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ALCOHOL AS MEDICINE.

Alcohol, although the first and oldest of all medicinal agents, and, in some respects, best known, is still an enigma in the science of therapeutics. While other powerful narcotics, stimulant and sedative, have been assigned their places with some degree of definiteness, alcohol may be compared to a weathercock, ever changing its position according to the "wind of doctrine," which, for the time, blows hardest. This is chiefly to be accounted for by the many-sidedness of this agent. In its case it is difficult to dissociate therapeutics and morals. Contemplating the horrible evils consequent upon the excessive use of alcoholic stimulants as a beverage, the moralist, though a physician, may easily come to regard alcohol as only an evil, and that "continually." On the other hand, the physician who, viewing the subject from a totally different standpoint, may, as easily, come to regard it as of universal benefit, both in health and disease. And, thus it comes to pass that, as relates to this agent, the medical profession is divided into three distinct parties. At one of the poles we find the doctor of "many drams but few scruples"; at the other end the doctor of many scruples but no drams; and, between the two, the doctor of the golden mean, who, while deploring the evils of intemperance, still proclaims his belief in alcohol as a remedial agent.

The history of alcohol shows it to have been at all times intimately interwoven with the life of

mankind, as drink and medicine. At all times, but more especially in modern times, it has entered largely into the social life of civilized nations. It should never be forgotten that alcohol is not an un-mixed good, but alas! a great evil. Hence, at the very threshold of our enquiries regarding it as a therapeutic agent, we are beset with many difficulties. Some use it habitually in moderation, some to excess, and some do not use it at all. Uniformity of dose and action under these varied conditions is manifestly out of the question. The moral aspect of the question, also, at once suggests itself. The life lying before is no less important than the present. In seeking to overcome a present evil we must endeavor not to burden the future with a greater evil. Alcohol is like a two-edged sword; it can cut both ways. A weapon so sharp and powerful needs cautious and skilful handling. Another difficulty encountered, is the number of combinations in which alcohol is presented to us for medicinal use. We have wines, malt liquors, and ardent spirits in endless variety, all differing in strength, not merely as relates to separate classes, but the varieties composing each class as well. This fact suggests two questions. First, the place of each in disease; and, secondly, the dose. Manifestly, the answer can be but little better than a guess. This remark receives additional force from the fact that we cannot know the strength of the article prescribed. Originally varying and uncertain, modern devices have made it still more an uncertain quantity.

No question in therapeutics is so hampered by the influences of habit and prejudice. In considering the place of alcohol it is hard for the average physician to divest himself of all preconceived notions and opinions, and to conduct his investigations with strict impartiality. The abstract scientist may, but the average doctor shares largely the frailties, habits, and prejudices common to other men. The "brandy" doctor was more a character of the past than the present. Still, he is with us. He is not open to conviction. He is impatient of argument, and dogmatic in belief. He formed his opinions long since, and is not to be driven about by newfangled ideas, started by diving chemists and over-zealous moralists. He is thoroughly convinced of the universal healing properties of brandy, and by it he will stand or fall. All thinking men will admit that the presence of such a person is a