

THE USE OF COFFEE AND OTHER SIMPLE BEVERAGES.

The introduction of tea and coffee has led to the most wonderful change that ever took place in the diet of modern civilised nations—a change highly important both in a physical and a moral point of view.

Food is taken for two purposes—to nourish and sustain the body, and to refresh, stimulate, or exhilarate the animal spirits. Solids, generally speaking, afford much more nourishment than liquids; but it is worthy of remark, that the refreshing or exhilarating substances, with some trifling exceptions, are all liquids. The body may be supported in vigour upon many different kinds of aliment, and the business of society carried on almost equally well, whether men live on fish, flesh, or fowl, on corn, pulse, or nutritious roots, or a mixture of all these together. Considered as a social being, it is of little consequence what man eats, but it is of great consequence what he drinks. Upon the nature of the refreshing and stimulating beverage consumed depends the state of the animal spirits, and this in its turn has a powerful influence upon the sensations, the mental activity, the feelings, the temper—in a word, upon the social and moral character of the individual. Previous to the introduction of tea and coffee, fermented liquors of some species—wine, ale, beer, or cider—were the drinks universally used by persons of both sexes, for the purpose of exhilaration. Every body has heard of Queen Elizabeth's maids of honour breakfasting upon beef-steaks and ale. Now, the stimulating quality of all these liquors arises from the portion of alcohol they contain; and hence the vivacity of spirits which they excite is in fact merely a lower species of intoxication. Three evils necessarily attend the habitual use of such a beverage. First, that even when used in moderation, it generally confuses the brain as much as it quickens its activity; secondly, that a little thoughtlessness or want of control, leads to inebriety; and, thirdly, that when the excitement has subsided, a proportional depression of spirits follows, while the sensibility of the system is impaired, and in course of time worn out, by the constantly recurring action of the alcoholic stimulus. Let us suppose that when these drinks were in universal use as articles of food, and when statesmen, lawyers, and merchants, were no doubt often seen with muddy heads in a forenoon, any one had discovered a species of wine or ale which had the refreshing and exhilarating effects required, without confusing the brain or leading to intoxication, would not such a man have merited a statue from the conservators of the peace in every town and county of the empire? Now, this is exactly what the introduction of tea and coffee has accomplished. These beverages have the admirable advantage of affording stimulus, without producing intoxication, or any of its evil consequences. To the weary or exhausted, they are beyond measure refreshing. They give activity to the intellect, without confusing the head, or being followed by that annoying depression which

impels the drinker of ale or spirits to deeper and more frequent potations, till he ends in sottishness and stupidity. To the studious they are invaluable; and they are perfectly adapted to the use of females, which ale or wine never can be. They render the spirits elastic, the fancy “nimble and forgetive;” and hence they greatly aid the flow of rational and cheerful conversation, and promote courtesy, amenity of manners, serenity of temper, and social habits. The excitement of wine, ale, or spirits, even if it were as pure in its nature, never stops at a proper pitch. The drinker of these liquors has hardly become gay or animated, when a glass or two additional carry him to the stage of boisterous jollity, which is too often followed by beastly inebriety. Then his carousals are succeeded by a woful flatness. He is listless, torpid, unsocial, perhaps crabbed and sulky, till he is again on the road to intoxication. Take half a dozen of men even who are not drunkards, and observe what a difference there is in their conversation, in point of propriety, piquancy, and easy cheerfulness, in the two hours after a coffee breakfast, and the two hours after a dinner at which they have been enjoying wine or spirits merely in moderation. Lovers of tea or coffee are in fact rarely drinkers; and hence the use of these beverages has benefited both manners and morals. Raynal observes, that the use of tea has contributed more to the sobriety of the Chinese than the severest laws, the most eloquent discourses, or the best treatises of morality. Upon the whole, we imagine the observant reader will go along with us in thinking, that coffee is a softener of the manners, and a friend to civilization.

Plenty of milk is essential to the preparation of good coffee, and with this accompaniment it affords, in our opinion, a much more nourishing and wholesome beverage than tea, though perhaps not so light or gently exhilarating. The art of preparing coffee is not very well understood in this country, as every one will admit who has tasted the superb and delicious beverage which is served up in the cafes and restaurants of Paris. There are different modes of preparing it, and these need not here be defined, for all are less or more acquainted with them. We need only remark, that the chief point to be attended to is making the beverage strong, and free of sediment. Great care should be taken to use the coffee as soon after it is roasted and ground as possible, for the best properties escape by exposure to the air.

The late Count Rumford, who was a great consumer of coffee, wrote a memoir in praise of its nutritive and medicinal qualities. Many medical men have eulogised its virtues; and if we had time, it would not be difficult, we believe, to collect a cento of testimonies in its favour. Hooper says, “Good Turkey coffee is by far the most salutary of all liquors drunk at meal time. It possesses nervine and astringent qualities, and may be drunk with advantage at all times, except when there is bile in the stomach. If drunk warm within an hour after dinner, it is of singular use to those who have