused through the stomach and acts more gradually, as well as more gently, upon the system. As our dinner-hour was at sunset, I proposed taking hasheesh at that time, but my friends, fearing that its operation might be more speedy upon fresh subjects, and thus betray them into some absurdity in the presence of the other travellers, preferred waiting until after the meal. It was then agreed that we should retire to our room, which, as it rose like a tower

one story higher than the rest of the building, was in a manner isolated, and would screen us from observation.

We commenced by taking a teaspoonful each of the mixture which Abdallah had procured. This was about the quantity I had taken in Egypt, and as the effect then had been so slight, I judged that we ran no risk of taking an overdose. The strength of the drug, however, must have been far greater in this instance, for whereas I could in the former case distinguish no flavor but that of sugar and rose leaves, I now found the taste intensely bitter and repulsive to the palate. We allowed the paste to dissolve slowly on our tongues, and sat some time, quietly waiting the result. But, having been taken upon a full stomach, its operation was hindered, and after the lapse of nearly an hour, we could not detect the least change in our feelings. My friends loudly expressed their conviction of the humbug of hasheesh, but I, unwilling to give up the experiment at this point, proposed that we should take an additional half spoonful, and follow it with a cup of hot tea, which, if there were really any virtue in the preparation, could not fail to call it into action. This was done, though not without some misgivings, as we were all ignorant of the precise quantity which constituted a dose, and the limits within which the drug could be taken with safety. It was now ten o'clock; the streets of Damascus were gradually becoming silent, and the fair city was bathed in the yellow lustre of the Syrian moon. Only in the marble court-yard below us, a few dragomen and mukkairee lingered under the lemon-trees, and beside the fountain in the centre.

I was seated alone, nearly in the middle of the room, talking with my friends, who were lounging upon a sofa placed in a sort of alcove, at the farther end, when the same fine nervous thrill, of which I have spoken, suddenly shot through me. But this time it was accompanied with a burning sensation at the pit of the stomach; and, instead of growing upon me with the gradual pace of healthy slumber, and resolving me, as before, into air, it came with the intensity of a pang, and shot throbbing along the nerves to the extremities of my body. The sense of limitation—of the confinement of our senses within the bounds of our own

flesh and blood—instantly fell away. The walls of my frame were burst outward and tumbled into ruin; and, without thinking what form I wore—losing sight even of all idea of form—I felt that I existed throughout a vast extent of space. The blood, pulsed from my heart, sped through uncounted leagues before it reached my extremities; the air drawn into my lungs expanded into seas of limpid ether, and the arch of my skull was broader than the vault of heaven. Within the concave that held my brain, were the fathomless deeps of blue; clouds floated there, and the winds of heaven rolled them together, and there shone the orb of the sun. It was—though I thought not of that at the time—like a revelation of the mystery of omnipresence. It is difficult to describe this sensation, or the rapidity with which it mastered me. In the state of mental exaltation in which I was then plunged, all sensations, as they rose, suggested more or less coherent images. They presented themselves to me in a double form: one physical, and therefore to a certain extent tangible; the other spiritual, and revealing itself in a succession of splendid metaphors. The physical feeling, of extended being was accompanied by the image of an exploding meteor, not subsiding into darkness, but continuing to shoot from its centre or nucleus—which corresponded to the burning spot at the pit of my stomach—incessant adumbrations of light that finally lost themselves in the infinity of space. To my mind, even now, this image is still the best illustration of my sensations, as I recall them; but I greatly doubt whether the reader will find it equally clear.

My curiosity was now in a way of being satisfied; the Spirit (demon, shall I not rather say?) of Hasheesh had entire possession of me. I was cast upon the flood of his illusions, and drifted helplessly whithersoever they might choose to bear me. The thrills which ran through my nervous system became more rapid and fierce, accompanied with sensations that steeped my whole being in unutterable rapture. I was encompassed by a sea of light, through which played the pure, harmonious colors that are born of light. While endeavoring, in broken expressions, to describe my feelings to my friends, who sat looking upon me



incredulously-not yet having been affected by the drug-I suddenly found myself at the foot of the great Pyramid of Cheops. The tapering courses of yellow limestone gleamed like gold in the sun, and the pile rose so high that it seemed to lean for support upon the blue arch of the sky. I wished to ascend it, and the wish alone placed me immediately upon its apex, lifted thousands of feet above the wheat-fields and palm-groves of Egypt. I cast my eyes downward, and, to my astonishment, saw that it was built, not of limestone, but of huge square plugs of Cavendish tobacco! Words cannot paint the overwhelming sense of the ludicrous which I then experienced. I writhed on my chair in an agony of laughter, which was only relieved by the vision melting away like a dissolving view; till, out of my confusion of indistinct images and fragments of images, another and more wonderful vision arose.

