

TEMPERANCE AND PHYSIOLOGY.

BY THOMAS BEAUMONT, ESQ., M.R.C.S.

One of the most distinguishing features of the temperance cause is *knowledge*; and it would be easy to prove that the employment of intoxicating drinks is principally owing to erroneous views of their *nature and properties*. It follows, therefore, that one of the very foremost and most formidable obstacles in the way of an universal temperance reformation is *ignorance*. Nor is it surprising when we consider that for ages an opinion has been entertained that spirituous liquors are highly beneficial to the human constitution, and that the belief in the salutary properties of these drinks has ever found adherents of all classes and in every station of life.

That water is, above all other beverages, the best adapted for the wants of the animal economy, is an assertion which scarcely admits of controversy; and yet, notwithstanding all the abundant evidence of its admirable adaptation to the diet, there are not wanting those who still assert that *wine, ale, porter, or beer*, are necessary for man, although not for the lower animals; and whilst this opinion is maintained and acted upon by those whose views and practices have great weight in society, of course I mean the more correct and reputable orders, we cannot wonder at the very general employment of such beverages, and, more especially, when even medical men give the sanction of their authority, and the force of their example, in favor of the practice.

It is necessary, however, not only to instruct mankind on the super-valuable properties of *water*, as the common beverage of life, but it is equally necessary to disabuse society of the prevailing errors concerning *intoxicating drinks*.

There are purely disinterested and philanthropic individuals who, for the mere sake of benefiting society, would cheerfully submit to the privation of a positive good. I believe there are not a few who have voluntarily laid aside the use of all alcoholic liquor, in order that those who are carried away by strong drink might have the benefit of their example of entire abstinence, without being themselves aware of the beneficial results which always attend such a course. It is necessary however, that the deleterious nature of intoxicating drinks should be thoroughly and universally understood, as we are thereby supplied with the most legitimate, if not the most powerful, argument for their abandonment.

It is not enough, therefore, to assert that human nature does not in ordinary circumstances require the use of intoxicating drinks, although this is a most important position, and one which was not generally understood until the practical application of the principle of teetotalism. We have not rested in the discovery of this fact, for we have ascertained, by *careful analysis, by medical observation, by chemical induction*, and, above all, by *ACTUAL EXPERIENCE*, that *alcohol* is necessarily hostile to the healthy condition of the body; and that, not only is an injurious influence produced by those preparations denominated *ardent spirits*, but that *wines and malt liquors* are not the salutary beverages they have been usually supposed.

It ought to be known that the healthy condition, and the full efficiency of the bodily powers, depend mainly upon *nutrition and nervous influence*; the former is dependent upon the alimentary supply, and the latter upon a healthy circulation. And it should not be forgotten that all the liquids received by the stomach pass into the blood, and the condition and quality of this fluid is thus readily and certainly affected by the alimentary supplies. Hence it must be obvious that if alcohol be unwholesome, it must damage the blood, unless it can be proved that it undergoes some essential change in the process of digestion and assimilation. Now it has been satisfactorily demonstrated, by the most eminent physiologists, that alcohol undergoes no change in passing through the system. Indeed it has been obtained in its original state from the fluid in the ventricles of the brain, and from the substance of the brain itself. It has also been obtained from the blood, and from other parts of the body. Now, although no one doubts the pernicious influence of drinking 'to excess,' as it is termed, why should the consideration of the evil be confined to those glaring instances of alcoholic destruction, (which, alas! are of too frequent occurrence) when every case, however aggravated, must have had an *incipient stage*; and as liability to morbid action may be materially modified by peculiar idiosyncrasy, or the habit of body, who knows

how small a portion of any poisonous substance may be sufficient to damage the parts to which it is applied, and even, in many cases, to sow the seed of an irremediable disease?

The recent experiments of Dr. Percy clearly prove the *peculiar* liability of certain organs to alcoholic injury; but while it is admitted that the brain, the liver, and all the organs of digestion are peculiarly amenable to mischief, it is quite impossible to say what parts of the body are exempt from its morbid influence.

The catalogue of diseases induced by the use of intoxicating drinks is of such extent, that medical men are of opinion that universal teetotalism would remove a large majority of the diseases, which they have to encounter, so that even if the nutritious and invigorating properties which have been so erroneously ascribed to them were true, the sad alternations of *disease and death*, by which their employment is so frequently followed, would more than counterbalance any benefits to be derived. It is found, however, that the aid which they impart to the powers of the body is more nearly allied to that which the horse derives from the *spur*. The truth is, that *stimulation* has ever been confounded with *strength*; and that which has driven the force of the circulation beyond its natural and healthy impetus, has been mistaken for augmented physical energy and increased power. The truth is, that although a portion of alcoholic drink may appear to enhance the capability for labour, it is but a transient feeling, and is only analogous to that temporary excitement which may equally be produced by moral causes. For instance, a little boy accompanies his father on a long walk, and becomes quite wearied. He complains, and looking wistfully at his father, says, 'Oh! papa, I am so tired I cannot walk any further.' He gives him his walking stick, and says, 'There is a *horse* for you.' Immediately he throws his leg over the stick, and away he proceeds with greater agility than ever. Was there any *nourishment* in the walking stick? Besides, nearly all the alcoholic preparations which are bought are, for the most part, vile compounds of unwholesome and deleterious substances, and, in addition to their alcoholic property, possess others almost as bad. Nor is even 'home-brewed' by any means the wholesome beverage which most persons are apt to imagine; for although, previous to the process of fermentation, there is nothing in the 'wort' particularly noxious, yet, by that remarkable process, it loses the *nutritious* quality which it might have possessed, in proportion as it acquires the *alcoholic*. Nor have wines any more claim to the attributes which are imputed to them than malt liquors. *Genuine* wines are rare commodities, but if entirely free from spurious combinations and substitutes, they are, for the most part, utterly unworthy of the regard which is paid to them. It is said that the light French wines are peculiarly wholesome. I may say, however, that on a recent tour in France, I ascertained that the French are by no means long-lived; and in Paris I was informed that very few could trace a family connexion in that city for a hundred years! At the same time I was sorry to observe that the French are eagerly adopting the use of malt liquor, so that in a short period one may expect the French to become as much addicted to intoxication as the English!

How, then, is the great delusion which has so universally spread over the public mind to be removed? I answer, that whatever appeals may be made to the feelings of mankind, however warm a sympathy may be excited in reference to the miseries and desolation consequent upon the employment of intoxicating drinks, yet the most *sure and permanent* temperance reformation is only to be hoped for from the diffusion of sound practical knowledge on the specific action of these agents upon the constitution. Even in a moral point of view, what is so important as the consideration of those principles which most essentially affect the public health? And one of the most valuable results of temperance societies will be the diffusion of true light upon a subject which has hitherto been suffered to remain unappreciated, because unexplored.

But the most humiliating view of the question is, that many prefer a state of ignorance to light and knowledge. They purposely avoid the means and opportunities of becoming acquainted with the principles of temperance societies, lest they should adopt views which might interfere with their existing habits and inclinations. They strongly suspect that in coming to the light of true temperance, they must be exposed to a change of views and habits which they cannot contemplate without uneasiness. They are unwilling to yield to any disparagement of their common