

ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF STIMULANTS IN FEVER.

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Alcohol.—The mode of action of alcohol upon the organism during the febrile state is very complex, and before discussing the nature of the modifications in the pathological changes probably effected by it, it is necessary to refer to the great distinction between the two objects for which wine and other stimulants are given during illness. Alcohol is prescribed—1, For the purpose of promoting digestion, improving the appetite, and relieving unpleasant sensations about the stomach; and 2, With the view of directly influencing those most active and serious abnormal changes which are taking place in the blood and in the tissues in all bad forms of fever, which, if they progress beyond a certain degree, will certainly lead to a fatal result.

I propose to defer the consideration of this latter part of the subject until the action of alcohol in moderate doses in the healthy state and in cases of slight fever has been discussed. The forms in which this substance is taken are very numerous, and nothing is more remarkable than the capriciousness exhibited by different stomachs as regards the reception of alcohol. Some persons like and can take without suffering any form of alcohol. With others beer and malt liquors agree well—better than wine or spirits. A certain number can even take porter, but not ale, or *vice versa*. With some dry sherry is the only wine that will agree. Port wine suits others; while not a few prefer, or can only take without suffering from derangement of the digestive organs, certain hocks or clarets, or sherry or cider. Brandy or whisky diluted will often agree when every other kind of alcoholic drink fails; but even pure rectified spirit properly diluted will not always be absorbed by the stomach without exciting discomfort and favouring the development of unpleasant gases, with certain organic acids, among which butyric, acetic, and valerianic are found.

No one has yet been able to give any satisfactory explanation of the fact that a little wine will occasion in some stomachs the greatest disturbance. Within a few minutes, not only is the process of digestion stopped, but there is pain, an unpleasant feeling of nausea, not unfrequently accompanied by an actual desire to vomit. In other persons a glass of wine will occasion no inconvenience at the time, but may lead, in the course of from twenty-four hours, to the development of that unpleasant collection of symptoms which constitutes what is often termed a "bilious attack." Vomiting, purgation, and free diuresis afford relief; but sometimes the disturbance lasts for days, and is not allayed until the stomach has had twenty-four hours' complete rest from work, or until free action of the alimentary canal and all the glands that pour their secretions into it has been promoted by a dose of mercury. It is, after all, not improbable that this most unpleasant action of alcohol indicates a highly sensitive but not unhealthy action of the nerves of the stomach, and that tolerance of wine and spirits is due to a change which

has been induced in the finest nerve fibres—in consequence of which their sensitiveness has been impaired. The tolerance of opium, tobacco, and some other poisons is probably to be explained in the same manner. Nor is tissue change limited to the nerves of the stomach; for it is an unquestionable fact that many of those persons who habitually subject their tissues to the influence of alcohol and tobacco, or both, at an early age, exhibit very distinctly signs of change in many tissues of the body. They look older; and indeed, physiologically speaking, their tissues are considerably older, and have deteriorated in a much greater degree, than would have been the case if they had not been exposed to the action of alcohol.

It is very remarkable how great a difference, as regards the capacity for the assimilation of alcohol, is observed in the same person when in ordinary good health, and when suffering from even a slight cold. I have observed this many times myself. When in health a very small quantity of wine will disagree, and not unfrequently give rise to a serious disturbance of digestion; but when one feels depressed and miserable from a feverish cold, three or four glasses of wine may be taken within a very short time with benefit, and with a feeling of immediate relief. Persons accustomed to alcohol in one form may take with advantage some other alcoholic fluid during illness.

If at the outset we have any reason to apprehend that an attack of fever is going to be severe, it is very desirable to administer small quantities of alcohol early in the disease. In this way the stomach may be accustomed to the remedy; whereas, if its use is postponed until the patient is very ill, and alcohol required in very large doses, the stomach is often in so highly irritable a state as to reject it. The patient's life may be in jeopardy from this circumstance, or fatal exhaustion alone may actually destroy him.

Of Giving Alcohol to Young Persons.—My conclusions as regards giving alcohol to the young are in the main not at variance with the opinions of those who advocate extreme temperance. My own experience leads me to believe that the majority of young healthy people would do well without alcohol; and I believe the habitual daily consumption by young persons—even of a moderate quantity—of wine or beer, is quite unnecessary, and mere waste, while in some instances it is positively injurious to health. At the same time, there can be no doubt that in certain cases where the health fails in children, and even in infants, great benefit results from giving small quantities of wine daily for a short time. Hard-working people, students, professional men, and people actively engaged have been advised to take stimulants, as a general rule—and some, no doubt, require them; but I believe many would enjoy very good health without any alcohol at all, while the recommendation that they should take plenty of claret or other light wine is bad advice for several reasons. Not only is a bottle of light wine not required, but in many cases it is actually injurious. That people who can get it will often take a bottle of light wine,