

TEMPERANCE COLUMN.

THE ALCOHOL HABIT.

BY THE REV. C. W. LEFFINGWALL, D.D.

By 'The Alcohol Habit' is meant the regular, daily use of alcoholic stimulants, in some form, not necessarily in quantities to produce intoxication. The insidious evil of habitual dram drinking is not, perhaps, generally understood. The strength of the temperance movement has been mainly directed against drunkenness, which is a public evil, entailing misery upon thousands; but the Alcohol Habit, even within the bounds of what men call 'moderation,' is a secret enemy which is undermining the health and shortening the lives of tens of thousands. Men think that if they never 'get drunk' they are in no danger. 'Moderation' means, or soon comes to mean, several drinks a day, indulgence ere long comes to be necessity, the nervous system demands and will have its periodic stimulation, and the Alcohol Habit is formed.

This article is not intended as a lecture on total abstinence. The writer does not venture the opinion that for most men it is dangerous under any circumstances to taste anything which can intoxicate; but he does venture the assertion that a great many men, and some of our most useful men, are injuring themselves beyond recovery, by 'moderate drinking,' while neither they nor their friends suspect anything seriously wrong. Many of these men would have kept far from this evil if they had understood it, and many might get away from it now if they were made to realize it. It is very difficult, however, to convince a man, while he is well and strong, that he can possibly injure himself by doing anything that he has a mind to do.

There is perhaps no fact better attested by medical authorities than that alcohol is cumulative in its action on the living tissues. It is not, like some poisons, stored up and retained in the body till its quantity is too great for toleration; but when used habitually, for a long time, it has a cumulative effect upon the nervous system and upon the brain. It is like the continued jarring of cast iron, during which the crystalline structure suffers a gradual change, but gives no sign till the process of disintegration is far advanced and the shaft suddenly breaks. Regular and frequently repeated doses of alcohol, in quantities not sufficient to affect at the time the action of body or mind, if continued for years will inevitably result in physical and mental degeneration. There is not one man in ten thousand, probably, who can long continue the daily habit of dram-drinking, without permanent injury, leading to premature decay.

Drunkenness degrades a man for the time, but he may raise out of it and be himself again. Perpetual, though moderate stimulation, gradually undermines the constitution, and makes a man an easy prey to

any disease that may overtake him. No respectable insurance company will take a risk on the life of a man who is known to have a habit of daily indulgence, even though he may never be intoxicated. All intelligent medical practitioners agree that the Alcohol Habit is extremely dangerous, and that occasional drunkenness is not so destructive of vitality as long continued and habitual stimulation, within the range of what most people call temperate.

The deleterious effect of alcohol is not upon the nervous system alone. Its continued presence in the blood will in time impair the action of nearly every organ and interfere with nearly every function of the body. By its eager affinity for oxygen, it consumes the cleansing air currents that flow in upon the blood through the tissues of the lungs, while the natural fuel, the worn-out particles that are gathered by the blood from every part of the body remain unconsumed. The blood is imperfectly purified as long as alcohol feeds the fire. Venous blood circulates in place of arterial, and all the tissues and organs of the body are injured thereby. It affects even the skin, and proclaims its presence in the bloated and bloated countenance of one who 'never misses his drinks.'

Upon the lungs, liver and kidneys is put an unnatural strain to accomplish the cleansing which should be performed by oxydization. Alcohol in the blood at once and invariably affects the action of the heart, and its continued presence is almost sure to bring about organic disease of this or of some other vital organ. A man whose system has been long subjected to daily dosing with alcoholic fluids is 'founded.' He is not good for much, as a rule, mentally or physically. He comes to find it out at last, and he sees too late what a fool he has been. He may possibly break off at a late hour but he will never be a sound man again.

Let not the victim of the Alcohol Habit delude himself by the supposition that temperance advocates are all fools or fanatics. The challenge may be safely given, to find one physician of more than local reputation, in England or America, who does not know and admit the truth of what has been stated above. There may be a difference of opinion as to the exact amount of alcohol per day, if any, a man may regularly consume without being "founded" in the long run. But upon this, however, all will be found to agree that the Alcohol Habit, even without occasional intoxication, will as surely destroy the physical constitution of the strongest man that lives, as that a small leak will in time sink the largest ship that floats.

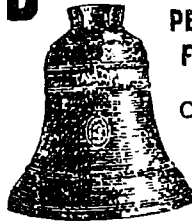
The argument above, allows, for the time, the most that men claim for themselves, as to the power of keeping within 'limits.' It is intended to show that even 'moderate drinking' as a habit, is not safe. The limits of safety are far within the lines of what most men are willing to lay down for themselves, if they indulge at all their appetites

for stimulants. And, as a fact, who does not know that few men long continue to observe the rules with which they start out. The tendency to increase the amount is almost irresistible. As a man grows older he drinks more often and more deeply, until it becomes apparent to all who know him that he is on the downward road.

Mothers and wives in darkened homes weep over the broken constitution, the ruined fortune and the impending disgrace of a son or husband. The fire may smoulder for a long time, but it breaks out at last, and the man who has regarded drunkenness as a crime, and was never really intoxicated in his life, is a helpless, habitual sot. If there is fanaticism in warning against such dangers, then there is fanaticism in crying 'fire' when the house is burning.—From *Living Church Tracts*.

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