

Original Communications.

THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF ALCOHOL.

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(Continued.)

That the therapeutic value of alcohol has been greatly over-estimated is quite certain, and it is equally certain that such exaggerated notions as have been too generally held concerning it must give way before evidence and enquiry, and the old theories concerning it become rapidly exploded. As in the preceding portion of this article I have not sought to put forward my own private opinions unsupported by other testimony, so, in this, I do not propose to confine myself entirely to my own *ipse dixit*.

I think it will be generally conceded that *contra-ria contrarius curantur*, and not *similia similibus curantur*, is the fundamental principle of allopathic practice; and, if so, there can scarcely be two opinions about the following axioms in therapeutics, namely: 1st. That an *irritant* remedy is never *indicated* to allay *irritation*. 2nd. That a remedy which excites or quickens the circulation is not indicated in a condition of already excited circulation as obtains in congestion and inflammation. 3rd. That a remedy whose action upon the alimentary canal in a state of health is such as to produce an irritated, congested, or inflamed condition with a vitiated condition of the secretions, is not a remedy calculated to allay these conditions when present as disease; and, in short, is not *indicated* in the treatment of such diseases as dyspepsia, diarrhœa, dysentery, or in gastric, typhoid or typhus fevers, diseases in which these lesions are peculiarly characteristic. 4th. That a remedy whose action upon the blood is such as to cause retention of effete matters in that fluid, is not indicated but contra-indicated in diseases primarily dependent upon such a state of things for their origin, as in gout, rheumatism, plethora, obesity, &c. 5th. That a remedy whose action upon the nervous centres is to produce degeneracy of structure and impairment of function, must be contra-indicated and *not indicated* in debility of the nervous system. 6th. That a remedy whose long-continued action upon a glandular structure is known to promote structural changes cannot be indicated in organic degeneration of such organs. 7th. That an agent whose introduction into the healthy system is known to lessen the tone of muscular fibre and produce lessened functional capacity or impaired function in nerve tissue, thus causing muscular and nervous debility,

is not indicated as a promoter of strength in cases of prostration from disease. 8th. That a beverage whose action is to produce excitement of glandular function, and thereby stimulation of the mammary glands to the production of an excessive secretion, which secretion, under such circumstances, has been proved to be deteriorated in quality, though increased in quantity and which eventually produces loss of function in a part, is not wisely indicated for the use of nursing mothers. 9th. Is it therapeutic wisdom to administer to a man prostrated to the lowest ebb of life, a course of stimulation which all experience shows will prostrate a person in health, even to the extent of producing delirium tremens, functional and even organic derangement and death? 10th. As food is acceded to be that which repairs tissue waste, and as physiological chemistry teaches that alcohol contains no substance which can supply the want of tissue of any portion of the system, even that which results from common muscular activity and from the very pulsations of the heart itself; therefore not being able to furnish elements for structural repair, it is not a food and cannot afford even muscular strength; and must be regarded as only the scourge applied to the back of the slave or the horse, which excites but to exhaust, and is not the flour or beef in the one case, or the hay and oats in the other, upon which the exhausted frame falls back to recuperate its wasted energies. In short, why recommend the administration of a class of beverages to give strength to the system, which Dr. Brinton and others have proven cannot be taken without loss of strength. As fuel, it has been supposed to heat the body, but the experience of Arctic navigators and others exposed to cold, is, that it diminishes instead of increasing the heat of the body and the power of resisting cold and exposure; and that oils, sugars and starch, are the kinds of food which heat the body. It may be argued that the patient may be kept up for days in the state of continued excitement produced by small doses of alcoholics frequently repeated, until the patient recovers. This cannot be, for the over-excited organism needs repose and must and will have it. Thus a degree of activity above that which the exhausted organism (in low forms of disease) is capable of sustaining is produced, and, as a necessary consequence, a corresponding depression follows, the exhausted vital forces give way, and, if the patient was barely at living point before, and the enfeebled organs barely capable of performing the necessary vital functions, the prostration which follows must be below living point, and the patient, typhoid, or maniacal inebriate, whose exhausted nature