The more vividly I recall the scene which followed, the more carefully I restore its different features, and separate the many threads of sensation which it wove into one gorgeous web, the more I despair of representing its exceeding glory. I was moving over the Desert, not upon the rocking dromedary, but seated in a barque made of mother-of-pearl, and studded with jewels of surpassing lustre. The sand was of grains of gold, and my keel slid through them without jar or sound. The air was radiant with excess of light, though no sun was to be seen. I inhaled the most delicious perfumes; and harmonies, such as Beethoven may have heard in dreams, but never wrote, floated around me. The atmosphere itself was light, odor, music; and each and all sublimated beyond anything the sober senses are capable of receiving. Before me—for a thousand leagues, as it seemed—stretched a vista of rainbows, whose colors gleamed with the splendor of gems—arches of living amethyst, sapphire, emerald, topaz, and ruby. By thousands and tens of thousands, they flew past me, as my dazzling barge sped down the magnificent arcade; yet the vista still stretched as far as ever before me. I revelled in a sensuous elysium, which was perfect, because no sense was left ungratified. But beyond all, my mind was filled with a boundless feeling of triumph. My journey was

that of a conqueror—not of a conqueror who subdues his race, either by Love or by Will, for I forgot that Man existed—but one victorious over the grandest as well as the subtlest forces of Nature. The spirits of Light, Color, Odor, Sound, and Motion were my slaves; and, having these, I was master of the universe.

Those who are endowed to any extent with the imaginative faculty, must have at least once in their lives experienced feelings which may give them a clue to the exalted sensuous raptures of my triumphal march. The view of a sublime mountain landscape, the hearing of a grand orchestral symphony, or of a choral upborne by the “full-voiced organ,” or even the beauty and luxury of a cloudless summer day, suggests emotions similar in kind, if less intense. They took a warmth and glow from that pure animal joy which degrades not, but spiritualizes and ennobles our material part, and which differs from cold, abstract, intellectual enjoyment, as the flaming diamond of the Orient differs from the icicle of the North. Those finer senses, which occupy a middle ground between our animal and intellectual appetites, were suddenly developed to a pitch beyond what I had ever dreamed, and being thus at one and the same time gratified to the fullest extent of their preternatural capacity, the result was a single harmonious sensation, to describe which human language has no epithet. Mahomet’s Paradise, with its palaces of ruby and emerald, its airs of musk and cassia, and its rivers colder than snow and sweeter than honey, would have been a poor and mean terminus for my arcade of rainbows. Yet in the character of this paradise, in the gorgeous fancies of the Arabian Nights, in the glow and luxury of all Oriental poetry, I now recognize more or less of the agency of hasheesh.

The fullness of my rapture expanded the sense of time; and though the whole vision was probably not more than five minutes in passing through my mind, years seemed to have elapsed while I shot under the dazzling myriads of rainbow arches. By and by, the rainbows, the barque of pearl and jewels, and the desert of golden sand, vanished; and, still bathed in light and perfume, I found myself in a

land of green and flowery lawns, divided by hills of gently undulating outline. But, although the vegetation was the richest of earth, there were neither streams nor fountains to be seen; and the people who came from the hills, with brilliant garments that shone in the sun, besought me to give them the blessing of water. Their hands were full of branches of the coral honeysuckle, in bloom. These I took; and, breaking off the flowers one by one, set them in the earth. The slender, trumpet-like tubes immediately became shafts of masonry, and sank deep into the earth; the lip of the flower changed into a circular mouth of rose-colored marble, and the people, leaning over its brink, lowered their pitchers to the bottom with cords, and drew them up again, filled to the brim, and dripping with honey.

