

OPIUM ADDICTION AND ENGLISH LITERATURE*

BY

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ALDOUS HUXLEY, when he swallowed 0.4 gramme of mescaline on one bright May morning in 1953 hoped that he might thereby achieve the visions of Blake or Thomas Aquinas. He was disappointed in the results of his 'chemical self-transcendence' for he acquired, not the supernatural images of the visionary, but only an increased awareness of visual perception. The drug allowed the intellectual for a few hours to see external objects with the eye of an artist—the bamboo legs of a chair became for him a miracle of design and of shining patterns, and the folds in his flannel trousers deepened into an affair of infinite chiaroscuro. His disappointment was altruistic as well as personal for he had hoped that mescaline would provide not only an enlarged experience for the intellectual, but also a way of escape—a Door-in-the-Wall, to use H. G. Wells's phrase—for the ordinary man and woman who lead lives, as he imagines, so painful, so limited, or so monotonous that self-transcendence by way of religion or drugs is inevitable. As a result of this personal experiment he now appreciates that mescaline is unsuitable for escapism, for although he regards it as obviously superior to alcohol and tobacco, in the absence of social and physical ill-effects, it destroys the will to action and to achievement, it distorts the concepts of time and space, and diminishes the sense of responsibility. Opium has identical qualities and its disintegrating effects were painfully apparent in the lives of three of the four Englishmen of genius whose addiction to it I am to discuss with you this afternoon.

There is no evidence that any of these four authors—George Crabbe, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, or Francis Thompson—found inspiration in opium, nor any evidence that by its use they themselves hoped for an enhancement of their powers. Doctors will both approve and share their realism, for while drugs can relieve anxiety, remove inhibitions and promote rest, we can have no expectation that they will directly improve man's intellectual performance or increase his artistic achievement.

The Rev. George Crabbe, a distinguished poet, was born in Aldeburgh on Christmas Eve, 1754. The portrait of him, aged sixty-four years, painted in 1819, shows a man benign, shrewd and assured, with no trace in his

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countenance of conflict or guilt. That he delighted in feminine society is well known. He did not take opium until 1790 when he was thirty-six years old, and his eldest son, in his admirable and modest biography, thus describes his father's vertiginous disorder and the way of its relief.

Having left my mother at the inn, he walked into the town (Ipswich) alone, and suddenly staggered in the street, and fell. He was lifted up by the passengers (probably from the stage-coach from which they had just alighted), and overheard someone say significantly, 'Let the gentleman alone, he will be better by and by'; for his fall was attributed to the bottle. He was assisted to his room, and the late Dr. Clubbe was sent for, who, after a little examination, saw through the case with great judgment. 'There is nothing the matter with your head' he observed, 'nor any apoplectic tendency; let the digestive organs bear the whole blame; you must take opiates.' From that time his health began to amend rapidly, and his constitution was renovated; a rare effect of opium, for that drug almost always inflicts some partial injury, even when it is necessary; but to him it was only salutary—and to a constant but slightly increasing dose of it may be attributed his long and generally healthy life.

George Crabbe II was of the opinion that opium had done his father no physical injury, but he had not the critical faculty to discern in his father's poetry the effect of opium-taking; this was left to later critics such as Edward Fitzgerald, Canon Ainger, and Edmund Blunden.

Coleridge and De Quincey also made their first acquaintance with opium in the treatment of a physical disorder. Samuel Taylor Coleridge—famous poet, philosopher and literary critic—first took laudanum in 1791 at the age of nineteen for the relief of rheumatic pain. His initial attack of rheumatism had occurred while he was a schoolboy, aged seventeen, at Christ's Hospital, which he attributed to 'swimming over the New River in my clothes, and remaining in them; full half the time from seventeen to eighteen was passed in the sick-ward of Christ's Hospital, afflicted with jaundice and rheumatic fever'. It was in a rheumatic relapse in 1801 that opium 'took hold of him finally'. This attack he attributed to getting wet through while walking from Keswick to Grasmere, and he described himself as a 'man on whom the dews of heaven cannot fall without diseasing him'. He spent several months of this year in bed with 'swelling of the knees and palpitations of the heart, and pains all over'. He had read in a medical journal (he was also addicted to medical reading) of the effects of opium, in a form known as the Kendal Black Drop, as a cure for rheumatism if used as a liniment and at the same time taken internally. 'In an evil hour I procured it: it worked miracles—the swellings disappeared, the pains vanished.' Soon Coleridge was requiring 80–100 drops a day, but only 'as the means of escaping from pains that coiled around my mental powers, as a serpent around the body and wings of an eagle. My sole sensuality was *not* to be in pain.'

