

# Flake, Dope and Hop Among Our Respectables

Modern City Life Is Painful: Opiates Ease Pain: That's Why 5,000 San Francisco Men and Women—2,000 of Whom YOU May Know—Are FIENDS!



by Fred R. Becholt

KEY:  
FLAKE—POWDERED COCAINE  
DOPE—MORPHINE  
HOP—OPIUM

GRIM figures and grimmer facts are foundation for the opening statement in this article. It will help you to understand the situation in San Francisco, which is no worse than the situation in other large cities of America. When you have read it, you will see how close the thing has come to you—the average man or woman. And after you have done reading it, you can read the statistics on which it is based.

There is a cell in the city prison, more noisome and more horrible than the rest, to which at least one of your acquaintances is destined to go. Or, put it this way: If you stand on Market street near Third at noon, and watch the sidewalk crowd go by, you will see among the passing faces one in every thirty seconds which is on its rapid journey toward that cell.

The cell in question is a square compartment; its dimensions, about 20 feet by 20 feet. Flat bars, crossing one another at right angles, inclose it. The floor is concrete. Sometimes it is crowded with a dozen prisoners; there have been more than that number within it at one time. The light is dim. In that half light the faces of these human beings show somewhat obscured. This fact is merciful to the observer. For to look upon those faces by day would sicken most men. Putty colored skin, drawn tight over the bones; lines of fright and despair and pain, so deep that they seem to have been gouged by fine chisels; protruding eyes that glare from the shadows; yellow hands like claws, rags that are hideous. And that is enough to tell. It is not all, however, by any means. When the jailers hand in the food these creatures, who once walked erect in God's sunlight, fight and snarl, as dogs would not.

These are the drug fiends—those far gone, who can not be kept like other prisoners, for reason of their loathsomeness. To save their lives, the officers must cart them at intervals to the hospitals for injections of opiates. And there are in San Francisco today more than 5,000 men and women afflicted with the habit which will ultimately bring them to this state. Out of that number nearly one-third come from the decent portion of society.

Five hundred thousand people in

the city; one drug user out of every 100 souls. Count your acquaintances; you will find that the list numbers more than 100. Count the faces that pass in 30 seconds by Lotta's fountain at noon. You will have numbered more than 100. And there are the figures. As for the facts, I know that police officers detailed on this work and physicians whose experience is wide unite in giving this rule: The confirmed drug user is hopeless. There are exceptions; there have been cures. But the number is small.

To get back to these figures: Five thousand is, in all probability, too small a number. One of your acquaintances is too small a proportion. I asked Detective Robert V. Williams, who has been working along with others in District Attorney Fickler's office in the fight against "dope," for figures. He is an experienced officer; he has grown accustomed to handling facts, and takes facts as they come, with no emotion on his own part to color them. Said he: "Five thousand." Then he paused. "No, that is too easy. More than that." When he was asked for the proportion of that army which comes from decent homes—clerks, professional men, housewives, and others of respectable environments, he said: "It is growing larger than it used to be. It is hard to get at." Pressed for an approximate figure, based on the number found among the fiends, he said: "One-fourth is too easy. Put it higher than that. It may be one-third."

A physician, whose practice lies among the well to do, listened to the detective's statement as I retailed it. He shook his head. "He is too conservative," said the doctor. "Too conservative for San Francisco or any other large city in America. Here the number of drug users in the respectable portion of the community will be—well, put it at somewhere about 2,000." His patients include bankers, lawyers, merchants, club-women and others who are able to pay good fees. He gets them from both sides of the bay. His practice is gen-

eral—that is to say, he is not a specialist.

Now, all this shows a great change from a few years ago. The tenderloin used to supply the bulk of the drug fiends. Occasionally a victim of opiates drifted downward from the world that lives by day. Usually that one was a person who had come to the habit through sickness. Now the fiends include a startling proportion from our part of society, and, of that proportion, a great many never went inside a hospital.

I tried to find how it was that this had come about, and how much it really amounted to. In telling what was told to me and what I saw, I shall try and stick to the story of the habit among those whose lives bring them in contact with you and me; the men and women who are apt to be on your calling list or among your business acquaintances. And because they, too, concern all of us and our safety, I shall include the soldiers of the regular army.

