

HOW ALCOHOL CAUSES MENTAL AND MORAL CHANGES.

The transforming power of alcohol is marvelous, and often appalling. It seems to open a way of entrance into the soul for all classes of foolish, insane or malignant spirits, who, so long as it remains in contact with the brain, are able to hold possession. Men of the kindest nature when sober, act often like fiends when drunk. Crimes and outrages are committed, which shock and shame the perpetrators when the excitement of inebriation has passed away. Referring to this subject, Dr. Henry Munroe says:

"It appears from the experience of Mr. Fletcher, who has paid much attention to the cases of drunkards, from the remarks of Mr. Dunn, in his 'Medical Psychology,' and from observations of my own, that there is some analogy between our physical and psychical natures; for, as the physical part of us, when its power is at a low ebb, becomes susceptible of morbid influences which, in full vigor, would pass over it without effect, so when the psychical (synonymous with the moral) part of the brain has its healthy function disturbed and deranged by the introduction of a morbid poison like alcohol, the individual so circumstanced sinks in depravity, and "becomes the helpless subject of the forces of evil, "which are powerless against a nature free from the morbid influences of alcohol."

Different persons are affected in different ways by the same poison. Indulgence in alcoholic drinks may act upon one or more of the cerebral organs; and, as its necessary consequence, the manifestations of functional disturbance will follow in such of the mental powers as these organs subserve. If the indulgence be continued, then, either from deranged nutrition or organic lesion, manifestations formerly developed only during a fit of intoxication may become permanent , and terminate in insanity or dypso-mania. M. Flourens first pointed out the fact that certain morbid agents, when introduced into the current of the circulation, tend to act primarily and specially on one nervous centre in preference to that of another, by virtue of some special elective affinity between such morbid agents and certain ganglia. Thus, in the tottering gait of the tipsy man, we see the influence of alcohol upon the functions of the cerebellum in the impairment of its power of co-ordinating the muscles.

Certain writers on diseases of the mind make especial allusion to that form of insanity termed 'dypsomania', in which a person has an unquenchable thirst for alcoholic drinks a tendency as decidedly maniacal as that of homicidal mania ; or the uncontrollable desire to burn, termed pyromania ; or to steal, called kleptomania.

Homicidal mania.

The different tendencies of homicidal mania in different individuals are often only nursed into action when the current of the blood has been poisoned with alcohol. I had a case of a person who, whenever his brain was so excited, told me that he experienced a most uncontrollable desire to kill or injure some one; so much so, that he could at times hardly restrain himself from the action, and was obliged to refrain from all stimulants, lest, in an unlucky moment, he might commit himself. Townley, who murdered the young lady of his affections, for which he was sentenced to be imprisoned in a lunatic asylum for life, poisoned his brain with brandy and soda-water before he committed the rash act. The brandy stimulated into action certain portions of the brain, which acquired such a power as to subjugate his will, and hurry him to the performance of a frightful deed, opposed alike to his better judgment and his ordinary desires.

As to pyromania, some years ago I knew a laboring man in a country village, who, whenever he had had a few glasses of ale at the public-house, would chuckle with delight at the thought of firing certain gentlemen's stacks. Yet, when his brain was free from the poison, a quieter, better-disposed man could not be. Unfortunately, he became addicted to habits of intoxication; and, one night, under alcoholic excitement, fired some stacks belonging to his employers, for which, he was sentenced for fifteen years to a penal settlement, where his brain would never again be alcoholically excited.

Kleptomania.

Next, I will give an example of kleptomania. I knew, many years ago, a very clever, industrious and talented young man, who told me that whenever he had been drinking, he could hardly withstand, the temptation of stealing anything that came in his way; but that these feelings never troubled him at other times. One afternoon, after he had been indulging with his fellow-workmen in drink, his will, unfortunately, was overpowered, and he took from the mansion where he was working some articles of worth, for which he was accused, and afterwards sentenced to a term of imprisonment. When set at liberty he had the good fortune to be placed among some kind-hearted persons, vulgarly called teetotallers; and, from conscientious motives, signed the PLEDGE, now above twenty years ago. From that time to the present moment he has never experienced the overmastering desire which so often beset him in his drinking days to take that which was not his own. Moreover, no pretext on earth could now entice him to taste of any liquor containing alcohol, feeling that, under its influence, he might again fall its victim. He holds an influential position in the town where he resides.

I have known some ladies of good position in society, who, after a dinner or

supper-party, and after having taken sundry glasses of wine, could not withstand the temptation of taking home any little article not their own, when the opportunity offered; and who, in their sober moments, have returned them, as if taken by mistake. We have many instances recorded in our police reports of gentlemen of position, under the influence of drink, committing thefts of the most paltry articles, afterwards returned to the owners by their friends, which can only be accounted for, psychologically, by the fact that the will had been for the time completely overpowered by the subtle influence of alcohol.

Loss of mental clearness.