Coleridge's poetic inspiration had failed before this illness. In October

1830 he had brought with him his poem *Christabel* to Grasmere, and intended to finish it for inclusion in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. *Christabel* was never finished. Clearly Coleridge did not look to opium for the restoration of his genius; nor, on the other hand, can opium be blamed for his decline. There was no flaw in his magnificent intellect, but he had a fundamental instability of character which had already showed itself in a frailty of purpose.

He continued to take opium to the end of his life, though for the last eighteen years under the prescription of his host—Dr. James Gillman. Both Dr. Gillman and his grand-daughter, Mrs. Watson, who have written incomplete biographies of Coleridge, have generously excused this opium-taking by reason of the intensity of his sufferings, as revealed at the autopsy made at the request of his friend J. H. Green, F.R.S., Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Academy, by 'two able anatomists' who reported:

The left side of the chest was nearly occupied by the heart, which was immensely enlarged and the sides of which were so thin as not to be able to sustain its weight when raised. The right side of the chest was filled with a fluid enclosed in a membrane, having the appearance of a cyst, amounting in quantity to upwards of three quarts, so that the lungs in both sides were completely compressed. This will sufficiently account for his bodily sufferings which were almost without intermission during the progress of the disease, and will explain to you the necessity for subduing these sufferings by narcotics and of driving on a most feeble circulation by stimulants, which his case had imperatively demanded.

The *Lancet* (15 June 1895, p. 1527) was equally sympathetic to the sufferings of genius, and it is not now necessary to differ from this assessment. Nevertheless, I must dissent from their assumption that the cardiac enlargement was due to an adherent pericardium, for obviously Samuel Taylor Coleridge died of congestive cardiac failure, a sequel to rheumatic mitral disease. No doubt the opium diminished his discomfort and prolonged his life. Samuel Johnson described the effect of opium in 1784 on his attacks of paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnoea, in words which cannot be bettered today: 'I need not tell you that opium cures nothing, though by setting the powers of life at ease, I sometimes flatter myself that it may give them time to rectify themselves.'

There is a well-known portrait of Samuel Taylor Coleridge made in 1795, when he was twenty-three, by Peter Vandyke. 'My face,' wrote Coleridge, 'unless when animated by immediate eloquence, expresses great sloth, and great, indeed, almost idiotic good-nature. 'Tis a mere carcase of a face; fat, flabby, and expressive chiefly of inexpression.' Hazlitt described Coleridge's appearance at this time as 'a mouth gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humoured and round; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done.' Hazlitt was both too harsh to Coleridge's nose—which in this portrait looks almost

Wellingtonian—and to his achievement—which is held in very high esteem one hundred and sixty years after Hazlitt's derisory summing-up.

The third and fourth of my opium takers of genius are imperishably associated with Manchester. Some of my audience will have been educated at that ancient foundation, the Manchester Grammar School, which owns no son more distinguished than Thomas de Quincey; and the Manchester Medical School has had no student whose name will outlive that of Francis Thompson.

In the National Portrait Gallery portrait of De Quincey, by Sir J. Watson Gordon, made in 1845 when he had finally settled in Edinburgh—the pleasures and pains of opium behind him, he looks every inch a satisfied Victorian. The publication in 1838 of the first volume of James Gillman's *Life of Coleridge* contained the following passage from one of Coleridge's letters.

