

Original Communications.

THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF ALCOHOL.

BY DR. W. E. BESSEY.—(Continued.)

If alcoholic medication could be shewn to lessen the mortality rate in fevers it would have much to recommend it; but, on the contrary, hospital statistics, wherever observations of the kind have been made prove the contrary.

The elaborate statistics of Dr. Gairdner, professor of physic in the University of Glasgow, published in the *Lancet*, 1864, shew that in several hundred cases (nearly 600) of all ages, the mortality lessened exactly as the dose of alcohol diminished, milk or buttermilk being the staple food. Wine, reduced from an average of 34 ozs. to 2½ oz., and spirits from 6 oz. to 2½ oz., was followed by a reduction of deaths, from seventeen to ten per cent.; while of 210 children under the age of fifteen, treated without any alcoholic stimulants, not one died, though the very same class of cases treated with alcohol in the Infirmary had a mortality of six per cent. Dr. Gairdner remarks upon this subject as follows: "The habitual use of drugs and stimulants has a great tendency to mask the disease, to disturb or retard the crisis, and to increase the mortality. This is an opinion formed after a most careful observation of particular cases, in detail, over many years. I venture to put it forward as a law, that, in a large proportion of cases, typhus fever, left to its natural course and treated without drugs or stimulants, will have its natural crisis before the twelfth day. Milk or buttermilk is, with me, the staple food in typhus. I know no other food that can be depended upon. To give wine, whiskey, and beef tea, while withholding milk, is simply, in my opinion, to destroy your patient; and the more wine or whisky you give while withholding milk, the more sure you will be to destroy your patient speedily, because you are thereby superseding the natural appetite (or what remains of it) for a nourishing and wholesome diet, by a diet, if it can be so called, which poisons the blood and checks the secretions and alters, for the worse, the whole tone of the nervous system, and of digestion and assimilation." The official account of the Russian epidemic of typhoid and relapsing fever states that quinine and stimulants had no effect, the deaths rising to forty per cent. Dr. Mussey, in his Prize Essay on the Physiological Action of Alcohol, says: "In the remission of the paroxysm of continued fever, there are probably but few physicians in our country, who have seen a large febrile practice during the last twenty-five years, who have not had

occasion to regret its unfavourable effects. Under the stimulant practice, trains of morbid symptoms are often aggravated and new centres of irritation established, which, if not sufficient to destroy the patient, prolong the period of fever, and frequently cause relapse, or a lingering convalescence." To this rule, however, there will be exceptions, as there is to every observation; for there will always be found exceptional cases in which because of peculiar idiosyncrasies in the patient, the most commonly received therapeutic aphorisms may be reversed, and we may meet with patients in whom alcoholics are well borne, and exert a temporary beneficial influence, but these are always the exception and never the rule.

Dr. J. B. Russell, of Glasgow, commenting upon the results of experiments with and without alcohol says: "Alcoholic stimulants are a two-edged sword in the hands of the practitioner," (agreeing with Dr. Anstie, he says,) "If employed within the range of their stimulant action they are helpful; if pushed beyond into their narcotic action, they impair the vitality, which it is our duty to augment." (This calls for the use of the sphygmograph to assist in determining when this point has been reached.) "Even as pure stimulants, he says, they may be used unnecessarily, so as to push and urge the labouring energies of the system, maintaining an unnatural excitement in a journey, which could, with leisure, have been more easily accomplished."

On this point, Professor Lehman observes: "When once the fact is admitted that the first thing in many diseases is to furnish a copious supply of oxygen to the blood, which has been loaded with imperfectly decomposed substances, and to remove as quickly as possible the carbonic acid which has accumulated in it, these observations will have afforded us true remedial agencies which exceed almost every other in the certainty of their action."

Dr. C. Murchison in a recent article in the *British Medical Journal*, after advocating cold water baths and quinine to lower the temperature, and aconite, digitalis and veratum viride to reduce frequency of pulse—remarks that: "The nutrition of the body must be maintained by appropriate food as milk, beef tea, eggs, farinaceous articles, &c." With Graves he recommends feeding fever, but with Parkes he does not approve of over-feeding especially with pure nitrogenous diet, as beef tea. He thinks it doubtful if wasting nitrogenous tissue can be fed, in which case such food must be cast off by already over-tasked organs. *Milk he considers to be the best of all diet.* My own observations with beef tea, has