How is it and why is it that drug fiends come from the following walks of life: Doctors, lawyers, clerks, actors, housewives, soldiers, businessmen, bookkeepers, writers, and the so-called "idle rich"? Also, what is the existence of a drug fiend? And what is the drug traffic like in San Francisco?

Now, to get at that question of "How and why?" Here is what the doctor and the detective said. Said the former: "Some kinds of patent medicine, and too rapid living." He elaborated: "Many babies get the craving from soothing doses, containing opiates. It never dies. Many grown people, particularly women, use certain kinds of proprietary medicines to allay suffering or to check neurasthenia." He went on to speak of the growth of nervousness. "Overwork, especially mental overwork; and over-pleasure, are constantly inducing neurasthenia. We live too fast and we take too seriously the problem of making our living in our cities. Men are overworked all day; and at night men and women seek their relaxation in a manner that borders on hysteria. All this brings about the use of opium in various forms—sometimes the victim does not know it is opium at all—and other poisons. Alcohol is prominent among these poisons. Overuse of alcohol is frequently followed by morphine."

He told me two stories. One was the story of a woman. She was eminently respectable, eminently conventional. She was brought to him, leaden skinned; her eyes had pupils like pin points. "Opium," he said. She denied it. In the end they found

that she had been drinking a very common medicine that contained a big percentage of the drug. The other story was that of a businessman. He worked hard; he worked fast; he became nervous; then neurasthenic. He had begun to seek relief, off hours, in drink. He came to the point where he braced himself with cocaine.

Detective Williams put it this way: "I don't know why, but there is more vice than there used to be. Much more. People go swifter. Men and women from good homes and boys and girls—especially boys—from good homes, spend their money extravagantly; they visit resorts, sight seeing, and then take part in the night life. And some always drift down. When they start really going swiftly, many of them come to 'hop' and then to 'dope.' There is a lot of both used by men and boys whose families and employers never dream of it."

And when I had listened to each of these men—who deal with hard facts every day—I asked each this question: "Opiates allay pain. Isn't living itself a pain with these people who overdo it?" The doctor and the detective gave the same answer. "Each man nodded as he said, 'Yes.'"

So you get the beginning—the answer to why. They let themselves be caught in the whirlpool of too swift life. They suffer the pain which comes from too much work or too much pleasure. They seek to dull that pain.

There is another angle to that double question of how and why. Dope has gotten a big hold among the crowds who throng the streets of every city because, in part, of its increased accessibility. In the war which the district attorney's office has been waging against the traffic, that fact has cropped up constantly. Opiates used to mean opium, when it came to the habit. We had our army of smokers. Two things happened in coincidence. The importation of opium was prohibited. The clumsy, expensive habit became almost impossible unless one knew the ropes. At the same time a new stepping

stone toward the hypodermic needle appeared. It was "flake."

"Flake" is powdered cocaine. The victim inhales it like snuff. It is milder than an injection; it produces an effect like opium. And it is cheap. Ten cents buys a portion. It is easy to sell under cover. So easy that half a hundred peddlers exist in San Francisco. They buy the stuff from drug stores and retail it on the streets. In Chinatown and on the Barbary Coast and in the various dives that used to exist near the Presidio, there were always a number of these retailers. That is the way the soldiers bought it. Several hundred of the men at the local post were found to be addicted to the habit. The district attorney and the police put a temporary check on this traffic; but it has sprung up again, under closer cover than it used to be.

This "flake" is scorned by the old "dope fiend." He says it has no strength; it is made for greenhorns. And he is right. The beginners use it. It is this powdered cocaine which is recruiting the ranks of the haggard, outcast army that sleeps in nests under the sidewalks and forages for food in the alleys. According to police officers there are probably 50 drug stores in San Francisco which sell it to victims. They are most numerous near the tenderloin; there are also many of them out in the residence districts. How fat that traffic must be is shown by the fact that although some drug stores were fined two and even three times, they resumed the sale. And the fines in some cases reached three figures.