Oh, may the God to whom I look for mercy through Christ, shew mercy on the author of the *Confessions of an Opium Eater* if, as I have too strong reason to believe his book has been the occasion of seducing others into this withering vice through wantonness. From this aggravation I have, I humbly trust, been free, as far as acts of my own free will and intention are concerned; even to the author of that work I pleaded with flowing tears and with an agony of forewarning. He bitterly denied it but I fear I had even then to *deter* perhaps not to forewarn.

This unctuous and posthumous declaration written by a man when still in the toils from which he himself had successfully emerged naturally angered De Quincey, who was even more irritated by the suggestion that the motive of Coleridge's opium-taking was the relief of pain 'whereas the confessor was surreptitiously seeking for pleasure'. In his Blackwoods essay of January 1845 on 'Coleridge and Opium-Eating,' De Quincey vigorously defends the 'Confessor' whom he describes as 'an author connected with himself.' He writes: 'We have no copy of the *Confessions* here; so we cannot quote chapter and verse; but we distinctly remember that toothache is recorded in that book as the particular occasion which first introduced the author to the knowledge of opium.' Reference to the *Confessions* confirms the Opium Eater's recollections:

The next morning, as I need hardly say, I awoke with excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face, from which I had hardly any respite for about twenty days. On the twenty-first day I think it was, and on a Sunday, that I went out into the streets; rather to run away, if possible, from my torments, than with any distinct purpose of relief. By accident, I met a college acquaintance, who recommended opium. Opium! dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain! I had heard of it as I had heard of manna or of ambrosia, but no further. How unmeaning a sound was opium at that time! what solemn chords does it now strike upon my heart! what heart-quaking vibrations of sad and happy remembrances! . . .

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My road homewards lay through Oxford Street; and near there I saw a druggist's shop. The druggist (unconscious minister of celestial pleasures!), as if in sympathy with the rainy Sunday, looked dull and stupid, just as any mortal druggist might be expected to look on a rainy London Sunday; and, when I asked for the tincture of opium, he gave it to me as any other man might do; and, furthermore, out of my shilling returned to me what seemed to be real copper halfpence, taken out of a real wooden drawer. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all such indications of humanity, he has ever since figured in my mind as a beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself.

Arrived at my lodgings, it may be supposed that I lost not a moment in taking the quantity prescribed. I was necessarily ignorant of the whole art and mystery of opium-taking; and what I took I took under every disadvantage. But I took it; and in an hour, O heavens! what a revulsion! what a resurrection, from its lowest depths, of the inner spirit! what an apocalypse of the world within me! That my pains had vanished was now a trifle in my eyes; this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me, in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea for all human woes; here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered; happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat-pocket; portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint-bottle; and peace of mind could be sent down by the mail.

De Quincey had too much insight to adopt Coleridge's defence of addiction as no more than a necessary relief of pain. He takes his stand on disposition: 'There are, in fact, two classes of temperament as to this terrific drug . . . those which genially expand to its temptations, and those which frostily exclude them.' To the first class 'whose nervous sensibilities vibrate to their profoundest depths under the first touch of the angelic poison, even as a lover's ear thrills on hearing unexpectedly the voice of her whom he loves, opium is the Amreeta cup of beatitude.' Opium then for vertigo, opium for rheumatism, and opium for neuralgia—these were their passports to bliss.

The last of our cases, Francis Thompson, protested no such reasons for he, unlike Coleridge, felt no need to defend himself publicly for he held that a man was responsible for his errors to God alone. 'Opium put Francis Thompson', writes Meynell, 'in such constant strife with his own conscience that he had ever to hide himself from himself, and for concealment he fled to that which made him ashamed until it was as if the fig-leaf were of necessity plucked from the Tree of the Fall.' In 1877 at the age of seventeen, Thompson left Ushaw College, the Roman Catholic School in Durham and returned to his parents' home in Ashton-under-Lyne, where his father practised medicine as a general practitioner. Both the Principal of the College and the boy's spiritual director decided that he was unfitted for the priesthood by reason of his timidity, his natural indolence, his abstraction,

