

PEYOTE.



HERE is no inconsiderable danger that this country, absorbed in the great problems of war measures and interested in the fulfillment of its philanthropic duties toward oppressed and suffering peoples abroad, will forget its unquestioned and immediate duty to dependent peoples at home. That the Indians in the West, recognized as wards of our Nation, are suffering under an appalling and continuing calamity is, in our judgment, after some careful study of the problem, unquestionable, and the continuance of this calamity is due, not to lack of careful investigation by the proper authorities, but to the absorption of the attention of Congress by other questions.

On February 2, 1916, Mr. Gandy introduced a bill "to prohibit the traffic in peyote, including its sales to Indians, introduction into the Indian country, importation and transportation, and providing penalties therefor." This bill was referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and has the approval, we believe, of that committee, of the Indian Bureau, and of the Department of the Interior. The investigation by the Office of Indian Affairs brought reports from Indian agents and others in the field embodied in over 200 typewritten pages. The very amplitude of the material makes it almost impossible for a busy Congressman to examine it. We hope the summary which follows may be of some service to our Representatives in Congress and may do something to stimulate a public opinion outside of Congress urging legislative action in this matter.

Peyote, also called mescal buttons, is a cactus imported from Mexico; it produces results upon the user somewhat analogous to those produced by opium and by hasheesh. The few defenders of its use present three arguments against its prohibition:

1. That it has some medical uses, as opium has. This is questionable.
2. That it destroys the appetite for whisky. This is also questionable, the witnesses on this subject being about equally divided. But

there is practical agreement that if it has such an effect the remedy is worse than the disease.

3. That it has become an instrument used in the religious worship of the Indians, and that it is not legitimate to interfere with their religious worship. If it were true that any practice employed in religious worship can never be interfered with, there would be nothing to prevent setting up in any of our cities a pagan temple, with prostitutes offering themselves under the name of religion as ministers to lust.

The reports from the field of the effect of peyote on its users contain three or four accounts of the personal experience of those who have made use of it. We select one of these accounts, given by an Indian, partly because it is less technical than those given by scientific experimenters, partly because its naivete furnishes a good illustration of its so-called religious effect on members of the Indian race:

"Now the first peyote that I took I drunk something about four cupful of tea. And its effects on me, that I seen, I do not want them again. I thought myself, that must be the devils. Why their ears stuck out above their heads, and they made all kinds of faces, they made fun of me; and turn over again and sometimes dance around me. They stuck their tongue out and made fun of me. I never paid any attention to them. I stayed with my peyote, and I prayed God. That is the first time.

"And then had effect once again. There was my girls—they was not married. I have three of them. When we was in there, the peyote meeting, why the peyote took effect on me, and I was praying myself, "And for the homeless and for the poor," and the fire was blazing up bright. I saw a ladder come from heaven and set right down at the end of the fireplace. Ladder was just as fine as could be made. And I seen two little fellows about so tall [Mr. W. indicates to Mr. L.] come out of the fire. They wore black suits and black hats both of them little children they went up to heaven on that ladder, and never came down."

We hardly need say to our readers that this is not religion, that it has no tendency to promote religion, that it has exactly an opposite tendency, since it leads the user to imagine that religion is something else than living a pure, honest, upright, kindly, and reverent life. There is a practically unanimous testimony from all missionaries, and apparently from all those interested in the moral and religious welfare of the Indian, that its intoxicating effects seriously interfere with the religion of good morals. It is equally deleterious, ethically and physically. It excites sexual passions. In the words of one of the writers, "its use among Indians is more of a drunk and carousal than a religious service."

Our space does not allow me to quote at length from these official reports. We must content ourselves with stating the substance of these reports in single sentences. According to the practically unanimous testimony of these witnesses, peyote has the same poisonous effect as liquor or as opium—effects so marked that it is called "dry whiskey." While producing abnormal awakening of the imagination, it saps the nervous energy and will power and gradually destroys energy, clearness of thought, and persistent purpose. It does not produce violence, as does alcohol, but is followed by a greater stupor. It unfits the user for the discharge of ordinary industrial and business functions; injuriously affects the stomach, the liver, and the heart, producing dizziness and nausea, destroying the mucous coating of the stomach. It has in some instances produced blindness, led to suicide,



LITTLE ALICE STENGAR, daughter of a Coeur d' Alene allottee. Alice holds the arrow which her father shot as his last arrow when he received a patent to his allotment.

and caused death. Probably nowhere in the country has there been a better opportunity for a study of the effects of peyote on the Indians than in Oklahoma, and as far back as 1899 Oklahoma passed a statute prohibiting its use on any Indian reservation or Indian allotment and its sale to any allotted Indian in the Territory, except as a medicine prescribed by a professional physician.

Mr. Gandy's bill, which was left unenacted by the last Congress will be reintroduced, and it ought to be pushed forward to speedy enactment, as it can be if Mr. Gandy receives the cooperation of his colleagues: for the use of peyote, promoted partly by financial interests, partly by unscrupulous Indian leaders opposed to anything which promotes Indian civilization, and partly a debasing superstition, is working a widespread evil among the Indian tribes which can be prevented only by prompt, vigorous, and legislative action.—The Outlook.

WORK

The law of nature is that a certain quantity of work is necessary to produce a certain quantity of good of any kind whatever. If you want knowledge, you must toil for it; if food, you must toil for it; and if pleasure, you must toil for it.

—Ruskin.