
ALCOHOL :

As a Remedy and as a Cause of Disease.

—BY—

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A THESIS FOR THE M.D. DEGREE.

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ALCOHOL.



THERE may be many who are of opinion that the subject which I have chosen for my Thesis, a subject so far-reaching in its results, should always be left for an able man to take up, one who is able to marshal facts and explain theories; who is able to clothe his thoughts in noble and gifted language, I can only say, that after I have exhausted myself upon the subject, there will yet remain much unsaid, there will yet be room for competent observers and able writers.

I possess no qualification fitting me to speak upon this subject, except that I am not a total abstainer, and therefore may be expected to treat not unfairly^{*}, the other side of the question, which it will be a part of my duty in this paper to attack. **i.e. not in a partizan spirit*

I am not a politician, or a teetotal advocate, I write of what I have seen as a medical man, and I write for medical men. I don't seek to deprive the poor man of his glass of beer, or the professional man of his glass of sherry, but if the dreadful effects of drink which I shall endeavour to describe cannot be otherwise dealt with, then it becomes a question for both those individuals, ~~of~~ obeying the law, of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, to give up their own enjoyment.

The position I take up, is that Alcohol has a necessary place in the successful treatment of disease, that it is a valuable indeed an indispensable remedy.

use of Alcohol are unmistakeable. Your patient may have passed through an exhausting period of diarrhoea, and you are therefore prevented from depending on animal broths for nourishment; the temperature may suddenly fall, and you find you have severe Intestinal Hæmorrhage to deal with; after giving opium to stay the peristaltic action of the bowels, and hæmostatics or ice to act as astringents, however near the wind you may choose to sail to allow the fainting condition to favour the closing of the open vessels, you dare not dispense with Alcohol, or you run the risk of losing your patient.

You have a patient hanging between life and death, in Puerperal Septicæmia, constant vomiting excludes eggs, &c., diarrhoea sets aside animal broths, you have done what you can in washing out the uterus with antiseptic injections, you have reduced further absorption of septic matter to a minimum, and if you can tide your patient over the time when the poison already absorbed has been eliminated, there is a chance of life; without Alcohol in some shape, you are I believe, without hope.

There is a patient dying of some lingering disease, perhaps malignant disease of some portion of intestinal tract, can or does anything, in the whole range of farinaceous foods:—Eggs, Milk or Animal Broths, however skilfully or variously prepared, take the place of stimulants; it may be in the shape of small quantities of Brandy or Whiskey, Port or Sherry Wine.

A serious operation has been performed, secondary hæmorrhage or profuse suppuration, perhaps both take place, dare you deprive your patient of his modicum of stimulants.

The House Surgeon of a Hospital receives into his care a man who has been seriously injured, say on the railway, a double amputation may be considered necessary; is it not a question of a liberal supply of Alcohol both before and after the operation, for have you not to consider the collapse after the accident and the shock of the operation.

It may seem strange that in one portion of these remarks I shall seek for approval in the case of Alcohol, and in the latter I shall drag it in the dust ; it is my object to try to show that there is an abyss—wide and deep—between Alcohol used as a remedial agent, and taken without end or aim on all occasions, at every social or business meeting.

PART 1.—ALCOHOL as a Remedial Agent.

Page 316.—Dr. Whitla in his book on Therapeutics, puts the matter very fairly, he says that most authorities would probably agree :

1.—That Alcohol is not at all necessary in the majority of cases.

2.—That often unpromising cases pull through without it.

3.—That in severe cases it cannot be withheld from those habituated to it.

4.—That occasionally by the use of Alcohol, life may be saved which would otherwise be lost.

5.—That it is very rarely needed in the large doses prescribed by some.

For purposes of discussion, I will take as types certain acute diseases, *e. g.*

In Acute Croupous Pneumonia with a considerable portion of lung involved, a high temperature, the constitution enfeebled by a long course of poor food, what drug, what form of food can be relied upon to keep the patient alive until the much-hoped-for crisis occurs, more than Alcohol.