The most remarkable feature of these illusions was, that at the time when I was most completely under their influence, I knew myself to be seated in the tower of Antonio's hotel in Damascus, knew that I had taken hasheesh, and that the strange, gorgeous and ludicrous fancies which possessed me, were the effect of it. At the very same instant that I looked upon the Valley of the Nile from the pyramid, slid over the Desert, or created my marvellous wells in that beautiful pastoral country, I saw the furniture of my room, its mosaic pavement, the quaint Saracenic niches in the walls, the painted and gilded beams of the ceiling, and the couch in the recess before me, with my two companions watching me. Both sensations were simultaneous, and equally palpable. While I was most given up to the magnificent delusion, I saw its cause and felt its absurdity most clearly. Metaphysicians say that the mind is incapable of performing two operations at the same time, and may attempt to explain this phenomenon by supposing a rapid and incessant vibration of the perceptions between the two states. This explanation, however, is not satisfactory to me; for not more clearly does a skilful musician with the same breath blow two distinct musical notes from a bugle, than I was conscious of two distinct conditions of being in the same moment. Yet, singular as it may seem, neither conflicted with the other. My enjoyment of the visions was complete and absolute, undisturbed by

the faintest doubt of their reality; while, in some other chamber of my brain, Reason sat coolly watching them, and heaping the liveliest ridicule on their fantastic features. One set of nerves was thrilled with the bliss of the gods, while another was convulsed with unquenchable laughter at that very bliss. My highest ecstasies could not bear down and silence the weight of my ridicule, which, in its turn, was powerless to prevent me from running into other and more gorgeous absurdities. I was double, not "swan and shadow," but rather, Sphinx-like, human and beast. A true Sphinx, I was a riddle and a mystery to myself.

The drug, which had been retarded in its operation on account of having been taken after a meal, now began to make itself more powerfully felt. The visions were more grotesque than ever, but less agreeable; and there was a painful tension throughout my nervous system—the effect of over-stimulus. I was a mass of transparent jelly, and a confectioner poured me into a twisted mould. I threw my chair aside, and writhed and tortured myself for some time to force my loose substance into the mould. At last, when I had so far succeeded that only one foot remained outside, it was lifted off, and another mould, of still more crooked and intricate shape, substituted. I have no doubt that the contortions through which I went, to accomplish the end of my gelatinous destiny, would have been extremely ludicrous to a spectator, but to me they were painful and disagreeable. The sober half of me went into fits of laughter over them, and through that laughter, my vision shifted into another scene. I had laughed until my eyes overflowed profusely. Every drop that fell, immediately became a large loaf of bread, and tumbled upon the shop-board of a baker in the bazaar at Damascus. The more I laughed, the faster the loaves fell, until such a pile was raised about the baker, that I could hardly see the top of his head. "The man will be suffocated," I cried, "but if he were to die, I cannot stop!"

My perceptions now became more dim and confused. I felt that I was in the grasp of some giant force; and, in the glimmering of my fading reason, grew earnestly alarmed,

for the terrible stress under which my frame labored increased every moment. A fierce and furious heat radiated from my stomach throughout my system; my mouth and throat were as dry and hard as if made of brass, and my tongue, it seemed to me, was a bar of rusty iron. I seized a pitcher of water, and drank long and deeply; but I might as well have drunk so much air, for not only did it impart no moisture, but my palate and throat gave me no intelligence of having drunk at all. I stood in the centre of the room, brandishing my arms convulsively, and heaving sighs that seemed to shatter my whole being. "Will no one," I cried in distress, "cast out this devil that has possession of me?" I no longer saw the room nor my friends, but I heard one of them saying, "It must be real; he could not counterfeit such an expression as that. But it don't look much like pleasure." Immediately afterwards there was a scream of the wildest laughter, and my countryman sprang upon the floor, exclaiming, "O, ye gods! I am a locomotive!" This was his ruling hallucination; and, for the space of two or three hours, he continued to pace to and fro with a measured stride, exhaling his breath in violent jets, and when he spoke, dividing his words into syllables, each of which he brought out with a jerk, at the same time turning his hands at his sides, as if they were the cranks of imaginary wheels. The Englishman, as soon as he felt the dose beginning to take effect, prudently retreated to his own room, and what the nature of his visions was, we never learned, for he refused to tell, and, moreover, enjoined the strictest silence on his wife.