Alcohol, whether taken in large or small doses, immediately disturbs the natural functions of the mind and body, is now conceded by the most eminent physiologists. Dr. Brinton says: 'Mental acuteness, accuracy of conception, and delicacy of the senses, are all so far opposed by the action of alcohol, as that the maximum efforts of each are incompatible with the ingestion of any moderate quantity of fermented liquid. Indeed, there is scarcely any calling which demands skillful and exact effort of mind and body, or which requires the balanced exercise of many faculties, that does not illustrate this rule. The mathematician, the gambler, the metaphysician, the billiard-player, the author, the artist, the physician, would, if they could analyze their experience aright, generally concur in the statement, that a single glass will often suffice to take , so to speak, the edge off both mind and body , and to reduce their capacity to something below what is relatively their perfection of work.

A train was driven carelessly into one of the principal London stations, running into another train, killing, by the collision, six or seven persons, and injuring many others. From the evidence at the inquest, it appeared that the guard was reckoned sober, only he had had two glasses of ale with a friend at a previous station. Now, reasoning psychologically, these two glasses of ale had probably been instrumental in taking off the edge from his perceptions and prudence, and producing a carelessness or boldness of action which would not have occurred under the cooling, temperate influence of a beverage free from alcohol. Many persons have admitted to me that they were not the same after taking even one glass of ale or wine that they were before, and could not thoroughly trust themselves after they had taken this single glass.

Impairment of memory.

An impairment of the memory is among the early symptoms of alcoholic derangement.

"This," says Dr. Richardson, "extends even to forgetfulness of the commonest things; to names of familiar persons, to dates, to duties of daily life. Strangely, too," he adds, "this failure, like that which indicates, in the aged, the era of second childishness and mere oblivion, does not extend to the things of the past, but is confined to events that are passing. On old memories the mind retains its power; on new ones it requires constant prompting and sustainment."

In this failure of memory nature gives a solemn warning that imminent peril is at hand. Well for the habitual drinker if he heed the warning. Should he not do so, symptoms of a more serious character will, in time, develop themselves, as the brain becomes more and more diseased, ending, it may be, in permanent insanity.

Mental and moral diseases.

Of the mental and moral diseases which too often follow the regular drinking of alcohol, we have painful records in asylum reports, in medical testimony and in our daily observation and experience. These are so full and varied, and thrust so constantly on our attention, that the wonder is that men are not afraid to run the terrible risks involved even in what is called the moderate use of alcoholic beverages.

In 1872, a select committee of the House of Commons, appointed "to consider the best plan for the control and management of habitual drunkards," called upon some of the most eminent medical men in Great Britain to give their testimony in answer to a large number of questions, embracing every topic within the range of inquiry, from the pathology of inebriation to the practical usefulness of prohibitory laws. In this testimony much was said about the effect of alcoholic stimulation on the mental condition and moral character. One physician, Dr. James Crichton Brown, who, in ten years' experience as superintendent of lunatic asylums, has paid special attention to the relations of habitual drunkenness to insanity, having carefully examined five hundred cases, testified that alcohol, taken in excess, produced different forms of mental disease, of which he mentioned four classes: 1. Mania a potu, or alcoholic mania. 2. The monomania of suspicion. 3. Chronic alcoholism, characterized by failure of the memory and power of judgment, with partial paralysis generally ending fatally. 4. Dysomania, or an irresistible craving for alcoholic stimulants, occurring very frequently, paroxysmally, and with constant liability to periodical exacerbations, when the craving becomes altogether uncontrollable. Of this latter form of disease, he says: "This is invariably associated with a certain

impairment of the intellect, and of the affections and the moral powers ."

Dr. Alexander Peddie, a physician of over thirty-seven years' practice in Edinburgh, gave, in his evidence, many remarkable instances of the moral perversions that followed continued drinking.

Relation between insanity and drunkenness.

Dr. John Nugent said that his experience of twenty-six years among lunatics, led him to believe that there is a very close relation between the results of the abuse of alcohol and insanity. The population of Ireland had decreased, he said, two millions in twenty-five years, but there was the same amount of insanity now that there was before. He attributed this, in a great measure, to indulgence in drink.

Dr. Arthur Mitchell, Commissioner of Lunacy for Scotland, testified that the excessive use of alcohol caused a large amount of the lunacy, crime and pauperism of that country. In some men, he said, habitual drinking leads to other diseases than insanity, because the effect is always in the direction of the proclivity, but it is certain that there are many in whom there is a clear proclivity to insanity, who would escape that dreadful consummation but for drinking; excessive drinking in many persons determining the insanity to which they are, at any rate, predisposed . The children of drunkards, he further said, are in a larger proportion idiotic than other children, and in a larger proportion become themselves drunkards; they are also in a larger proportion liable to the ordinary forms of acquired insanity.