The curbside peddler usually knows his customers and slips the drug to them as they approach him on the sidewalk, taking the coin which they hand him covertly at the same time. Usually he is an ex-soldier; sometimes an old habitue of the dance halls. And nine times out of ten he uses the stuff himself. There is another retailer. The man who dresses well and holds a place alongside the rest of us can't afford to be seen hanging around all night drug stores. He gets his drug by sending for it. And in this way, there have, according to the police, grown up a class of dope carriers. Some of these are messenger boys, and some are former employes of drug stores. They go between the poison counter and respectability. And this is also true of opium. For, although it is now an expensive luxury, opium is still smoked in San Francisco. The recent scandal of the Palm lodging house is fresh in the minds of the newspaper reading public, who will remember the allegations on the part of prisoners that the drug was being sold in the residence districts. The white man's opium joint exists always in this city, according to the police. And such places employ their messengers who carry the sticky stuff out to private houses and into offices.

I have tried to tell how the milder opiates are sold in San Francisco; that is to say, how the beginner gets his drug. The beginner who is still a doctor, lawyer, clerk, soldier, housewife, etc., the man or woman whom any of us may either know or need; and whom we want to trust. Now, what becomes of such a one?

His end is a certainty. It is a grim certainty. He uses the drug; he finds relief from it. Mind you, this is a habit of obtaining pleasure by the relief of pain. The greater the pain, the greater the pleasure of relief. The more he uses, the more he needs next time; the deeper his discomfort when the effect of the last portion has died away, the more profound his joy when he indulges again. 'So it grows;

It must grow. He becomes nervous; he fumbles in his pockets and, feeling a distrust in himself, he fails to look you in the eye. The strange nerve sickness which brings moral decay along with it has hold of him. He ceases to be reliable; he becomes a liar.

Then he loses his position, or loses his clients, or loses his customers; or loses his family's company. At the same time the "flake" or the pipe no longer satisfies him. He takes his first "shot" from a hypodermic syringe. He is a lost soul in a decaying body.

The hypodermic syringe is a common thing; nearly every one has seen it. We know the blessings it has brought. And the misery is something which no man knows. The drug fiend carries his hidden on his person. He is a nervous, thin, lack luster eyed individual. He walks with jerky steps. When he needs a dose of morphine he suffers the tortures that lie away beyond acute neurasthenia. He seeks the nearest secluded spot, punctures his skin with the needle, pushes the little piston down. His muscles stiffen; his eyes brighten; he walks out on the sidewalk, exhilarated, living in the realms of his imagination. He is now working at some poorer position than he used to hold, or doing odd jobs. The chances are that he hangs about the lower class of saloons. He has no morals; his sense of shame is gone. He would rather beg than steal, and he would rather borrow than beg. But he never repays; and if he can't get for the asking, he takes by stealth. He lies always. And so he loses the chance to work, for men can no longer trust him. The cheap lodging house to which he has drifted turns him out. He is a vagrant.

As the morphine has become impotent for him, he buys cocaine. He loses his syringe and can not afford to buy another. He uses a pin to make the puncture and a medicine dropper for the injection. He sleeps in a nest of rags under the sidewalks. He earns money by carrying what scrap iron he can find to the junk dealer; or by selling what brass or copper he can steal. He does not buy food with this, for food is expensive. He purchases cocaine. And he forages for his living. There is no need to tell how he forages. If you are out at night some time you may see one of these ragged, stooping, gaunt eyed beings flitting by you into an alley. He is looking for crusts of bread.

Down and down. Life is a succession of nights. By day he hides beneath the sidewalks or in deserted buildings. Physical description is no longer possible. I would ask no man to look at one of these fiends from near by. There is no truth, no honor, no light; no future. And there is no past. He has forgotten it. And that is the sort they take to the cell in the city prison. That is the sort who fight for food like famished dogs. The doctor and the detective said that there are 5,000 in San Francisco coming to that stage. And of that 5,000, one-third come from decency.

It is a problem which many men in San Francisco are trying to solve. In other cities, the same attempt is being made. Physicians are using new and less harmful opiates. Reputable druggists are united in trying to stamp out the traffic. The pharmacists have employed a lawyer and detective to war against it. The district attorney's office has men at work constantly. The commandant at the Presidio has instituted a rigid investigation among the soldiers. And, so far as I could learn, no man has as yet found a solution for the evil which comes where too swift life is pain.