By this time it was nearly midnight. I had passed through the Paradise of Hasheesh, and was plunged at once into its fiercest Hell. In my ignorance I had taken what, I have since learned, would have been a sufficient portion for six men, and was now paying a frightful penalty for my curiosity. The excited blood rushed through my frame with a sound like the roaring of mighty waters. It was projected into my eyes until I could no longer see; it beat thickly in my ears, and so throbbed in my heart, that I feared the ribs would give way under its blows. I tore open my vest, placed my hand over the spot, and tried to

count the pulsations; but there were two hearts, one beating at the rate of a thousand beats a minute, and the other with a slow, dull motion. My throat, I thought, was filled to the brim with blood, and streams of blood were pouring from my ears. I felt them gushing warm down my cheeks and neck. With a maddened, desperate feeling, I fled from the room, and walked over the flat, terraced roof of the house. My body seemed to shrink and grow rigid as I wrestled with the demon, and my face to become wild, lean and haggard. Some lines which had struck me, years before, in reading Mrs. Browning's "Rhyme of the Duchess May," flashed into my mind:

On the last verge, rears amain;  
And he shivers, head and hoof,  
and the flakes of foam fall off...

That picture of animal terror and agony was mine. I was the horse, hanging poised on the verge of the giddy tower, the next moment to be borne sheer down to destruction. Involuntarily, I raised my hand to feel the leanness and sharpness of my face. Oh horror! the flesh had fallen from my bones, and it was a skeleton head that I carried on my shoulders! With one bound I sprang to the parapet, and looked down into the silent courtyard, then filled with the shadows thrown into it by the sinking moon. Shall I cast myself down headlong? was the question I proposed to myself; but though the horror of that skeleton delusion was greater than my fear of death, there was an invisible hand at my breast which pushed me away from the brink.

I made my way back to the room, in a state of the keenest suffering. My companion was still a locomotive, rushing to and fro, and jerking out his syllables with the disjointed accent peculiar to a steam-engine. His mouth had turned to brass like mine, and he raised the pitcher to his lips in the attempt to moisten it, but before he had taken a mouthful, set the pitcher down again with a yell of laughter, crying out: "How can I take water into my boiler, while I am letting off steam?"

But I was now too far gone to feel the absurdity of this,

or his other exclamations. I was sinking deeper and deeper into a pit of unutterable agony and despair. For, although I was not conscious of real pain in any part of my body, the cruel tension to which my nerves had been subjected filled me through and through with a sensation of distress which was far more severe than pain itself. In addition to this, the remnant of will with which I struggled against the demon, became gradually weaker, and I felt that I should soon be powerless in his hands. Every effort to preserve my reason was accompanied by a pang of mortal fear, lest what I now experienced was insanity, and would hold mastery over me for ever. The thought of death, which also haunted me, was far less bitter than this dread. I knew that in the struggle which was going on in my frame, I was borne fearfully near the dark gulf, and the thought that, at such a time, both reason and will were leaving my brain, filled me with an agony, the depth and blackness of which I should vainly attempt to portray. I threw myself on my bed, with the excited blood still roaring wildly in my ears, my heart throbbing with a force that seemed to be rapidly wearing away my life, my throat dry as a potsherd, and my stiffened tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth-resisting no longer, but awaiting my fate with the apathy of despair.

My companion was now approaching the same condition, but as the effect of the drug on him had been less violent, so his stage of suffering was more clamorous. He cried out to me that he was dying, implored me to help him, and reproached me vehemently, because I lay there silent, motionless, and apparently careless of his danger. "Why will he disturb me?" I thought; "he thinks he is dying, but what is death to madness? Let him die; a thousand deaths were more easily borne than the pangs I suffer." While I was sufficiently conscious to hear his exclamations, they only provoked my keen anger; but after a time, my senses became clouded, and I sank into a stupor. As near as I can judge, this must have been three o'clock in the morning, rather more than five hours after the hasheesh began to take effect. I lay thus all the following day and night, in a state of gray, blank oblivion, broken only by a single wandering gleam of consciousness. I recol-

lect hearing François' voice. He told me afterwards that I arose, attempted to dress myself, drank two cups of coffee, and then fell back into the same death-like stupor; but of all this, I did not retain the least knowledge. On the morning of the second day, after a sleep of thirty hours, I awoke again to the world, with a system utterly prostrate and unstrung, and a brain clouded with the lingering images of my visions. I knew where I was, and what had happened to me, but all that I saw still remained unreal and shadowy. There was no taste in what I ate, no refreshment in what I drank, and it required a painful effort to comprehend what was said to me and return a coherent answer. Will and Reason had come back, but they still sat unsteadily upon their thrones.