Dr. Winslow Forbes believed that in the habitual drunkard the whole nervous structure, and the brain especially, became poisoned by alcohol. All the mental symptoms which you see accompanying ordinary intoxication, he remarks, result from the poisonous effects of alcohol on the brain. It is the brain which is mainly effected. In temporary drunkenness, the brain becomes in an abnormal state of alimentation, and if this habit is persisted in for years, the nervous tissue itself becomes permeated with alcohol, and organic changes take place in the nervous tissues of the brain, producing that frightful and dreadful chronic insanity which we see in lunatic asylums, traceable entirely to habits of intoxication . A large percentage of frightful mental and brain disturbances can, he declared, be traced to the drunkenness of parents.

Dr. D.G. Dodge, late of the New York State Inebriate Asylum, who, with. Dr. Joseph Parrish, gave testimony before the committee of the House of Commons, said, in one of his answers: "With the excessive use of alcohol, functional

disorder will invariably appear, and no organ will be more seriously affected, and possibly impaired, than the brain. This is shown in the inebriate by a weakened intellect, a general debility of the mental faculties, a partial or total loss of self-respect, and a departure of the power of self-command; all of which, acting together, place the victim at the mercy of a depraved and morbid appetite, and make him utterly powerless, by his own unaided efforts, to secure his recovery from the disease which is destroying him." And he adds: "I am of opinion that there is a "great similarity between inebriety and insanity.

"I am decidedly of opinion that the former has taken its place in the family of diseases as prominently as its twin-brother insanity; and, in my opinion, the day is not far distant when the pathology of the former will be as fully understood and as successfully treated as the latter, and even more successfully, since it is more within the reach and bounds of human control, which, wisely exercised and scientifically administered, may prevent curable inebriation from verging into possible incurable insanity."

General impairment of the faculties.

Dr. Richardson, speaking of the action of alcohol on the mind, gives the following sad picture of its ravages:

"An analysis of the condition of the mind induced and maintained by the free daily use of alcohol as a drink, reveals a singular order of facts. The manifestation fails altogether to reveal the exaltation of any reasoning power in a useful or satisfactory direction. I have never met with an instance in which such a claim for alcohol has been made. On the contrary, confirmed alcoholics constantly say that for this or that work, requiring thought and attention, it is necessary to forego some of the usual potations in order to have a cool head for hard work.

"On the other side, the experience is overwhelmingly in favor of the observation that the use of "alcohol sells the reasoning powers, "make weak men and women the easy prey of the wicked and strong, and leads men and women who should know better into every grade of misery and vice. If, then, alcohol enfeebles the reason, what part of the mental constitution does it exalt and excite? It excites and exalts those animal, organic, emotional centres of mind which, in the dual nature of man, so often cross and oppose that pure and abstract reasoning nature which lifts man above the lower animals, and rightly exercised, little lower than the angels.

It excites man's worst passions.

Exciting these animal centres, it lets loose all the passions, and gives them more or less of unlicensed dominion over the man. It excites anger, and when it does not lead to this extreme, it keeps the mind fretful, irritable, dissatisfied and captious.... And if I were to take you through all the passions, love, hate, lust, envy, avarice and pride, I should but show you that alcohol ministers to them all; that, paralyzing the reason, it takes from off these passions that fine adjustment of reason, which places man above the lower animals. From the beginning to the end of its influence it subdues reason and sets the passions free. The analogies, physical and mental, are perfect. That which loosens the tension of the vessels which feed the body with due order and precision, and, thereby, lets loose the heart to violent excess and unbridled motion, loosens, also, the reason and lets loose the passion. In both instances, heart and head are, for a time, out of harmony; their balance broken. The man descends closer and closer to the lower animals. From the angels he glides farther and farther away.

A sad and terrible picture.

The destructive effects of alcohol on the human mind present, finally, the saddest picture of its influence. The most aesthetic artist can find no angel here. All is animal, and animal of the worst type. Memory irretrievably lost, words and very elements of speech forgotten or words displaced to have no meaning in them. Rage and anger persistent and mischievous, or remittent and impotent. Fear at every corner of life, distrust on every side, grief merged into blank despair, hopelessness into permanent melancholy. Surely no Pandemonium that ever poet dreamt of could equal that which would exist if all the drunkards of the world were driven into one mortal sphere.

As I have moved among those who are physically stricken with alcohol, and have detected under the various disguises of name the fatal diseases, the pains and penalties it imposes on the body, the picture has been sufficiently cruel. But even that picture pales, as I conjure up, without any stretch of imagination, the devastations which the same agent inflicts on the mind. Forty per cent., the learned Superintendent of Colney Hatch, Dr. Sheppard, tells us, of those who were brought into that asylum in 1876, were so brought because of the direct or indirect effects of alcohol. If the facts of all the asylums were collected with equal care, the same tale would, I fear, be told. What need we further to show the destructive action on the human mind? The Pandemonium of drunkards; the grand transformation scene of that pantomime of drink which commences with, moderation! Let it never more be forgotten by those who love their fellow-men

until, through their efforts, it is closed forever."