

valuable servants. And alcohol, like any other drug, is a good medicine, administered skilfully and under professional advice. It acts powerfully, as has been seen, on the brain and nervous system, and is, therefore, not only useful but necessary in cases of extreme depression, when the vital action is feeble, be the cause accident or disease. An over dose must be as carefully avoided as if arsenic, laudanum, or other deadly agent were being administered; and by an over dose is generally meant one in which the *stimulant* effect is passed and the *sedative* produced, the former being in most cases the one required. Hence the need of small doses administered at intervals, not at discretion but with discretion. Where the vital action is so thoroughly depressed as to exclude all reasonable hope of rousing it, which frequently happens in old age, the kindness of large and repeated doses is very questionable; and patients have been known to make the touching request, sometimes it is to be feared in vain, that they might at least be allowed to make their exit from life sober.

The question whether the medicine alcohol may be safely or beneficially used without medical advice, is the same as may be asked with regard to the use of any other medicine, a question merely of judgment; and people of common sense may safely be left to answer it for themselves. Alcohol may with prudence be used as safely as any other edged tool or combustible material, more safely, indeed, because an accident, strictly so called, is, in such a case, scarcely possible. When a man is used up so as to be unable, for instance, by his own unassisted efforts, to complete any work which he has engaged to produce by a given time, an alcoholic stimulus may, no doubt, be useful for that particular purpose. It may enable him to do the work which he could not do without it. But let him not forget that the work is really done at his own expense: more is taken out of him than his strength warrants. His body requires to be recruited by rest, and if circumstances forbid this, his health is more or less injured. "Alcohol," it has been well said, "gives no addition to the amount of vital strength; it merely urges the more rapid and thorough using up of what you already have."

III.

It cannot be expected that many will accept this statement who have been indoctrinated with the notion, prevalent certainly in England, that alcohol is, in any proper sense of the word, *food*. It is no such thing. We are speaking now of pure alcohol, which has no nourishing properties, nothing which can procure muscle, renovate tissue, or repair the wasted vitality of the blood. But people do not drink pure alcohol or anything approaching to it; and many spirituous beverages, such as beer,