

INTEMPERANCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

If we recall the close connection between dietetics and health, if we consider how many diseases issue from the sink of intemperance and the excesses of the table, we would discover that true morality is the soundest medicine.

Many doctors are accused of epicurism: be it so, if it is true that many of their patients pay them only with a dinner. But if it is not their interest, it is at least always their duty to extol Temperance, guardian of health and safe protectress against the most cruel maladies. Near to nature and truth, we will endeavour to fix the limits within which man may judiciously confine himself so as to separate hurtful vices from those pleasures accorded in this life to the legitimate use of our functions. Nature having placed voluptuousness at the door through which man sees the objects indispensable to his existence, and the perpetuity of his species, he is only too prone to abuse these pleasures, especially in youth and the vigour of his age.

Intemperance springs from two principal kinds of appetites: that of food and drink, and that of incontinence. In fact, the senses of sight, hearing and also smell, although contributing delightful pleasure and enjoyment, rarely lead to abuses dangerous to health and morals; but it is not so with taste and touch. These two, which seem to be but modifications of one another, and brought into activity by the immediate contact of bodies, are the rudest and most material of all, and the only ones that are never absolutely wanting in the whole animal kingdom, even in the least perfect species. They are also the most necessary to animal life in the search for food and sexes of different species. They form the lowest, the most animal of the functions of sensation, or relation with exterior objects; nature has attached to them the most sensual pleasures, in order that the animal may be a prey to vehemence and ardor, whether in seeking its food or propagating its species. But as the preservation of the species is even more precious than that of the individual, nature has bestowed more delicious pleasure in the latter than the former.

These two sensations, in affinity with the body only, are the most debasing for the intellectual faculties; whilst what we see or hear is adapted to our instruction and enlightenment of our proceedings in life. Smell occupies a sort of middle position between the intellectual and material senses, since it may affect either the imagination or the taste by fragrant perfumes or peculiar exhalations.

Man, being the most sensitive, or most nervous, of all creatures, can also go to greater extremes in the abuse of his senses than the brutes. With the animal, instinct is appeased, as a rule, when its wants are satisfied. When the famished wolf has fed abundantly, he hides the rest of his prey underground. When quadrupeds have abated their ardor, nature's limits are rarely overleaped. On the contrary, the industry of man has led him to invent a thousand preparations which incite his appetites beyond measure, and precipitate him into the most pernicious excesses. These dangerous arts unceasingly setting on fire an organization already disposed to enjoy sensuality, necessarily force the barriers that instinct and reason set up before its abuse; and if man is the most sickly of animals, he must not accuse nature, but his own intemperance.

It is not as a man that this vice is characteristic of our species, but as an animal. With the brute, the functions of nutrition and generation prevail more than the intellectual and sensitive life which dominate in man. Consequently, the more scope we give to the first, the more we descend to sensuality, and the intellectual faculties necessarily lose their preponderance. Look at the animal! The projection of its muzzle, the recedence of its forehead and brain, seem to say that it takes more pleasure in eating than thinking. It stoops to the ground to feed and graze; but man, who raises his head towards heaven—man, whose jaws and mouth shorten in proportion as the capacity of his cranium expands, manifests that he was destined to reflect rather than devour.

Although we may cite the excesses of the tables of Alexander, Marcus Antony, and perhaps other renowned personages who inherited these vices amidst their surroundings; no man, illustrious by the splendor of his genius, ever was or ever can be intemperate, whether from the pleasures of the table, or of love.

Let us consider what individuals display most affection for sensual voluptuousness. As to taste, they are those of a ruby phiz, all those tools of Bacchus, those friends of the gormandiser and lovers of gastronomy who make a god of their belly, a servile vice affected by vulgar people who haunt the taverns and never reflect. The inhabitants of cold countries are more voracious and more given to drink than those of warm climates. In like manner a Spaniard is very sober compared with a German or an Englishman.

