

SCIENTIFIC ASPECT OF THE ALCOHOL QUESTION.

BY G. GORDON RICHARDSON,

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY IN THE ONTARIO VETERINARY COLLEGE.

MY LORD BISHOP: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—I have been asked to speak at this Conference on behalf of the "moderate wing" of the Society. I accepted the proposal with pleasure; first, because I deemed it right that we should give our reasons for temperately using, for dietetic and beverage purposes, alcoholic stimulants, more especially as it is a custom often questioned at the present day; and, secondly, because I am convinced from long study of the question that medical and scientific opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of moderation.

But, it may be objected, many doctors are in favour of total abstinence. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes once said that "medicine, professedly founded upon observation, is as sensitive to outside influences, political, religious, philosophical, imaginative, as is the barometer to changes in atmospheric density." The majority of practitioners are often, it is to be feared, too easily swayed by popular public opinion, to be the *true* guides in this question, their practice depending largely, as it does, from day to day, upon their standing in the church or in society. If then we would obtain an opinion unbiased by the influences mentioned by Prof. Holmes, we must have recourse to the authorities inmedical and chemical science, the authors of the "text" works, and the Professors in the leading universities of Europe and the States, though even these reflect in some degree the feelings, political and otherwise, of the times. To the opinions of such I shall confine myself this afternoon, fearlessly challenging our opponents to produce a like array from the accepted exponents of medicine and chemistry.

It has been stated that alcohol is not a food. On more than one occasion I have had to point out the falsity of such an assertion, and to detail the reasons, chemical and medical, which decide against such an assumption. Let me refer you to Dr. R. Brudenell Carter, F.R.C.S., the eminent consulting surgeon of London (Eng.), who recently said in the *Contemporary Review*: "If we come to inquire in what way this small dose (half a wine-glassful of brandy or whiskey) exerts a beneficial action, we are at once met on the part of many of the advocates of total abstinence by the assertion that alcohol is not a food. I have no inclination for a controversy about words; but if we may accept Johnson's definition of food as 'anything which nourishes,' I do not hesitate to say that the advocates of total abstinence are mistaken. I have recorded a case in which an old gentleman took no other food for many months, and was kept not only alive but in moderate strength and comfort, and with no remarkable emaciation, upon alcoholic drinks alone. He liked variety, and rang the changes upon champagne, old port, brandy, the strongest Burton ale and other liquids, some of which contained a certain amount of saccharine matter, but not enough to maintain life as he maintained it. Cases of a similar kind are recorded by the late Dr. Anstie and others; and nothing is more certain than that people will live upon alcohol and water for long periods. The evidence by which this is proved seems to me altogether to outweigh the opinions of those who declare that alcohol is not food, or no better grounds than that they are unable to discover