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and his inability to subject himself to the imperious rule of time. He met his parents' disappointment with a mask of indifference, and he accepted with equal detachment their suggestion that he should study medicine. It is not surprising that a father should wish his son to follow his own profession, but it is remarkable that the deficiencies of character which were rightly held to disqualify him from the priesthood were not seen by his parents to exclude him equally from a career in medicine. For six years he was enrolled as a medical student at Owens College, Manchester. He passed no examinations and indeed the College saw but little of him. He left his home each morning, his shoe laces trailing on the pavement, and took himself to museums, to art galleries, and most often, to read poetry in the public libraries. Sometimes in the summer he would go to Old Trafford. He was so devoted to Lancashire cricket that when he lived in London his memories seldom allowed him to go to the Oval or to Lords.

*It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though my own red roses there may blow;
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though the red roses crest the caps, I know.
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,
And I look through my tears on a soundless-clapping host
As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
To and fro.
O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!*

When he was nineteen years old, his mother gave him a copy of *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Surely no mother ever encompassed her son's destruction more certainly and yet more thoughtlessly. 'He took opium at the hands of De Quincey and his mother,' writes Everard Meynell, his discerning biographer. As we have seen, Coleridge asserted that De Quincey, in *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, had 'recklessly disregarded the temptations which he was scattering abroad amongst men'. It was not until fifty-seven years after the book was published that Coleridge's charge was justified for, in De Quincey's own city of Manchester, its superb eloquence captured the mind of a man whose imagination was fashioned like his own. Doctors may agree with De Quincey that those who fall victims to the temptations of opium are 'preconformed to its power' and the devitalized and undernourished waif that was Francis Thompson, whose noble spirit was completely dedicated to suffering and to poetry, proffered little resistance to 'just, subtle and all-conquering opium'.

Coleridge, too was already infirm of purpose and erratic of behaviour

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before addiction to opium confirmed the failure of his inspiration. De Quincey had been a vagrant before he took opium and his personality, in its eccentricity and its impracticality, had, in lesser degree, those identical deviations which later were to incapacitate Francis Thompson so grievously. We must conclude then that the fault in these men of genius lay in themselves, and alone in this respect George Crabbe escapes our diagnosis.

Yet it would be wilfully impercipient not to see that the poetic life enjoins so acute a sensitivity to the suffering implicit in our human situation that a refuge in some anodyne is nearly inevitable. Even so conventional a Victorian as Matthew Arnold revealed in his moving poem *Dover Beach* the depth of a poet's distress. He wrote:

*For the world which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.*

The instability in these writers' characters which we have observed, may have not been simply the defects of their virtues, but a very corner-stone of their genius.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Doctors like to cultivate the appearance of omniscience, so let us look for further contributory causes in the history of these unhappy addicts. We have seen that Francis Thompson was the son of a doctor, and himself drifted through the doors of a medical school for six years, finally to depart unqualified. George Crabbe practised for some years as an apothecary in Aldeburgh but eventually discarded medicine for poetry and the Church. He was a keen botanist and this hobby had contributed to his professional failure for 'his ignorant patients, seeing him return from his walks with a handful of weeds, decided that, as Dr. Crabbe got his medicines in the ditches, he could have little claim for payment'. Coleridge's brother Luke was a medical student at a new foundation, the London Hospital, and 'S.T.C.' was at one time determined to be a surgeon. At the age of fourteen he had Blancard's *Latin Medical Dictionary* almost by heart, and he spent his Saturdays at the 'London', thinking it bliss if he were allowed to hold a plaster or watch a dressing. These three poets, before they took to opium, all had an unusual knowledge of drugs and their powers.