My friend, who was much further advanced in his recovery, accompanied me to the adjoining bath, which I hoped would assist in restoring me. It was with great difficulty that I preserved the outward appearance of consciousness. In spite of myself, a veil now and then fell over my mind, and after wandering for years, as it seemed, in some distant world, I awoke with a shock, to find myself in the steamy halls of the bath, with a brown Syrian polishing my limbs. I suspect that my language must have been rambling and incoherent, and that the menials who had me in charge understood my condition, for as soon as I had stretched myself upon the couch which follows the bath, a glass of very acid sherbet was presented to me, and after drinking it I experienced instant relief. Still the spell was not wholly broken, and for two or three days I continued subject to frequent involuntary fits of absence, which made me insensible, for the time, to all that was passing around me. I walked the streets of Damascus with a strange consciousness that I was in some other place at the same time, and with a constant effort to reunite my divided perceptions.

Previous to the experiment, we had decided on making a bargain with the Sheikh for the journey to Palmyra. The state, however, in which we now found ourselves obliged us to relinquish the plan. Perhaps the excitement of a forced march across the desert, and a conflict with the



hostile Arabs, which was quite likely to happen, might have assisted us in throwing off the baneful effects of the drug; but all the charm which lay in the name of Palmyra and the romantic interest of the trip, was gone. I was without courage and without energy, and nothing remained for me but to leave Damascus.

Yet, fearful as my rash experiment proved to me, I did not regret having made it. It revealed to me deeps of rapture and of suffering which my natural faculties never could have sounded. It has taught me the majesty of human reason and of human will, even in the weakest, and the awful peril of tampering with that which assails their integrity. I have here faithfully and fully written out my experience, on account of the lesson which it may convey to others. If I have unfortunately failed in my design, and have but awakened that restless curiosity which I have endeavored to forestall, let me beg all who are thereby led to repeat the experiment upon themselves, that they be content to take the portion of hasheesh which is considered sufficient for one man, and not, like me, swallow enough for six. ☯



# Orgies of the Hemp Eaters



From the *New York Herald*, Friday, March 15, 1895

**S**tanding in the outskirts of the little town of Latakieh, in Northwestern Syria, famous everywhere for the excellent tobacco which takes its name from the otherwise obscure and insignificant place—and turning his back on the ramshackle houses, the flea-infested caravansary, the malodorous bazaar, and garbage strewn streets where the scavenger dogs lie stretched out in the noonday sun—the traveller sees in the distance, beyond a wide stretch of green slope and alternate level, a low range of hills, on which a soft purple haze seems always to linger. These hills lie between Lebanon, where the fierce Druses dwell in their highland fastnesses, and the Nahr-el-kebir, “The Mighty River.” They are known nowadays as the Nosairie Mountains, the home of the so-called Nosairiyeh tribesmen, the modern “Assassins,” or “Hemp Eaters,” as they should be designated, from their ceremonial use of hemp, in Arabic “hashish.”

## AT THE TIME OF THE FULL MOON

The festival or gathering of the hemp eaters is celebrated monthly, at the time of the full moon, the moon being then supposed to exert a specific influence upon human beings. The sectaries meet under a sacred oak tree growing upon a hill, about equidistant from Latakieh and the valley of the Orontes, and close to a tiny village inhabited by some twenty families of the tribe.

There is an enormous drum, some three feet in diameter, standing at the entrance to the village, a couple of hundred yards off, and as soon as it begins to darken and the westering sun appears to have fairly sunk in the waters of the Mediterranean, which is clearly visible from the elevated hilltop on which the Nosarriyeh are gathered, a

