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TEMPERANCE TALK.

THE DISEASE OF INEBRIETY.

By Leslie E. Keeley, M.D., LL.D.

The vice of inebriety, and of intemperance, clung to human ideas of its pathology like a stigma of evil for many centuries. We know very well that old associates among ideas refuse to separate or be parted. But the clearest logic and statement of fact at last triumphed, and men now see that there is no more simple proposition in medical science than is the one that alcohol and opium cause certain definite diseases which are readily and easily cured. Looking at the symptoms of inebriety as a disease, we find that its most prominent factor is a peculiar craving for liquor. This craving is not a constant or continuous quantity, but is periodical. It is a property of the diseased cells, however, and is the cause of the drinking and debauch at certain periods. Looking at the inebriate from the moral standpoint, we see that he voluntarily buys liquor and drinks it. If we ask an explanation, very likely the inebriate may not say that he feels a crave for liquor, but there will be some associated feeling or condition which he himself thinks is the cause of his drinking at this particular time. He is sick, or fatigued, or disconsolate, or overjoyed, and for one or all of these reasons he enters upon a debauch.

The laity as well as the technically trained will ask why it is that the craving is periodical, and also want to know what it is. There is a popular idea that the craving for liquor consists in a liking for it; and there is much said about the thirst and appetite for drink. But this is entirely an error. Few drunkards have any pleasure in the taste for drink, and the thirst for liquor can not be described in terms of thirst. The crave for

control of his efforts to ride—his reflexes and automatism do the work.

The same process is adopted when a man makes an inebriate of himself. He begins drinking from some cause—becomes intoxicated and disgraces himself and friends. When he sobers up he repents, has remorse and "turns over a new leaf." But within a few months repeats the debauch with its attendant remorse and reform. A few of these debauches fix the crave upon his nerve centers, as any education becomes a part of the nervous system, and now the man is an inebriate—he will have his periodical debauches every few months, with a crave seeking an excess—then the coma of acute poisoning or drunkenness—then the regrets, the shame, and the interval of sobriety. This whole matter is simply an education of the nerve centers, which were put through debauch, remorse and sobriety enough times to create the education, and which merely follow out their schooling and training.

Nothing but alcohol can cause inebriety, and the same law holds good with all the other narcotic poisons which are used by inebriates. No other poison or disease can cause alcoholic inebriety than alcohol. No heredity ever causes it.

It is true that many diseases and general unsanitary conditions may induce a person to begin drinking, but, as above, nothing other than alcohol can create and maintain the crave for liquor which maintains inebriety. Joy, disappointment, or grief, the highest or lowest breeding—any occupation or social life, may cause any person to begin drinking, and thus make an inebriate of him.

In the light of science at the present age there is no ethereal warrant that inebriety is a moral vice. It is no more a vice than is yellow fever or cholera. Of course, drinking is an evil and causes many others, but the crave



Steep Rock Point, Lake Manitoba.

drink is the same thing and has the same origin as that for opium and other drugs which are demanded by the crave.

The crave for narcotic drugs is a compound sensation—the factors being the pain and distress undergone by the nerve cells, when the drug is used and more is demanded. This is the pain of variation. To understand this we must know that when one habitually takes a drug until the cells have acquired an increased tolerance to it, then the cells have experienced a change of type, the change consisting in a variation which enables them to endure a greater amount of the poison. They maintain this variation while the drug is supplied, but any attempt to withdraw the drug places the cells in a new environment—as complete a change as is undergone by a fish when taken out of water and placed on land.

As will be seen, then, this change of type on the part of the cells, due to the influence of the drug, and which demands the drug in order to live and carry on the physiology of the body—this variation of type goes through a backward evolution when the drug is not supplied, and it is this which causes the distress or the crave.

The next factor of crave is an automatism of the cells, acquired by education; this is the explanation of the periodical returns of the craving. Automatism means one of the methods of nerve action—these methods being known as sensation, motion, reflex, sympathetic and automatic action. By automatic action is meant that certain nerve centers, nerves and muscles will act in definite harmony so that a definite end or object is reached, and without the control of consciousness.

All people know or can readily understand automatism of the nerves, or unconscious action. Two-thirds of all people's action—whether work or play—is educated automatism. The first efforts to ride a bicycle are laborious and conscious, but when the art is learned the rider needs no conscious

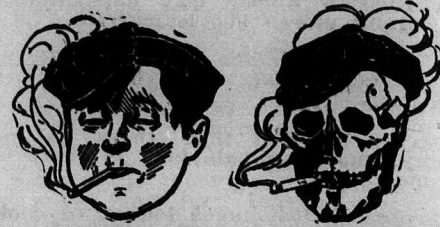
control, after it has become a disease, renders the will powerless and the individual has no more will power of control than he has the power to reduce the bodily temperature in a fever.

What has so maintained the idea in the public mind that inebriety is a vice only is the fact that in appearance people voluntarily drink—even if they are drunkards. People say that voluntary drinking is a very different thing from providentially catching the fever. Analysis of the two cases will show that there is no difference. In the first place, the zymotic diseases—as typhoid, scarlet fever, etc.—are not special bits of Providence, and in the next place the drunkard is often not entirely responsible for his conduct in beginning to drink; while all men know that the zymotic diseases can be prevented. No man is responsible for drinking when he is an inebriate, and a typhoid patient is not responsible for his disease, his loss of insight, temperature, and stupor after he has acquired the disease. He, however, or the community where he lives is responsible for his acquiring the disease for the reason that it could be prevented by sanitary science.

Inebriety is readily cured as a disease. If not, then no disease is curable. The disease does not depend upon a weak will—it is caused directly by poison, and is directly and positively cured by medicine. The foundation principle of all medication homeopathic or otherwise, is that drugs antagonize each other, either chemically or physiologically, and diseases are caused by poisons.

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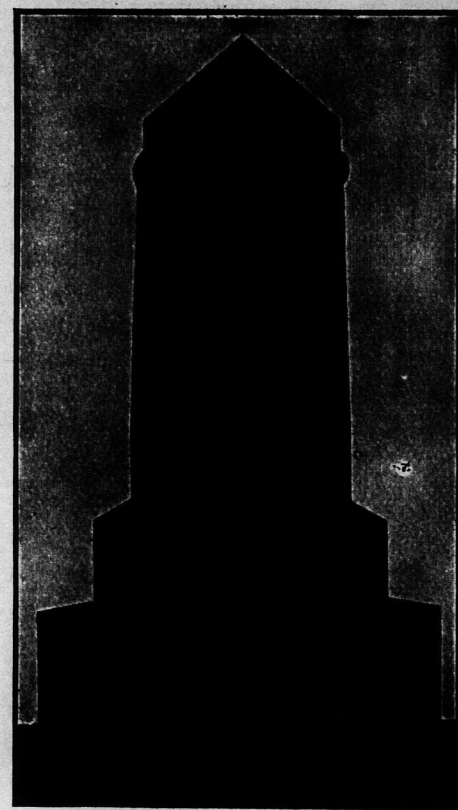
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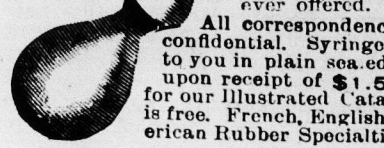
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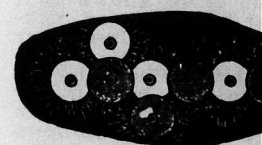
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