

Cognoscenti of Cannabis I: Jacques-Joseph Moreau (1804-1884)

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Portrait of Moreau in 1845, by N.E. Maurin, Library of the Academy of Medicine, Paris, France.

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Jacques-Joseph Moreau (de Tours) was one of the earliest pioneers of modern psychopharmacology. Born in 1804 in Montrésor, France, Moreau pursued medical studies in Tours and Paris, subsequently studying psychiatry under the tutelage of Jean Étienne Dominique Esquirol, whose eclectic approach to healing of the mind included the prescription of therapeutic travel. As part of his duties, Moreau accompanied patients to the Orient, where he was able to observe the effects of, and partake himself of hashish, the resinous by-product of cannabis (Holmstedt 1973).

Upon his return to France, Moreau investigated the therapeutic possibilities of this substance. He likely is the character known as “Dr. X” who provided hashish in the form of an electuary called *dawamesk* to literary illuminati such as Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Alexandre Dumas and Honoré de Balzac of *Le Club des Hachichins* at the *Hôtel Pimodan* in Paris.

Moreau was among the first to apply herbal pharmacology systematically to the treatment of mental illness, using the dissociative hallucinogen, *Datura stramonium* L. Solonaceae (Moreau 1841). Moreau espoused a theory that such compounds mirrored effects of insanity, and from them, physicians might gain insight into psychopathological conditions, and even their amelioration. He then applied this concept to cannabis. His 1845 book, *Du Hachisch et de l'Alientation Mentale. Études Psychologiques*. (Moreau 1845) is a classic in the field. Unfortunately, it is a document that few have actually viewed themselves. It had a limited press run, and was never reprinted until a 1980 facsimile edition was issued by Ressources of Paris and Geneva. On the infrequent occasions that original copies appear on the rare book market, prices in the thousands of dollars are obtained.

The book was not translated into English until 1973, as *Hashish and Mental Illness* (Moreau 1973), but this volume, too, is out of print. In an early passage, Moreau observes (p. 211):

One of the effects of hashish that struck me most forcefully and which generally gets the most attention is that manic excitement always accompanied by a feeling of gaiety and joy inconceivable to those who have never experienced it. I saw in it a mean of effectively combatting the fixed ideas of depressives, disrupting the chain of their ideas, of unfocusing their attention on such and such a subject.

In his early efforts to apply this knowledge of cannabis to patients, Moreau observed mixed results, and himself questioned its utility. However, he persisted in his efforts. Subsequently, some years later, Moreau reported an in-depth case study of a man with intractable lypemania, a type of obsessive melancholia (Moreau de Tours 1857), and its apparent resolution with cannabis therapy. Spontaneous cure might be surmised, but subsequent evidence supports a rational basis for its efficacy with the work of Muller-Vahl on obsessive-compulsive disorder (Muller-Vahl et al. 1998; Muller-Vahl et al. 1999).

Close examination reveals that this article, presented here in English for the first time, was apparently written by one "*Homo, interne provisoire,*" but obviously under the close direction and supervision of Moreau at the *Hospice de Bicêtre*. It presents an important insight into 19th century medicine, psychopharmacology and cannabis usage.

According to Bo Holmstedt (Efron 1967) (p. 7), one of Moreau's favorite pronouncements was, "Insanity is the dream of the man who is awake." Moreau died in 1884 at the age of 80.

In the intervening century, many have judged Moreau's efforts to apply cannabis therapeutically as a failure. This view is not universal, however. Professor E. Perrot of the *Faculté de Pharmacie de Paris* stated in 1926 (Rouhier 1975) (p. IX):

The Indian hemp, to take but one example, quite cheated the hopes of Moreau de Tours, but it would be imprudent to affirm that it will not be better utilized by the psychiatry of tomorrow!
[translation EBR]

This sentiment is a useful one to consider in the modern age, as the search for better pharmacotherapeutic agents continues.

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