In Enteric Fever I am no approver of the indiscriminate use of Alcohol simply because the ailment is a Fever, but when there is evidence of weakness of the heart exemplified by frequent, weak and fluttering pulse, with weakness or absence of first sound of heart, and the tongue is also dry, and the teeth, lips and mouth are covered with Sordes, the indications for the

In profuse post-partum hæmorrhage, the labour has been everything desirable, placenta has been expelled, suddenly without any warning, in the course of a few minutes your patient may be within an ace of the grave, you administer Ergot, knead the uterus, or possibly clear out clots from its lower part and by your utmost efforts may have succeeded in stopping further hæmorrhage, but your patient is likely to slip, from the very suddenness of the loss; Brandy at once, in quantity if your patient can take it, in repeated small doses if she cannot, may save her, nothing else short of transfusion can take its place, Ammonia cannot, the strongest Beef Essence is only a poor substitute, Eggs without Brandy and possibly with it, will be at once rejected; in cases of this kind Brandy is your sheet anchor, for owing to its high diffusion power, it passes readily into the blood.

It is a noticeable feature that those Surgeons who are in the habit of preparing their patients for Chloroform, by giving them a short time previously, a small quantity of stimulants, have, as far as I have been able to learn, a clear record as regards accident.

In sleeplessness from overwork, and in some neuralgias, the good effects of Alcohol are very apparent.

("Therapeutics," 5th Ed., p. 273)—Dr. Ringer says:—"Stimulants are most serviceable in the prostration of acute illness, when in common with the other functions, digestion is much depressed, at a time when it is most important to support the strength until the disease has done its worst."

Strength no doubt is best supported by food, yet the weakened stomach can digest but sparingly; at this critical stage, Alcohol well spurs the flagging digestion, and enables the patient to take and assimilate more food.

If we turn for a time to the vital statistics of a hospital, the *raison d'être* of whose existence is that it can be carried on without Alcohol; the authorities stultify themselves by the

saving clause, that they may give it if found necessary. In this year's report of the London Temperance Hospital, two cases, one fatal the other ending in recovery are given, in which Alcohol was deemed necessary. In the fatal case—a Phlegmonous Inflammation of Perinæum and death—the surgeon waited until collapse had set in before administering his egg and brandy; possibly the case might have terminated fatally anyhow, but in my humble opinion, it would have been well to have anticipated the collapse—only one ounce of brandy was given!

In the case of recovery—Embolism, Gangrene of leg, and amputation, the heart's action was irregular and a systolic murmur heard over the apex beat—one ounce of spirits of wine daily was considered sufficient.

The staff of the Temperance Hospital is composed of men of high academic attainment, but even the most capable men may allow their minds to become warped when they are riding their hobby.

The death rate of the above hospital is not high, 7.48 p.c., or 59 in 789 (493 of which were medical, and 296 surgical) there is a probability that it might have been still lower, if stimulants had not been so rigidly excluded.

I have written to several hospitals asking them to supply me with statistics showing the amount of stimulants supplied to their sick inmates, so as to enable me to form a comparison. I had intended to take certain diseases and show the rate of mortality, disease by disease, and compare the results of the abstaining treatment with the alcoholic. The authorities written to, have acceded to my request, with the exception of the Broughtonⁿ Consumption Hospital; but the different methods in which the statistics are prepared, prevent any comparison. For instance, the death rate of the Temperance Hospital is 7.48 and that of the Glasgow Western Infirmary 8.4 p.c. The former hospital gives no analysis of the cases treated, and I believe as a matter of fact, there is a total absence of the frightful cases of accidents which the latter institution receives.

I think then that in the slight comparison I shall make, it is perfectly justifiable to subtract those cases which die within 48 hours of admittance, and if the Temperance Hospital had many of this class, their report would contain an account of it; deducting then this class of cases from the death rate of the Glasgow Western Infirmary, it stands at 7.1 p.c. against 7.48 of the Temperance Hospital.

The Belvidere Fever Hospital at Glasgow has a mortality p.c. of 10.9 and seems to be the highest in Diphtheria, Whooping Cough and Erisypilas, and in the order named. Again, the absence of an analysis of cases treated at the Temperance Hospital prevent any comparison; they would have no Typhus or Scarlet Fever, but I presume they would have Enteric Fever, Whooping Cough, Diphtheria and Erisypilas.

The use of malt liquors in wasting diseases holds a definite position, they may not have the fat forming power of Cod Liver Oil or the nerve stimulating properties of the Hypophosphites, but as an adjunct they have a valuable position. To persons brought low by exhausting discharges, stout is perhaps more valuable than anything else.

