

TRAFFIC IN OPIUM AND OTHER DANGEROUS DRUGS.

Whereas in the earlier years of the League's existence discussion on this subject related, for the main part, to opium, this phase of the subject, while still remaining of great importance, is more and more being overshadowed by the question of the illicit trade in narcotic drugs generally. The fact that, as mentioned in the report of the Advisory Committee (Document C. 138, M. 51), the number of drug-addicts in Egypt alone is estimated officially at five hundred thousand out of a total population of only fourteen million is all the more startling in view of the fact that the drugs, such as heroin, which are principally responsible for this tragic state of affairs were practically unknown in Egypt until after the war. Nor is the danger confined to non-European countries, for important seizures of illicit consignments both of opium and of cocaine and other drugs have been made in various European countries, and also in the United States, Canada, and even Australia, while the illicit traffic to South American countries is believed to have reached large proportions.

Very material assistance has been given by the organs of the League concerned in this matter to the Police and Customs authorities of various countries, by supplying information which has led to the seizure of large quantities of drugs, and has facilitated the tracing of the channels of supply. Unfortunately, the work has been considerably hampered by the fact that many States have failed to co-operate with the League organs by furnishing *full* particulars of seizures made by them, and have also failed to reply to various questionnaires, &c., sent to them. It is with a view to endeavouring to effect a marked improvement in this respect that the Assembly adopted the very specific resolution set out on page 4 of Document A. 78. I am glad to know that New Zealand has no cause to reproach herself with regard to these points. Though there is still much room for improvement in many quarters, the publicity given by the League discussions and inquiries is gradually bringing the delinquents into line by arousing public opinion in their own countries.

It is pleasing to be able to refer also to another side of the picture where much progress has been made—namely, the great reduction in the amount of opium grown in India, and also, to some extent, in Persia, though there still exists a very considerable traffic in Persian-grown opium between Persian Gulf ports and China. Five years ago the Indian Government put into force a plan for reducing the export of opium by one-tenth each year, and thus in another five years the export of opium from that country, formerly one of the greatest suppliers, will cease entirely.

Despite the pressure exerted by the League, the system of "import certificates," issued by Governments, for the purpose of enabling a country which does not manufacture narcotics to obtain the drugs required for legitimate purposes is still not strictly enforced in some countries, and in others a more careful scrutiny of the activities of firms licensed to manufacture such drugs is required. Further, a grave difficulty has arisen owing to the recent establishment of drug-factories in Turkey by foreign firms. As Turkey is not a member of the League nor a signatory to either The Hague or the Geneva Opium Conventions, it is particularly difficult to deal with this new menace, but, as you will see from the report of the committee (Document A. 78), a special appeal has been issued to Turkey by the Council of the League, calling attention to the dangers involved, both to herself and to the rest of the world, should she continue to tolerate the manufacture of large quantities of drugs which almost certainly are destined for the illicit traffic, and asking for her co-operation in controlling the menace.

In the report on the Tenth Session of the Assembly last year special mention was made of the decision that an International Conference should be convened to deal with the question of limitation of manufacture—which had been decided upon in principle—and also to deal with the cognate subjects of the total amount of narcotic drugs required to meet the medical and scientific needs of the world, and the quotas to be allocated to the various manufacturing countries. In considering the methods of limitation to be adopted special care has also to be taken to guard against an increase in the price of drugs required for legitimate purposes. During the past year the Advisory Committee on Opium has drawn up a plan for the direct limitation of manufacture of narcotics (see Appendix 5 to Document C. 138, M. 51), but, owing to the necessity for securing as complete data as possible in order to ensure the success of the Limitation Conference, that Conference has not yet been held. It has been definitely decided, however, that it shall meet on the 27th May, 1931. In addition, the British Government has invited the principal drug-manufacturing countries to participate in a preliminary Conference in London in October of this year, in order further to prepare the ground for the general Conference.

Though very definite results are hoped for from these Conferences, the committee emphasize in their report that the limitation of manufacture is not intended to *replace* the system of supervision now in force, as laid down in the conventions, but is to be *added* to and supplement it.

One point in the report to which I would draw special attention is that regarding the penalties for breaches of the laws in regard to opium and narcotics, and the recommendation that all Governments should consider whether it might not be advisable to strengthen their laws in this respect by providing heavier penalties.

Some advance has been made during the past year in the number of ratifications of the Geneva Opium Convention, but there are still a considerable number of States—particularly South American ones—which have failed to ratify, and a special appeal is to be made to them to rectify the omission as soon as possible.

During the past year a Special Commission of Inquiry into the control of opium-smoking in the Far East conducted lengthy investigations in various Asiatic countries, and the report of this Commission will be issued very shortly. A separate Conference on this subject is also to be held next year, attended only by those States directly interested. It is therefore to be held in one of the Asiatic countries, and the principal delegate of Siam, at the Assembly meeting on the 1st October, extended an invitation for the Conference to be held in his country, and stated that, in that event, his country would be prepared to find the sum of £6,000 towards the expenses.

For further information on this important subject I would refer you to the very full particulars contained in the two reports to which I have several times alluded in the foregoing remarks, and in Document C. 518, M. 213.