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Does Tobacco Increase Brain Power

By R. Brudenell Carter.

I have met with many instances of heavy smokers in whom no sign of either intellectual or physical decadence was manifest on the surfaces of their lives, and I know that many imaginative literary men and artists at least have believed that they found aid or inspiration in tobacco. It may be so. My own explanation of the facts, as far as they are known to me, would be that such persons had smoked themselves into a state in which their brains were made to respond to the calls of duty or of volition until they had received a fillip, analogous in its temporary action to the dose taken by the victim of the morphine habit. I believe in the absolute superiority of the undrugged nervous system to the drugged one, and am convinced in my own mind that the tobacco often must have lessened and never can have raised the quality of the totality of the work that was done under its influence. I think every one would be able to cite more than a few examples of heavy smokers whose careers of promise had closed more or less under a cloud of intellectual failure or of social discredit, such as naturally would have been attendant upon the victims of narcotics of other kinds. There is extant a letter from the first Napoleon written from Egypt to the French commandant at Malta and congratulating him upon the security of the island against any attack by the English. The vessel carrying the letter was captured by an English cruiser and underneath the delicate signature of Napoleon there now stands a bold scrawl of "Mark the end, Nelson and Bronte." When I see good work of any kind produced by a man who is dependent upon tobacco I am apt to remember Lord Nelson's injunction.

There is at least one aspect of the consumption of tobacco as to which the hitherto prevailing optimism has been disturbed of late, and that aspect has regard to smoking by children. Many of the writers who lately have striven to direct attention to the alleged physical deterioration of large classes of

our people have laid much stress upon juvenile smoking as an important element in the production of some of the evils which they describe and deplore; and it certainly is true that the immature and comparatively unstable nervous system of the young is more liable to be injured by narcotics than that of the adult. The deterioration is not in growth or muscular development alone, but extends to the intellectual faculties by which the effect of drugs are first displayed. At one of the great universities the authorities instituted a definite series of comparisons between smoking and non-smoking students, with the result that the former were surpassed by the latter in every competition in which they engaged, whether physical or intellectual, whether in the class rooms, in the playing field, or in the gymnasiums.

The craving for it I believe is artificial, for if it were not so it would be as prevalent among girls and women as among boys and men. Boys want to begin smoking because they see their elders do it, and they think it is manly, and so they bear the initial discomforts with fortitude and drug themselves until tolerance and a habit are established.

A similar educational process seems now to be in progress among women of the more leisured classes. The smoking room has become an institution in clubs for women, and girls will soon be eager to follow the example set by their mothers and their elder sisters. In favor of such a result something possibly might be said. I always have felt that the soothing effect described by smokers is better adapted to the real needs of the softer than to those of the sterner sex, and that there is something which, if not quite feminine, may at least be described as womanish in the practice of seeking refuge in a narcotic from the pin pricks of daily life. A man who talks about requiring to be soothed reduces himself to the level of a fractious baby; and my own observation leads me to believe that his narcotic tends to the permanent diminution but use our understanding of the forces of his nervous energy.



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