Three of our subjects became habituated to opium between 1790 and 1813, and it may be that this was a predisposing moment in time. There was then, of course, no restriction on the sale of opium, and little general awareness

of its disintegrating effects on human personality. I have quoted Coleridge's attack on De Quincey for exposing the multitude to the temptations of opium, but it is both more accurate and more charitable to conclude that De Quincey's book and his life (and indeed that of Coleridge also) held more of warning than of attraction, and as far as I know, Francis Thompson was De Quincey's only disciple, and he was drawn to follow him by a sense of blood-brotherhood which easily spanned the half-century between them. Cyril Connolly once said to me that every artist has an unhappy childhood and this may well have been true of these poets. Sometimes their circumstances were of great wretchedness, at other times they suffered acutely in situations which appeared tolerable to children with less sensitive and less imaginative minds than theirs. Coleridge, who was always inclined to self-dramatization, wrote: 'I was hardly used from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth most, most cruelly.' Smacked by his nurse, beaten by his brother Frank, tormented by the boys in his father's boarding school, he was finally flogged by the most famous flagellating pedagogue of all time—the Rev. M. Bowyer of Christ's Hospital whom, you will remember, ultimately went to Heaven in the imagination of Charles Lamb, 'borne by a host of cherubs all face and wing, and without anything to excite his whipping propensities'. George Crabbe's childhood and youth was rough, chequered and intermittently unhappy. His sensitivity, like his poetic imagination, was not so acute as that of our other three poets, and we guess, hopefully, that he suffered less.

Francis Thompson describes, once and for all, the agonies of the sensitive child. It is difficult to remember that he is writing of ordinary schoolboys as he describes in the following passage the devilish fiends that oppressed him:

The malignity of my tormentors was more heart-lacerating than the pain itself. It seemed to me, virginal to the world's ferocity, a hideous thing that strangers should dislike me, should delight and triumph in giving pain to me, though I had done them no ill and bore them no malice; that malice should be without provocation. *That* seemed to me dreadful, and a veritable demoniac revelation. Fresh from my tender home, and my circle of just-judging friends, these malignant school-mates who danced round me with mocking, evil distortion of laughter—God's good laughter, gift of all things that look back to the sun—were to me devilish apparitions of a hate now first known; hate for hate's sake, cruelty for cruelty's sake. And as such they live in my memory, testimonies to the murky aboriginal demon in man.

De Quincey's unhappiness at Manchester Grammar School was bred, not of cruelty, but of monotony and boredom. 'How could a person be happy', he wrote to his mother, 'in a situation which deprives him of health, of society, of amusement, of liberty, of congeniality of pursuits, and which to complete the pious picture, admits of no variety?' He attributes his

wretchedness to an enforced lack of exercise which produced an affection of the liver. He was directed to consult

not a physician, who would of course, have expected the ordinary fee of a guinea for every visit; not a surgeon; but simply an apothecary. In any case of serious illness a physician would have been called in. But a less costly style of advice was reasonably held to be sufficient in any illness which left the patient strength sufficient to walk about. Certainly it ought to have been sufficient here; for no case could possibly be simpler. Three doses of calomel or blue pill, which unhappily I did not then know, would no doubt have re-established me in a week. . . . Unhappily my professional adviser was a comatose old gentleman . . . with sublime simplicity he confined himself to one horrid mixture, that must have suggested itself to him when prescribing for a tiger. . . . To fight simultaneously with such a malady and such a medicine seemed really too much.

So Thomas decided to run away from Manchester and the Grammar School. This account of the misfortunes of our heroes by no means exhausts the curious identity of their unhappy situations. Two of them ran away from Manchester, and three of them endured appalling poverty in London where two, De Quincey and Francis Thompson, were succoured and sustained by prostitutes.

THE EFFECT OF THEIR OPIUM-TAKING

We should expect that the effects of opium addiction would depend on the amount taken and that, in turn, on the extent of the addict's need for the drug. The physical ills attendant on opium-taking—such as vomiting—appear to be short-lived—and no permanent physical damage results in any system. George Crabbe took his daily dose in unspecified amount for forty-two years and died aged seventy-seven. De Quincey died aged seventy-four. A well-known portrait shows him in old age, happiness unachieved, having for ten years (aged twenty-seven to thirty-seven) taken enormous doses of opium, sometimes as much as 480 grains daily. Coleridge, too, when in the depths, drank laudanum by the half-pint, and died in his sixty-second year, of congestive heart failure after 'thirty-three years fearful slavery to the drug'.