The habit of intemperance, when it is not followed by cachexy and the most deplorable maladies, makes the body plethoric, effeminate, lymphatic and sanguine. The intemperate man is inclined to quick passions, such as joy and anger, and rushes rashly into dangers and battle. If he is imprudent, dissipated, licentious, inconstant and impetuous, he opens his mind with more frankness, cordiality and courage than the generality of sober men; these are more dissembling, more sluggish in their affections, more avaricious and reserved in everything, harsher in their virtues than the others in their vices. The intemperate man almost always abandons himself to the fury of his impulses of love or hatred without any disguise; the temperate man, with much more prudence and reflection, governs himself with fear and circumspection.

To whatever degree the moderns have pushed the luxury of gastronomy, there is nothing in our most far-fetched entertainments comparable to the extravagance with which the Romans, in their orgies, swallowed up the rarest productions of the then-known world, and devoured the revenues of many kingdoms. But it was the *people-king*, *populum latè regem*, descendants of Curius and Cato, who lived on the bannock, the cabbage and the turnip. Some pushed their greediness so far as to glut themselves with food which they were forced to reject again. This shameful and disgusting habit was daily practised by those strange gluttons, and even women followed the custom, although doctors raised their voices against vomiting by such mechanical means as the introduction of a finger or a feather into the throat. These cleansings were only a preparation for new excesses:—

Vomunt ut edant, edunt ut vomant, et epulas quas toto orbe conquirunt, nec concouquere dignantur. Senec.

We do not pretend to vaunt those Pythagoreans who practised fasting as a virtue, and had the table covered with the most exquisite dishes on which they feasted their eyes for some hours, and carried them back without touching them. Aristotle assures us that when we wish to habituate ourselves to temperance, it is much more prudent not to fasten our eyes upon those objects of concupiscence that excite us, for the sight of carnal pleasures makes the mouth water. He claims that temperance and moderation in drinking and eating preserve serenity of soul, the calm sense of reason and wisdom; he maintains that they make the character sweet and forbearing, the feelings modest, the mind more reflective, the affections more chaste and continent, and the manners more pure and simple; that order and method are better preserved, that our passions are less impetuous; and that we know better how to economize and conduct ourselves with prudence. Studious and contemplative men are obliged to abstain from the excesses of the table and of love if they wish to fulfil to perfection those sublime functions of the mind to which they have consecrated their lives. Intemperance or an insatiable desire for voluptuousness becomes the mother of all bestial passions. Nothing quenches the imagination, degrades the memory, and stupefies the judgment more than excesses of the table. Sobriety is so necessary to the maintenance of a healthy body that athletes and soldiers among the ancients were bound to practise temperance and continence, as Horace says: *Abstinuit venere et vino*. Old men have more need of temperance in all things than young men.

Health, it is said, is the sweetest seasoning of life. Doctors cry out that gluttony and other intemperate habits are the sinks of iniquity, the cloace of disease, the stagnation of digestion, visceral obstructions, tumors, cachexy, burning fevers, gout, gravel, apoplexy and caverns of all ills. Hippocrates, and all the ancient philosophers praise temperance and labour, the true props of prudence and of health. Then, the native heat of the body, or vital force, distributes itself with ease among the members, makes us lively, firm and sound. Despire voluptuousness, that nurse of suffering, says Plato. Shun, says Socrates, those pernicious ragouts that excite us to eat beyond what hunger demands. Is it not shameful for a man, the noblest of creatures, to brutalize himself by drunkenness, to drown his reason by intoxication, to wallow in the mire of vice more than the lower animals themselves; then to come out in this shameful state only to experience articular torture, calculus, fever, and other insupportable ills? What indiscretion to purchase these fatal maladies at the price of a momentary pleasure! Look at the drunkard that we lift from the gutter, throwing up what he has taken, crying like a madman, and tossing about on his dunghill! See him after his recovery, dull and besotted, sometimes with a headache and colic and sometimes with a fever! Is it the brute or is it the man that hearkens best to the voice of nature? We see the beast take the simple food that the earth provides for it, satisfied with the limpid water and sweet sleep to recuperate its strength. Man, on the contrary, insatiable amidst all the gifts of the universe, ceases not to fill himself, like the tun of the Danaides. He gathers from every quarter, not the things he needs, but rather new sources of disease. Nothing satisfies his shameful voracity whilst he