

THE ABSTAINER.

ORGAN OF THE GRAND DIVISION OF THE
BOYS OF TEMPERANCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

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Essays, &c.

THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF PROHIBITION.

BY PROFESSOR YEOMANS.
(Continued.)

It is thus that alcohol becomes a cause of endless evil. By its influence as a material substance upon the material brain, it poisons the fountains of action, so that obliquity of conduct, and every form of debasement, wretchedness and crime are the natural and expected consequences. It is the inveterate foe of the intellectual and moral principle in man. In all its numberless forms, and in every quantity, it is the potent adversary of the mind.—When alcoholic mixtures are drunk, the very first effect that we perceive is a perverted action of the mental faculties. A small quantity does not finish the work, but it begins it. It is the quality of wheat to nourish the body, but a small amount will not completely produce this effect, nor even protect from starvation; still the nature of all wheat, and every grain of it is to nourish and strengthen. So also with Alcohol; a small quantity may not so poison the brain as to overthrow the intellectual fabric; still such are its essential nature and tendency in every form and every drop. Its invading effects upon the mind are not restricted to the employment of excessive quantities; they follow from its common use. There is much said about the inoffensiveness of liquor, when taken in trifling amount, but this is little applicable to general practice. People do not take liquors in infinitesimal doses. They drink them to produce a specific and positive alcoholic effect, and they demand and use enough for the purpose. Whatever may be said about "flavor," "aroma," "fruitiness," "body," "nutriment," or other secondary properties of intoxicating liquors, if alcohol be absent, it is mockery to offer these in substitution. We must bear in mind, that when a small portion of liquor is taken—as a glass of wine—it is not mingled with the mass of the blood and lost in the general system.—This result is forbidden by the law of local affinity. The Alcohol is drawn out of the circulation into the nervous tissue, and the single dose, therefore, ceases to be insignificant although minute, when compared with the whole body, it becomes powerful when concentrated upon a single part. In the quantity, therefore, necessary to produce the agreeable, exhilarating and stimulant effect for which it is used, Alcohol so deranges brain action as to violate the harmony of the mind. The feelings become excited and the temper

irritable, so that the individual is easily "touched" and provoked to acts of impropriety and violence, by causes which under other circumstances, would be unheeded. Long before the speech thickens and the motions falter, there is a firing of irascible passions, which leads to the commission of numberless offences, from two-edged utterances that wound the spirit, to homicidal thrusts that destroy the body. From the first point of mental dissonance, onward through all the stages of intoxication, mania and madness become more and more clearly developed, until the man disappears and the demon takes his place. The change, as I have already explained, that multiplies his vicious and criminal capacities, it is the universal testimony of those who have had most dealings with the perpetrators of crime—judges, police magistrates, sheriffs, jailors, prison wardens, and others—that four-fifths to nine-tenths of all the crime committed in society is done under the influence of Alcoholic Liquors. In the extent of the mischief and the completeness of the ruin they work upon the human character, these liquids are supereminent among all the discovered products of art or nature. There are other agents besides alcohol, which, when introduced into the human system, exert a special action upon the nervous tissues and brain, and through these upon the mind.—Among such is Opium, which has been compared to Alcohol in its physiological influences; but while it is perhaps equally seductive and insidious, there is this important difference in its effect—alcoholic intoxication has in it far more of violence and malignant passion. An eminent medical authority, Sir Benjamin Brodie, in a late work (Psychological Researches), says: "The effect of Opium, when taken into the stomach, is not to stimulate, but to soothe the nervous system. It may be otherwise in some instances, but these are rare exceptions to the general rule. The opium taker is in a passive state, satisfied with his own dreamy condition, while under the influence of the drug. He is useless, but not mischievous.—It is quite otherwise with Alcoholic Liquors. When Bishop and his partner murdered the Italian boy, in order that they might sell his body, it appeared in evidence that they prepared themselves for the task by a plentiful libation of gin. The same course is pursued by housebreakers and others, who engage in desperate criminal undertakings. It is worthy of notice, also, that Opium is much less deleterious to the individual than gin or brandy." In the light of these views, the duty of government becomes evident. Its relation to

those who drink intoxicating liquors is one of direct responsibility and power, and differ from that of voluntary societies or private persons. In urging upon individuals the considerations which should induce them to discontinue drinking, it is proper that we present the case in every aspect, and appeal to various motives. In stating that Alcohol selects the citadel of thought as the main point of attack in the human system, I by no means imply that its injuries are limited to this part. The whole constitution is liable to more or less embroilment and disease, and it is entirely appropriate to lay open to the consideration the details and extent of the harm they are inflicting upon various organs of the system. But with government it is different. It has no business to pry into the minutiae of bodily ailments.—There is a just jealousy of its encroachments into departments of impertinent curiosity. In respect to many things appertaining to the management of the body and which involve the maintenance or loss of health, men will not tolerate interference or dictation. The question for example, how a person will manage his digestive and pulmonary affairs, is a concern of his own, with which government has no right to intermeddle. Beyond general sanitary measures, for the preservation of public health, and protection from causes of contagion, the Legislature has no right of interposition. If, by indulging in a bad quality of diet, or over eating, a man chooses to inflict upon himself stomach or liver disease, or if he so deal with air, clothing, or heat, so as to engender colds, inflammations, lung complaints, and rheumatism, he has the sovereign privilege of so doing without governmental molestation or disturbance. The evil consequences in these cases are presumed to be confined to himself; he can do as he lists with his own. If, in like manner, by the use of Alcohol, a man inflames and ulcerates his stomach, or degenerates his kidneys, or granulates his liver, the matter is purely private, into which the lawmakers have no right of scrutiny, and over which they have no authority of prevention. But this rule does not apply to man's entire constitution. There is a part of the body in which, as I have stated, government has a legitimate and special concern. It is not a private affair of the individual, and a matter of indifference to society if the human brain be in health or disease. When this organ is in order, the man is capable of contributing his due support to the fabric of Society; but when it works badly, he becomes the victim of headlong and irresistible impulses; he is no longer amenable to the tribunals of Society as a rational being, and government places him under restraint as dangerous to the commu-