A pencil sketch of Francis Thompson made in 1903, four years before his death, portrays a frail, withdrawn and emaciated figure. He died at forty-eight, and in his last illness he said to Wilfred Meynell, speaking a word from which both had refrained for ten years, 'I am dying from laudanum poisoning'. In truth he was dying from chronic tuberculosis. How much opium Francis Thompson took no one was ever told, but it is certain that the amount was greatly reduced when Wilfred and Alice Meynell redeemed him from the London streets.

Of the evil that opium wrought in the characters and lives of De Quincey,

Coleridge and Francis Thompson, there is ample record, but before I conclude by considering the effect of opium on their poetry, let us fortify ourselves by recalling the humanity with which their friends aided them. Edmund Burke salvaged George Crabbe (long before he became an opium addict) just as poverty was driving him to suicide. Crabbe delivered some specimens of his poetry to Burke's house in Charles Street in St. James's together with a long appealing letter, writing that he would call the next day for Burke's verdict. He spent the whole night pacing up and down Westminster Bridge. Burke promptly recognized his genius, and his generosity saved a poet more fortunate than Chatterton.

Dorothy Wordsworth and Charles and Mary Lamb were steadfast in their kindness to both De Quincey and Coleridge, despite the annoyances and insults which the opium-addict distributes 'as lavishly as St. Anthony his loaves'. For the last eighteen years of his life Coleridge was sheltered by James Gillman and his wife Maria in Highgate, where Dr. Gillman carried on his medical practice. There is a portrait made by Washington Allston in 1814, the year before Coleridge moved to the Gillman's. It is 'the picture of genius in decay'. Coleridge became the devoted friend of the Gillmans, and slowly the daily ration of laudanum and spirits was reduced. After five years Coleridge owed Gillman £500, so it was not greed that stimulated the Gillmans' charitable impulse. De Quincey waspishly suggested that the patient had taught the doctor the opium-habit ('and scandal says (but, then, what will not scandal say?) that a hogshead of laudanum goes up every third month through Highgate tunnel') and Lamb was told by a gossip that Maria Gillman was Coleridge's mistress. These false witnessesses cannot abate our admiration for the Gillmans; Coleridge had the greatest intellect of his day, but drug-taking had left no more than the dregs of his genius for the Gillmans to enjoy. How tedious his wonderful conversation had become in his last years is illustrated by two anecdotes. He said to Charles Lamb 'Charles, did you ever hear me preach?' and Lamb retorted, 'I n-never heard you do anything else.' Wordsworth and Samuel Rogers were walking away from Highgate together, having spent an evening with Coleridge. Rogers cautiously remarked, 'I did not altogether understand the latter part of what Coleridge said.' 'I did not understand a word of it,' rejoined Wordsworth abruptly. 'No more did I,' replied Rogers, finally encouraged to candour.

Wilfred and Alice Meynell, with unremitting patience, rescued Francis Thompson from destruction and his poetry from oblivion; not a line of Thompson's poetry would have been published but for them. De Quincey wrote that opium killed Coleridge as a poet, and we may conversely say that by his partial release from opium, Francis Thompson the poet was created. Both he and De Quincey experienced an enormous intellectual

outflow as they unwound 'the accursed chain'. Poetry is not solely the product of an exalted imagination, it is one of the highest manifestations of the human intellect; and here we may call in as chief witness, Mr. Bowyer, the brutal schoolmaster.*

'I learnt from him', writes Coleridge, 'that poetry, even that of the loftiest, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science. In the truly great poets he would say, there is a reason assignable not only for every word but for the position of every word.' Opium, which inflames the imagination and distorts the fancy, cannot be the true begetter of poetry. It does, however, give rise to a peculiar dream-state which was immortally characterized by De Quincey in his eloquent and dramatic prose, and which can be recognized in the poetry of the opium addicts.