(p. 276) Dr. R'nger says that Alcohol strengthens the contraction of the heart, strengthens the pulse and reduces its frequency, and must be considered as one of the most powerful Cardiac Tonics.

In the Typhoid state, perhaps more than in any other condition, it is difficult to see how stimulants can be dispensed with; the symptoms point chiefly to the nervous system, and denote depression; brandy, by mouth or rectum, ought to be given unsparingly.

(vol. II., p. 1182)—Dr. Theodore Williams, in Quain's Dictionary of Medicine, says:—"in Phthisis, when the strength fails and the powers of digestion are weak, stimulants may be given frequently and advantageously."

(vol. 1, p. 214)—Mr. Erichsen in his System of Surgery, says:—"In the treatment of low forms of Inflammation, it may be stated generally, that the more the disease assumes the Asthenic and passive forms, the more are stimulants required; until at last in the truly adynamic types, our principal trust is in these agents, and indeed in large quantities to maintain life."

(p. 18)—Dr. Eustace Smith in his Diseases of Children says:—"amongst internal remedies, alcoholic stimulants take a high place. A few timely doses in severe cases have often turned the scale in favour of recovery. So also, weakly children with poor appetites and feeble digestion, often benefit greatly by an allowance of wine with their principal meal."

It must be remembered that a stimulant is not a tonic, it is given for an immediate purpose, and should be withdrawn as as soon as the object has been attained.

Different observers appear to have arrived at conflicting results with regard to the effect of Alcohol on febrile temperatures, but it may be taken that the consensus of opinion is, that while it does not appear to increase the temperature, it very frequently, for a time at any rate, has the power of lowering it from 5° to 3° and that an excessive dose may, and as a matter of fact does, cause death by bringing about abnormally low temperatures.

At the present day with Medical science as it now exists, Alcohol in some shape or form cannot be dispensed with, and I think he is a rash man who says he can contend as successfully against the diseases of humanity as his neighbour who takes what benefit he can from a judicious use of stimulants. The position of a Medical man without Alcohol is like that of an eminent Surgeon who is without one or more digits of his right hand, who attempts an operation in which an elaborate dissection is necessary, or undertakes to pass a catheter through a sinuous stricture, an operation in which the greatest finesse is necessary, it is easily conceivable that a distinguished man in such a crippled state might have to hand over his instrument to a less capable colleague who was not in his mutilated condition.

PART 2.—ALCOHOL as a Cause of Disease.

I would now draw attention to the baneful effects of strong drink ; effects, which we as medical men meet with at every turn. Apropos of this, I may perhaps be allowed to give in illustration, an account of a case which has occurred in my practice while this paper is being written. A horse dealer returns from market in a half-drunken state, drives furiously, collides with another vehicle and is thrown out ; immediate result, severe scalp wound, large portion of skull quite bare ; consequences : several days' suffering, great anxiety to his family, and probably *erisypelas*.

I do not speak now of the vice, misery, degradation and penury, to which a continued indulgence too often leads ; or to what extent our workhouses are peopled by drunkards or their offspring ; or what portion of our heavy rates may be due to the same cause.

You have it on all sides, you see it written in broad characters, in living figures, north, south, east and west, in town and country. The diseases to which I shall call attention are not trifling ones, with only one or two exceptions they are of a progressive and fatal character, defying alike the skill of the physician, and the art of the surgeon.

Whether as physician or surgeon, pathologist or specialist, who can say, I meet with none of the injurious effects of drink ?

Does the physician now meet with no Gastritis or Hepatic Cirrhosis, are the furred tongue and the trembling hands of the drunkard not seen in the out-patient room, or the consulting room of the private practitioner. Does the ophthalmic surgeon never have to record Alcoholic Amblyopia ? Or is the nutmeg liver never now seen in the post-mortem room. Can the Superintendents of our lunatic asylums say that no cases of Dementia or General Paralysis are now due to drink. Can the house surgeons of our large hospitals say that the fractures of bones, compressions, and other frightful injuries they have daily to deal with, are now never to be attributed to the same cause.

Sir Andrew Clark has said upon a public occasion, that of 10 hospital patients who had occupied his attention that morning *the disease of* were due to drink.

