

TEMPERANCE COLUMN.

HYGIENIC CONGRESS.

Discussion on Alcoholism and Public Health.

[CONTINUED.]

All this mischief was avoidable. How could it be remedied? The remedial process would require time, extending over several generations, but the evil could be remedied. How could this be done?

1. By recognising inebriety (or as Dr. Kerr had ventured to call it, 'narcomania,' a mania for intoxication or torpor) as a disease, and drunkenness as very often but an effect or symptom of disease. They might preach and pray, they might administer teetotal pledges (as the good and single-hearted Father Matthew had done) by the million, but there were vast multitudes of drunkards whose inhibitory power had been so paralysed that they could not resist violating their pledge if liquor was to be had for love, money, or even life. Such persons were as truly under the domination of a disease as if they were the subjects of neuralgia or epilepsy. A fair proportion of such cases, as the experience of the Dalrymple Home for the treatment of inebriety, and other similar hospitals proved, could be cured. In the Dalrymple Home, though the previous average term of alcohol addiction had been nine years, more than one-third of the cases had afterwards done well. Even in private practice, without the seclusion of the patient, he had been successful with nearly 20 per cent., though he had had a patient as old as 88. Were this disease recognised and treated at an early stage of the malady, Dr. Kerr had no doubt that the majority would be cured.

The present method of dealing with the inebriate was as unfair as it had proved useless. Penal discipline had been a failure. One female inebriate, aged 35, had been imprisoned 700 times, another had been in prison 52 times in the course of one year. The present method was unfair, because there were many inebriates who, from their morbid state, could not possibly refrain from drunkenness when at liberty, or resist the abounding temptations to drinking which the legislature surrounded them with. In fact, the legislature made and kept them inebriates, and punished them, even with death, if they, without criminal design or actually unconscious of the act, committed a criminal offence either in an intoxicated or post intoxicated state. Our present judicial process simply rewarded the shattered drunkard with the healthful conditions of one of Her Majesty's teetotal club-houses for inebriates, and rehabilitated them for renewing, with re-awakened vigor, their former intemperate career.

II. By amended legislation (the existing inebriates Acts applying only to well off inebriates voluntarily asking to be admitted to a licensed retreat, under the forbidding requirement of appearance before two justices) to provide for

(a) compulsory reception and re- tention of inebriates too demoralised to apply of their own accord; (b) for reception of voluntary applicants on a simple agreement, without appearance before justices; (c) for the care and treatment of the poor, and those of limited means. It would be well also for guardians to have power to pay for the care and treatment of pauper inebriates, and the authorities to establish special hospitals for the detention and treatment of inebriates convicted of crime. Our criminal jurisprudence should be improved so that the most destitute could have the benefit of expert medical testimony in trials complicated with inebriety.

The adoption of such urgently called for measures in the interests of the individual, of the community and of the administration of justice, though of vital importance, touch but the fringe of the subject. For the prevention of alcoholism in the future, a knowledge of the poisonous action of alcohol on body and on brain ought to form an integral part of education. Immunity from the physical, mental, moral, and social ravages wrought by alcoholism could be eventually secured only by general abstention from even the 'limited' use of intoxicants; their exclusion from social, political, and sacred functions; and the scheduling of alcoholic beverages as a poison under the Pharmacy Acts, or, by some other legislative enactment, the prohibition of their manufacture and common sale.—Temperance Chronicle.

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