De Quincey, you will recall, characterized for all time the dreams of the opium-eater. Any shape that he discerned in the darkness was transformed into a phantom in colour, insufferably splendid; and these images were accompanied by a profound depression which he felt as an utter darkness, indescribable in words. The sensations of time and space were distorted, so that buildings and landscapes swelled beyond the eyes' orbit; and the experiences of one night became a hundred years. The power of recall was vastly intensified so that all the incidents of childhood were recognizably revived. By these tokens, and especially in the distortion of time and space, it has become possible to recognize the opium-dreams of the poets. Edward Fitzgerald first realized this in the work of George Crabbe. Crabbe's poetry was usually homespun and realist—'Pope in worsted stockings.' His picture of village life contrasted strongly with the idealistic descriptions of Oliver Goldsmith. In some of his poems, however, the 'dream-scenery' of the opium addict is manifest. Particularly in a poem entitled 'Sir Eustace Grey' which tells the story of a patient in a madhouse. It is a long poem but the following eight lines are sufficiently characteristic:

*Vast ruins in the midst were spread
Pillars and pediments sublime
Where the grey moss had formed a bed
And clothed the crumbling spoils of time.
There was I fix'd, I know not how
Condemned for untold years to stay
Yet years were not; one dreadful Now
Endured no change of night or day.*

* De Quincey in the essay on 'Coleridge and Opium Eating' wrote: 'To this horrid incarnation of whips and scourges Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, ascribes ideas upon criticism and taste which every man will recognise at once as the intense peculiarities of Coleridge. Could these notions really have belonged to Bowyer, then how do we know but he wrote the *Ancient Mariner*?'

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Possibly De Quincey was right when he said that opium had killed Coleridge as a poet—but before it destroyed his inspiration opium had left its mark on his poetry. He himself has described his poem ‘Kubla Khan’ as ‘a fragment composed in a sort of reverie brought on by two grains of Opium, taken to check a dysentery, at a farm house between Porlock and Linton, in the fall of the year 1797’. Once again there is the limitless landscape:

*Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*

Coleridge related that he would have recalled the whole dream ‘if he had not been called out by a person on business from Porlock’. His sceptical brother-in-law, the poet Robert Southey, suggested that ‘he had dreamed that he had made a poem in a dream’.

The dream poetry of Francis Thompson also displayed the immeasurable scene and the terrifying vistas; it reached its finest expression in ‘The Hound of Heaven’:

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days,
I fled Him, down the arches of the years. . . .
Up vistaed hopes I sped,
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic gloom of chasmèd fears.*

And again:

*Across the margin of the world I fled
And troubled the gold gateway of the stars
Seeking for shelter in their clangèd bars.*

If we were casting the balance sheet for opium in English literature we should have these few poems to put on the credit side together with *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, but how much anguish and misery, how many projects conceived and discarded, and how many dreams that did not achieve expression must be debited to opium. Poets do not require these chemical aids to self-transcendence, and opium, while enlarging their fantasies adds nothing of value to their experience. Whenever a severe addiction supervenes the will is deranged and the powers of expression are paralysed.

For a person to develop an addiction to a drug three component factors are usually present, even though in varying degree. The drug must provide some inner comfort which gives release from a painful situation; the drug

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must usurp some place in cellular metabolism so that the body becomes physiologically dependent upon it; the personality of the addict must contain some weakness which makes resistance to the temptations of the drug especially difficult. Peyote—obtained from the cactus and from which the active principle mescaline is derived—is said not to cause addiction in the North American Indians who use it. I doubt whether a pleasure-providing drug will ever be synthesized which will not produce addiction in some of its habituated takers. I have heard of a doctor who was addicted to calciferol and who died of the effects of his addiction. I do not therefore share Aldous Huxley's hope that 'if the psychologists and sociologists will define the ideal, the neurologists and the pharmacologists can be relied upon to discover the means whereby that ideal can be realized or at least more nearly approached than in the wine-bibbing past, the whisky-drinking, marijuana-smoking and barbiturate-swallowing present'.

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