

The Black Candle (published in 1922) was written by Canadian author, women's rights activist and judge, Emily Murphy. While the book is mostly about opium it also contains early 20th-century claims about cannabis and cocaine. In the preface, Murphy explains how she acquired her drug expertise – her official position (as Police Magistrate and Judge of the Juvenile Court at Edmonton) gave her access to unique information, addicts and dealers through which she learned the causes of people's downfall and potential rehabilitation strategies.

[Cannabis] is not really new but, as yet, is comparatively unknown in the United States and Canada, although three of the American States – California, Missouri and Wyoming – have legislated against its use, the authorities and police of cers generally being woefully ignorant of its nature or extraordinary menace.

Hashish or hasheesh is the Arabic name and means literally “dried herb.” It may be smoked, chewed or drunk. Our English word “assassin” comes from this word.

This Indian hemp is used chiefly in Asia Minor, India, Persia and Egypt, but is being increasingly used on this continent, particularly by the Mexicans, who smuggle it into the United States. Last year forty-four persons were convicted for using, or peddling it in Los Angeles, California.

According to Charles A. Jones, LA Chief of Police: “Addicts to this drug, while under its influence, are immune to pain, and could be severely injured without having any realization of their condition. While in this condition they become raving maniacs and are liable to kill or indulge in any form of violence to other persons, using the most savage methods of cruelty without, as said before, any sense of moral responsibility.”

“Dr. Warnock in The Journal of Mental Sciences for January 1912 this condition

curse to their families.”

The Black Candle ends with an apologia to “addicts” and, ultimately, a handful of lines from a Walt Whitman poem that Murphy claims reflects her own heart:

From all the rest I single you out,  
 Having a message for you  
 Softly I lay my hand upon you  
 I am more than nurse, more than parent or neighbour  
 I absolve you from all except yourself.