Heredity, puberty, age, sex, and fevers are usually considered as the predisposing causes of Epilepsy; within my observation I have seen that epileptic children often have drunken father or mother; I don't mean to say that drink has been the direct cause of the Epilepsy, but I may safely say that an already irritable nervous system, has received through the channel of drink further irritable matter, without which the explosions known as epilepsy might not have occurred.

Within three years I have, in a very limited field, met with 3 cases of Acute Spinal Meningitis, in the last of which I had no proof of drink and I make no suggestion of it, but in the 2 earlier cases, the one a landlady of a public house, the other a member of a travelling troupe of gymnasts, were both admittedly deep drinkers; was the drink in these cases cause and effect, or merely accidental?

In these forms of degeneration of the Spinal Cord, which are known as Scleroses, the causes of which are far from considered as settled, the toxic influence of Alcohol no doubt plays a very important part.

What position has heredity in this question? Sir James Crichton Browne in his masterly address before the Psychological section of the British Medical Association at Leeds, said that the taste for drink is hereditary, and that heredity from the mother is greater than from the father, that is, children are more likely to have a craving for drink if the mother is a drunkard than if the father has been so. This law coincides with my own observation in this matter, I have in my mind's eye at this present moment several mothers of families, who are or have been heavy drinkers, the child or children born before this habit fell to the mother are bright and intelligent, those born since seem to me to be cunning and unintelligent, and if the authority named above be correct in his statement, these children may be expected

in due course to develop a craving for drink, and in all probability this congenital craving will be of a fiercer nature than the acquired craving of the mother.

Dr. Savage says the influence of drink is greatly increased if there be strong inheritance, so that certain persons who might have become insane from some other cause, become insane in consequence of drink. One special relationship of drink to nervous disease is, the direct transmission of drinking tendencies from parent to child. I have known a drunken father beget a child who became a drunkard, and also children who are idiotic or who became insane. On January 1st, 1889, there were 81,340 lunatics in England and Wales, and in 1300 of these cases 29·9 p.c. were traced to intemperance. In 14,326 cases Alcohol was traced as one of the causes of insanity in 13·5 p.c. We see then that excess in stimulants is recognized by Psychologists as an important factor in the production of insanity, but yet it is difficult to assign to it, its proper place. Drink is a multiple agent in the bringing on of mental derangement; a person does not jump from sanity to insanity, many things enter into this morbid condition, Dr. Savage says:—"A drunken man loses his situation and is brought face to face with ruin, drink has been preparing the brain, and the shock of the loss of the situation is just sufficient to upset the already unstable mental balance. Sleeplessness may lead to the use of stimulants, and these in their turn upset the digestive functions, and the patient thus weakened and exhausted becomes mad." "Intemperance acts upon the brain directly as a poison; it acts indirectly upon the brain by impairing nutrition and interfering with the depuration of the blood; it acts morally by lowering the social condition of those who indulge in it to excess, and indirectly it leads to injuries, &c. "

(Insanity, p. 38.) Dr. Savage uses two rather contradictory statements, he says:—"If there be a marked increase of insanity among the educated classes, I have no evidence that there is any connection between that increase and any increased consumption of intoxicating drinks." "Among the lower orders it has been

" shown that when wages are high and work abundant, great
 " excesses in drink are common, and at the same time insanity
 " abounds ; but with strikes and depression of trade follow
 " teetotal movements and decrease of admission to asylums."

(Quain's Dictionary of Medicine, vol. I., p. 716)—Dr. Blandford says :—" Drink among the working-classes plays a
 " fearful part in the causation of Insanity."

(p. 276)—Dr. Savage says :—" In general Paralysis of the
 " Insane, we have a disease affecting the robust middle-aged,
 " active-minded man, which rapidly destroys everything human in
 " him, leaving him to exist, often for months together, an un-
 " conscious automaton."

The causation of General Paralysis of the Insane is usually looked upon as three-fold—sexual excess, syphilis and intemperance.

Dr. Sibbald, Commisioner in Lunacy, says :—" General Paralysis may be brought on by alcoholic excess." Dr. Savage says :—" In my mind, Alcohol is an undoubted cause of this
 " disease."

