

DRUNKENNESS AS A DISEASE.

The constancy with which the various so-called cures for inebriety are foisted upon the public and the frequent disappointment of those who pin their faith to the utility of drugs as in inherited or acquired disturbance of the higher nervous system, indicates how much yet remains to be done in the way of educating public opinion up to the proper comprehension of the complicated process, involved in the "cure" of a condition arising from such different and even conflicting causes. The *Medical Press and Circular*, speaking on the subject, remarks, "The treatment of chronic inebriety by restraint, is just now upon its trial, but although it yields a certain proportion of successes, it has not yet falsified the adage that *qui a bu, boira*."

In America, the so-called "Gold Cure," is attracting a great amount of attention, and certainly seems to do good in a large per cent. of cases treated, though controversy exists as to what extent it may be due to "moral effect." Keely, the originator of the treatment, claims that 95% of his patients are cured of all taste or desire for alcoholic stimulants, but admits, that if the "graduate" deliberately sets about cultivating the taste for it, he may become as badly off as before. But speaking of the treatment by restraint, or sequestration, we find it is only useful in cases where the habit has been acquired by self-indulgence, with no element of heredity in the case.

This is, however, not condemnatory of the system of self-sequestration, which is all that the law has seen fit to authorize. The most regrettable cases, and, at the same time, the most hopeful ones, are those persons who have fallen victims to the habit, owing to a want of prudence in the use of alcoholic stimulants. The average healthy man only resorts to liquor for social reasons, or to whip up his system when jaded and fatigued from overwork or worry, the temporary relief, so obtained, however, draws upon a store of latent nerve force, which, from constant depletion, weakens the will power, necessarily dependent, as a manifestation of nervous change or action, upon a thoroughly healthy condition of the nerve store, or latent accumulation of psychic energy; until at last the fatal day arrives, when the unfortunate victim finds himself the irresponsible slave of a

new growth of nerve-cells, whose ancestors in the economy, so to speak, have handed down to them an inability to perform their functions properly without alcohol, just as the want of oxygen in the circulation causes an "air craving," in the cells of the respiratory centre. In such cases there existed no lack of self-control or will power at first, and until the habit became a disease or rather an intrinsic nerve condition, this will power could have been exerted with good effect. It is in such cases that restraint, for a longer or shorter period, as the case may call for, is of great utility in bringing about a cure. But, on the other hand, in the poor unfortunate born into the world, a child of his ancestor's middle life, and formed habits of indulgence in sack, Madeira, or other stimulants so fashionable in other days, morally weak from the beginning, predestined, we might almost say, to ruin, if brought into contact with drink, we find that sequestration lamentably fails, and that the only hope lies in his never touching the drug, and being taught when a child wherein his danger lies. A great many such cases are unfortunately seen among the mentally gifted; how many do we all know of, who seemed to have success, power, riches, happiness at their command, who suddenly faltered in the race of life, struggled hopelessly for a time, and sank back into a drunkard's grave. Others, again, become affected at certain periods with the "drink crave," having little or no desire for it in the interval. Such cases resemble the disease to which the French psychologists have given the expressive name of *folie circulaire*, which is characterized by periodical outbreaks of mania, the patient being lucid in the interval, but requiring restraint during the attack. In many cases of this rhythmic "drink crave," the condition may be looked upon as an alternative manifestation, to epilepsy, insanity, or other nervous diseases, which upon investigation may be found to mar the patient's family history, so that we clearly see the hopelessness of drug treatment in such a condition of affairs, there being an inherited lack of nutrition of the higher nerve centres, the unfortunate victim being really a moral idiot. In conclusion, thinking men must agree, that great caution is to be exercised in the acceptance of any one cure for all classes of inebriates, remembering, that although many who have acquired the habit may be treated with success, those belonging to