

MARIHUANA

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(Published in July <sup>1938</sup> issue of Federal Probation)

The Marihuana Tax Act approved August 2, 1937, places this drug about on a par with opium and cocaine in the eyes of the law and makes it desirable for law enforcement officers, probation officers, judges and physicians to orient themselves as to the effects of it.

Marihuana is obtained from a species of hemp plant, *cannabis sativa*, the active drug from which is usually referred to in medical literature as *cannabis indica*. The hemp plant grows throughout the world as a weed in temperate and tropical climates, but has been and is cultivated both for medical and commercial purposes. Its use in medicine has, however, almost reached the vanishing point. Commercially it is cultivated for the soft fibre from which twine, rope, and certain grades of paper are made, and for the seed, which is used for bird food and from which an oil used in paints, soap, and linoleum is procured, but the plant comes to our attention principally because of the intoxicating properties of its active principle, cannibinol.

This drug has been known by its effects for at least 3,000 years and goes under a variety of names, depending upon the country in which produced and whether it is prepared for smoking, chewing, or eating. The active principle is contained chiefly in a resin which exudes from the flowering tops, but it has been determined that all parts of the plant contain some of it. In this country the tops and leaves

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are dried and crushed into a coarse powder, which is then rolled into cigarettes ready for smoking.

The abusive use of the drug spread to the United States from Mexico during the past 10 or 15 years, but from the literature it appears that there have always been some marihuana addicts in the United States. It has been said that there are 200,000,000 users in the world, but of this there is no definite evidence. In the United States the drug is used mostly by unstable people, but it appears to be a well-founded belief that many persons with normal nervous constitutions indulge in it occasionally. The curiosity of some of these has been aroused by reports of its effects, while others indulge sporadically for somewhat the same reason that some people get drunk on Saturday night or to celebrate on special occasions.

No matter by what means taken, marihuana is a dangerous drug. It is more intoxicating than alcohol, and the abusive use of it is more likely to lead to insanity than the abusive use of alcohol, and possibly also of cocaine. It is much more harmful in these respects than opium, but addiction to it does not bring about physical dependence as does addiction to opium. The opium addict when deprived of his drug suffers from intense physical symptoms until his body functions are readjusted to abstinence, but the marihuana addict deprived of his drug merely has a hankering for it; he does not suffer physical pain. Because of the seductive ease produced by opium and the physical dependence brought about by a short period of indulgence in it, users of this drug are much more likely to become chronic addicts than users of marihuana.

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Marihuana produces a peculiar intoxication somewhat similar to, but more fantastic than, intoxication from alcohol. The devotee takes it primarily for the intoxication, but the drug also releases inhibitions and, as with all drugs that have this effect, stupefaction is the final result. When marihuana smoke is inhaled the subject becomes hyperactive and anxious; he has vague fears and may even fear death and become panicky; this is quickly followed by a feeling of calm, ease, and elation. He becomes talkative and is filled with a vivid sense of happiness. His limbs feel light; his legs and arms may seem to be lengthened and his head much larger than he knows it to be. Sense perception is increased so that colors look brighter, sounds are clearer, sensations are more vivid, and things in general are more beautiful and more interesting than they were before, but they may seem unreal and terrifying; hallucinations of sight are common. Thoughts come quicker and the subject feels that he can see to the bottom of things and solve problems much better, when as a matter of fact he is usually less efficient, but jazz musicians who indulge claim, with some show of reason and credibility, to have an increased sense of rhythm and beauty with consequent ability to produce better music. Because of the rapidity of thought it may seem to the subject that he has lived hours in the course of a few minutes. He may become hilarious and noisy, and finally dangerous. In some the sex impulse seems to be aroused, probably because the sexual object appears more attractive than before. All of this ends in sleep, and the patient wakes up the next day apparently no worse off for his experience.

Continued use of the drug causes insanity in many cases but very

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unstable persons may have a short psychotic episode from only a few doses. The insanity may be of several different types, although most patients eventually recover when the use of the drug is discontinued, but there is a form of dementia caused by it from which recovery does not occur. In some of the severe cases the drug has apparently acted as a precipitating cause in persons who were strongly predisposed to mental disease. Insanity due to marihuana is rare in the United States, probably because the drug is not as excessively used here as it is in some other countries. It has been stated that about 25% of the cases in mental institutions in Egypt and India are due to marihuana.

The excessive use of marihuana will certainly cause some persons to commit crimes, but the prevalent opinion that anyone who smokes a marihuana cigarette and becomes intoxicated by it will have criminal impulses is an error. Marihuana is in this respect like alcohol, but probably somewhat more dangerous because of the peculiar sensations and hallucinations produced by it. It releases inhibitions and distorts the judgment, and the criminally inclined person with no inhibitions and distorted judgment is likely to convert his criminal impulses into action, but the normal person who becomes intoxicated with marihuana is like the normal person who becomes intoxicated with alcohol, likely to be a nuisance to himself and to others but not dangerous.

Much loose and inaccurate information is being given out about marihuana by uninformed enthusiasts. For instance, one writer states that marihuana causes more insanity than opium, and another that it

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gives a lust to kill and is worse than heroin as a cause of crime. Both of these are true statements carrying false inferences, and both are pointless to one who knows that opium does not cause insanity and heroin does not excite people to commit crimes.

A careful study of the effect of marihuana addiction on crime was made by Dr. Walter Bromberg, psychiatrist, at the Court of General Sessions in New York. Marihuana addiction is fairly common in New York, according to Bromberg, but of 2,216 criminals convicted of felonies over a period of a year, in 1932 and 1933, not one case of confirmed marihuana addiction was noted. Of 361 individuals diagnosed as psychopathic personalities 32 were drug addicts, and of these only 7 had smoked marihuana. None of the assault cases had been committed under the drug's influence, and no crime was committed during or immediately after intoxication. Reports based on less carefully made studies attribute a larger proportion of crime to marihuana, but whatever the truth may be enough is known about the drug to brand it as a dangerous one that needs to be strictly controlled.

The marihuana addict is like the opium addict and drunkard; seeking at first an escape from reality by abnormal means and unusual sensations, he sinks deeper and deeper into distress because the remedy is only transitory. Through using <sup>it</sup> on numerous occasions in various situations to create pleasure or relieve pain he develops a habit whereby practically all his pleasureable and painful sensations are associated with taking the drug. He becomes mentally conditioned to it so that practically everything in his environment impels him

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toward it, even though he may wish to quit and meet his original weakness in a normal way. Like the opium addict he needs help rather than punishment, but in order to control the drug some restraint on users is necessary. There is, however, no point to making this unduly punitive, as punishment beyond the confinement necessary to bring about cure is harmful rather than beneficial. Long prison terms for marihuana users are therefore contraindicated. The associations inseparable from prison and the natural resentment over unjust punishment are bound to harm the psyche that is already very susceptible to harm. Therefore, long sentences, especially for short time users, are likely to make criminals and chronic users out of patients who only have a weakness needing a short period of treatment, with mild restraint. Such patients, when convicted, should be put on probation and sent to the Lexington or Fort Worth hospital, to be discharged when as much has been done for them as it is possible to do.