(Dr. Merson, Hull Borough Asylum)—" Alcohol was one of the agents in causing 22·3 p.c. of general paralytics in Hull. The proportion of general paralytics to all other cases is as low as 9 per 100 ; in Hull it is 19·5 p.c. or on an average 14 p.c.

By rough calculation, out of 84,340 cases of lunatics in England and Wales, 2,633 people are in the dreadful condition described above by Dr. Savage, and in which drink has been traced as a cause.

(Therapeutics page 277)—Dr. Ringer says :—" That Alcohol
 " for the healthy is not a necessary or even a useful article of diet.
 " Varied, repeated, and prolonged experience of army surgeons,
 " prove that troops endure fatigue and the extremes of climate
 " better if Alcohol is altogether abstained from." During arduous
 marches it has always been found that without Alcohol, the

health of the men is exceptionally good, but as soon as spirits are given, disease breaks out.²² The above is the spirit in which Lord Wolseley views the matter with regard to the various campaigns he has been engaged in.

Modern trainers recognise the fact that the power of sustained-exertion and resistance to fatigue is best promoted by abstinence from Alcohol, and the ill-health of many athletes depends not on the rigour of the training, but on the excesses in which they indulge afterwards.

This question of the effects of drink, affects every one who is accustomed to think or act for the good of the state; the Social Reformer, Politician, Political Economist, Poet and Novelist, Physician, ~~and~~ Clergyman, and Military man, have all spoken out and recognized that something must be done. I imagine the responsibilities of the medical men far outweigh those of other men, as he from the day he enters at the hospital to that other day when he surrenders his life to Him who gave it, ever and always is having the evil effects of Alcohol brought before him and he cannot ignore them.

My teetotal friends point with gladness to the fact, that public-houses are fewer, and that so many drunkards are not now seen on the streets; I grant that both these assertions may be true, but is it not also true, that more beer and porter is brewed, more whiskey distilled, and more wine imported than was the case 40 years ago, and more also than the increase in population warrants.

Year.	WINE.	SPIRITS.	POPULATION
		British and Foreign.	
1845	6,736,000 galls.	26,665,000 galls.	27,875,000
1866	13,327,000 „	29,769,000 „	30,050,000
1887	13,694,000 „	34,333,000 „	37,500,000

As a matter of fact, less Spirits have been consumed in the years of the decade 1870—80 than in succeeding years, but more Wine and Malted Liquors.

Bestial drunkenness may be less, but general drinking is greater.

If it be taken as proved that stimulants as now taken are equally injurious to the individual, the family and the state, the question will require to be taken up ere long as practical politics and I think a form of politics in which party may well be set aside, for I hold that it is *par excellence* a matter in which "no man fights for himself alone, but all men fight for the state," and whoever shows a sufficient grasp of the question, whether he is a young man desirous by it to win his spurs, or an old man grown grey in the avocation of politics, desirous of winning further honour, such a man whichever side of politics he may be on, or if indeed he should be a party in himself, should receive the support of the whole medical world.

I am no advocate of spoliation, at the same time I think that the present means of obtaining drink far exceed the public requirements, and to those who say that people cannot be made sober by Act of Parliament, I would answer, "that the means to do ill deeds oftentimes make ill deeds done."

I do not seek to pose as guide, philosopher and friend to other medical men on the question of alcoholism, nor do I presume to offer any advice as to how much stimulants should be given, or to whom it should be given or withheld, but I do plead that there should be a greater finality observed in the advice given to patients on the subject, that a period of time should be mentioned, beyond which if a patient goes, it is contrary to the wish of the medical adviser; and if there is one class of cases in which this instruction is more necessary than another, it is beyond all doubt in the case of nursing mothers.

In many of the diseases specified in this paper as due to drink, that cause cannot be questioned; in others it may be merely supposition, but I believe in all, there is fair ground for the supposition.

If a money value could be placed upon a unit of population, and I believe the modest sum of £20 has been, by political economists, stated as that value, and if there were any means of ascertaining the number of people who died or were totally disabled yearly *directly* through drink, the sum total would appear alarming; but if it could be ascertained what number died or were disabled from pursuing their occupation *indirectly* from the same cause, the amount lost to the state would assume colossal proportions.



JOHN W. ADAMS, PRINTER. 23, MARKET PLACE, HULL.