deafening boom comes from the instrument and rolls over the mountain tops like the rumble of thunder, rousing the tribesmen to activity, and in a moment they are on the alert. Lamps are quickly lit and suspended to the branches of the sacred oak among the dangling rags and buttons and feathers and metal scraps that decorate it. A square heap of wood is built up in front of the tree about a dozen yards from it. A sheep is brought forward by one of the men, and the rest of the tribesmen then gather around, the lamps throwing a dim light on their picturesque figures and grim countenances. The Sheikh puts his hand gently on the head of the bleating animal, it is thrown down, its throat cut, after the fashion of the Moslems, and in little more time than it takes to write the words the fleece is off, the carcass is divided and placed on the wood heap, to which fire is applied and kept up till all flesh as well as timber is utterly consumed. Now the Nosarriyeh seat themselves in a circle upon the earth, the Shiekh in the centre, with an attendant on either hand, one holding a large earthenware bowl containing a liquid, the other a bundle of stems to which leaves are attached—the leaves of the sacred hemp plant. The chief takes the stems in his left and the bowl in his right hand and slowly walks around the circle, stopping in front of each man present, who takes from him, first the greenery, at which he sniffs gently, then the bowl, the contents of which he sips. The vessel contains a sweetened infusion of hemp, strong and subtle in its action.

### **WHAT THE DECOCTION IS LIKE**

The taste of the decoction is sweet, nauseously so, not unlike some preparations of chloroform, and its first effects are anything but pleasant, for it produces a distinct tendency to vomit, not unlike a strong dose of ipecacuahna. As soon as all have in succession partaken of the drink, which is termed "homa", big horns are produced containing spirits, for the Nosarriyeh are great dram drinkers. The horns of liquor are passed about and in a few moments the effects are apparent, following upon the hemp. The eyes brighten, the pulse quickens, the blood seems to

bound more actively in the veins, and a restlessness takes possession of the whole body. At this moment the booming of a giant drum is heard again, giving the signal for the sacred dance which is the next item in the ceremonial of the evening. From each of the dozen parties or so into which the clansmen are divided one steps out, and the dozen individuals so designated form up against a gentle declivity in rear of them. Two of the tribe with a "reba," one string fiddle, and a tambourine, seat themselves and start a peculiar air in a minor key, which all those around take up, clapping their hands the while rhythmically, and to this rhythm the dancers, joining hands as they stand, begin to move gently to and fro.

The moonlight is full on them, showing up their white nether garments, but leaving the dusky faces and dark upper garments in a semi-shadow. First the dancers move slowly, a few steps to the right and further to the left they go each time, till the movement becomes a positive allegro. Faster goes the music, faster the dancers, until with a finale furioso the men stop, panting and out of breath, at the signal of the Sheikh. He claps his hands and twelve others step out, and the figure begins as before. When these are exhausted a fresh set take their place, and this is continued until each of the clansmen has taken part in the dance. In conclusion all join hands and go seven times round the sacred oak in the direction left to right.

### **A CRAZY FESTIVAL**

The solemn supper is now ready, and is served by the wives of the tribesmen, who have been busy preparing it in huge earthenware dishes placed upon the ground in the middle of each group. And the moonlight meal in the shade of the sacred oak is none the less striking by reason of its being dished up by women who wear in their shashbands a sharp yataghan, of which the handle shows clearly, and a brace of pistols in the girdle. The plates are peculiar. First there is fried liver, eaten to the accompaniment of fiery arrack—the favorite spirit of the hemp eaters. Then comes "leben"—a species of sour cooked cream, with more "arak;" afterward the "kibabs" of mutton, in slices on little

wooded sticks, like the familiar ware of the cat's meat man; eggs filled with a force meat of rice, tomato, mutton and onions and "pillau." Each person has a wooden spoon to eat with, and the etiquette of the table requires one to eat much and eat quickly, and to drink as much as one eats. The appetites of the Nosairiyeh are proverbial in Syria, the usual allowance of meat being a sheep or two. I can vouch for their tipping powers. Scores of them finish their pint horn of arrack in a couple of draughts, taking a couple of quarts in the course of their supper. The meal is really a match against time, and, with such good trencher men as the hemp eaters, is quickly finished.

