

science or theology. There is no substance which is everywhere and always a poison. The term is a relative one, and there are many substances which, used in excess, deserve to be ranked as poisons whilst their moderate use may be harmless, useful, or even essential to bodily health.

I do not propose to discuss the desirability or otherwise of the employment of alcoholic beverages as foods. I think we may accept it as being the consensus of opinion amongst scientists who have given the matter careful study, that, whilst alcohol is a true food, supplying heat and energy in its combustion, yet it is not a practicable source of energy in the performance of muscular or mental labor. It has its field of usefulness in certain diseased conditions; for, instance, as a stimulus to appetite and digestion in aged and debilitated, and to tide over a crisis in grave diseases when the power of digesting other foods is temporarily impaired. But the healthy man does not need it. If he chooses to use it in strict moderation, to make glad his heart, or soothe his nerves, or as an adjunct to social life, he may do so without injury to his health; and if he would avoid all evil effects he must take care that the amount habitually taken must be very small, and he must guard carefully against the danger of insidious increase of dosage.

There is much evidence to point to the restorative influence of a small amount of alcohol after severe physical or mental exertion, or after prolonged exposure to cold, but nearly all are agreed that, until our work is done, we are better without it, and that, "in all those avocations of life where keen senses, sharp attention, the ready and immediate action of a clear judgment, or great concentration of the mind are called for, alcohol in any form or amount is injurious when taken during the performance of the duty in hand. He who has mental labor of an exacting kind to perform, and he upon whom great responsibilities devolve, is forced, if he would be at his best, to use alcohol as a restorative agent only at the proper season; he must behave to it as he does to many other pleasures and luxuries in his environment" (John J. Abel, of Baltimore).

All this does not involve the necessity of total abstinence. In the judgment of many the discipline of moderation is better than the discipline of abstinence, and the evolution of an efficient self-control will prove humanity's best safeguard against the vicious tendencies of alcoholic indulgence. So far as the influence of the strictly moderate use of alcohol upon an applicant for life insurance is concerned, it is not my purpose to contend that