

RECORD OPIUM SEIZURE

£15,000 HAUL ON ARAFURA UGLY MENACE OF THE TRAFFIC

People who scoffed at the suggestion that fortunes are made by men who traffic in opium will doubtless begin to believe, as the result, of an enormous haul of the drug that was made on the Chinese steamer Arafura yesterday, that, after all, it is true. Customs searchers who boarded the Arafura yesterday found hidden on the steamer opium valued at, roughly, £15,000. It may be found that the opium discovered is not worth quite that amount, but the figure is not far wrong. About 1500 tins of the drug were found. It was opium known as "Ching Kee" - or "A1" opium - which, at the present market value is worth £10 a tin.

SEARCHERS AMAZED. It was the biggest haul that has ever been made in Australia, and, for that matter, it is probable that no bigger haul has been made in the world. Customs officers could not believe at first that all the small tins they found really contained opium, as they did not think that the traffickers would be so bold as to endeavor to land such a quantity from the one steamer. The opium was confiscated, and stored, in the "King's Warehouse" — the Customs House.

CHINESE ARRESTED. Prowling about near the part of the ship where the opium was found, the searchers noticed an anxious-looking Chinese, one of the crew of the steamer. He was questioned, and, as a result of something he told the officers, was arrested. The Arafura is from Japan and Hong-kong, via ports, and berthed at No. 8 Wharf, Woolloomooloo, at about 3 p.m. Not many minutes after the steamer had been moored to the wharf, Inspector Clifford, of the Customs Department, Chief-Searcher G. Brown, and twelve other Customs officials, boarded the Arafura, and commenced a search for contraband cargo.

THE SEARCH. They had almost completed their search without finding anything to arouse suspicion, when one of the searchers, who was probing under the chain locker in the forepeak of the vessel with a stick, felt something could not be extracted until the anchor was lowered. So, at the

request of Inspector Clifford this was done, and the officers found that the locker was stacked with cases, tins, casks, and bags, and these, on being opened, were found to contain the opium. Not many people on the steamer knew of the sensational discovery that had been made and the opium was quietly lowered into the Customs launch and removed to the Customs House. DEVELOPMENTS EXPECTED. Last night Officers and police were at work endeavoring to locate the owners of the drug, and amazing developments may be expected in the course of a few days. Although never before has so much opium been found in one lot, there is good reason to believe that when the Arafura left China and Japan there was more than the quantity discovered yesterday aboard the vessel. The Arafura called at Thursday Island, Cairns, Townsville, and Brisbane, on her trip, and it is well known by Customs officers and the police that big quantities of the drug are landed at these ports for distribution all over Australia. There are men in Sydney recognised as being "respectable citizens," who have built fine homes for themselves out of money made in the infamous trade.

BIG RISKS - BIG PROFITS. They run a big risk, hut the profits are big and worth the risk they take. These "masters" of the trade are not the men who suffer when the police or Customs' officials confiscate opium or make arrests. It is their agents who pay the penalty. But the agents make good money, too, and they also are prepared to run the risks. So big are the operations of these men that the great haul made on the Arafura will not dismay them. They are prepared for such things, and will continue to carry on. "Where does all the opium come from" is a question often asked. The police know that most of it comes from Chinese and Japanese ports, but there are many islands in the East where it is smuggled on board steamers going to European countries. The Arafura, which left Yokohama on March 18, called at Kobe, Hongkong, Manila, Kalumbang, before reaching Thursday Island, and it is surmised that some of the drug was smuggled aboard at these ports. And the terrible feature of the whole business is that not only Chinese, but white men and women, smoke opium in this country. Day by day the evil is getting worse, and if the traffic is to be stopped immediate and drastic action must be taken.