The real business of the evening now begins. The hemp, powdered and mixed with syrup, is brought round in bowls, together with the decoction of the leaves well sweetened. Each of the tribesmen secures a vessel of arrack—for it quickens and heightens the action of the drugs—and disposes himself in the most comfortable attitude he can think of. Then, taking a good spoonful of the hemp, and washing it down with an equally good drink from the liquor receptacle, he lies or leans back to allow it to operate. I take a reasonable allowance of the compound (it tastes very much like raw tea leaves flavored with sugar water), and then lie back to note the action on my own person, and watch, so far as I can, its effects upon the modern assassins whose systems are seasoned and more accustomed to the drug. Five, ten minutes pass, and there is no sensation; the men around me, with closed eyes, look like waxwork figures. Another ten minutes, and the pulse begins to beat rapidly, the heart commences to thump against the sides of the chest, the blood seems to rush to the head, and there is a sensation of fullness, as if the skull would be burst asunder at the base. There is a roaring in the ears, and strange lights, blurred and indistinct, pass before the eyes. In a moment and quite suddenly all of this passes off, leaving a feeling of delicious languor, and an idea that one is rising from the ground and floating in space. Little things assume an enormous size, and things seem far off.

## EFFECTS OF THE DRUG

The oak tree close by appears to be a mile off, and the cup of drink looks a yard across, the size of a big barrel. One's hands and feet feel heavy and cumbersome, and then feel as if they were dropping off, leaving one free to soar away from the earth skyward, where the clouds seem to open to receive one, and one long perspective of light shines before the eyes. The feeling is one of ecstatic restfulness, contented unconsciousness, suggesting the "nirvana" of the Buddhist. This marks always the end of the first stage of hemp eating. The aphrodisiac effects, the visions of fair faces and beauteous forms, the voluptuous dreams and languishing fancies which the Easterns experience—these are the results of larger and oft repeated doses of the drug.

Already the larger quantities of the compound, repeated many times in the meantime and stimulated by frequent draughts of arrack, are beginning to show their results upon the hitherto immobile figures of the Nosiariyeh round the sacred oak. Again and again they seize the spoon and convey it to their mouths, until the hemp craze is fully upon them. One or two stir uneasily; then another screams for "Ali, Ali!" (their founder Ali), who is identical, they say with Allah. A half a dozen respond lustily, "Ali hu Allah!" then empty the arrack cups beside them. A few move about with outstretched arms as though they were in the clouds trying to clutch the houris, whose imaginary forms they see, and disappointed, sink back, after a fresh supply of the drug has been swallowed. From the extremity beyond, where the women are located, come the sound of singing and of laughter and the rhythmic patter of feet upon the ground. The ladies have been indulging on their own account, and the noise they make rouses the men from their dreams. Three or four jump up from the floor at a single bound, and, seized by the dance mania, begin capering away as for very life. They jig here and there, they twine and twist, and writhe and wriggle and distort themselves.

## END OF THE HASHISH DEBAUCH

In the distance we hear the sound of the women's voices as they scream and sing and dance in a noisy whirl under the influence also of the intoxicating hemp. Again and yet again the tribesmen quaff from the hashish bowl, and the riot grows wilder and madder than before. It becomes a veritable saturnalia. Flushed and inflamed, they fly from side to side, tear to and fro, whirl round on the heels, skipping in the air and jumping feet high above the ground, to the banging of the great drum in the village; the shouting of those unable to move, the screeching of the "Reba," or fiddle, which still plays on, and the crackling of the guns as they go off. Scimitars are drawn, yataghans flourished, half a dozen engage in mimic combat, slashing and cutting at each other with an all too earnest resolve to draw blood—a result speedily obtained—while yet another batch dance round and round on their heels spinning like tops in play. Faster and furious grows the corybantic rout, and in their mad excitement the men tear the garments from their bodies, throw away their weapons, fling the turbans from their heads and, naked to the waist, with disheveled hair and eyes ablaze and extended arms, they continue their mad antics, until foaming at the mouth and bleeding from the nostrils, they sink to the earth and lie huddled in heaps, hopelessly and helplessly intoxicated with the hemp. ☯

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The sense of limitation—of the confinement of our senses within the bounds of our own flesh and blood—instantly fell away. The walls of my

frame were burst outward and tumbled into ruin; and, without thinking what form I wore—losing sight even of all idea of form—I felt that I existed throughout a vast extent of space. The blood, pulsed from my heart, sped through uncounted leagues before it reached my extremities; the air drawn into my lungs expanded into seas of limpid ether, and the arch of my skull was broader than the vault of heaven. Within the concave that held my brain, were the fathomless deeps of blue; clouds floated there, and the winds of heaven rolled them together, and there shone the orb of the sun. It was—though I thought not of that at the time—like a revelation of the mystery of omnipresence.