

Original Communications.

The Therapeutic Value of Alcohol.—By W. E. BESSEY, M.D.

The precise value of *Alcohol* as a therapeutic agent, and the particular circumstances under which it is indicated, or contra-indicated, in the treatment of disease, are questions of the utmost moment, not only to the conscientious medical practitioner but also, and more especially, to the public, who are to derive the benefit of a correct solution of this medical problem, or suffer the consequences which must inevitably flow from an adherence to erroneous opinions upon the subject.

The profession seems to be particularly liable to a periodicity of change in opinion upon important matters relating to the treatment of disease; and these changes seem to be of a contagious nature, and to become epidemic. Thus has it been in the past, and we have witnessed an epidemic of blood-letting in which each aspirant for medical fame seemed to be metamorphosed into a veritable Sandrigo. So, from Cullen, a crop of leeches followed, who were only startled from their delusion when Count Cavour paid the penalty of a fanatical adherence to *routine*, by the sacrifice of his life to professional prejudice.

The age or epidemic of *Mercurialization* followed that of blood-letting, and is only being abandoned by degrees, and, as by necessity, before the pressure of a more thoughtful and considerate phase of medical opinion.

The age or epidemic of *Alcoholization*, or Alcoholic Medication, is still active here as in many other portions of the world; while in many of its former strongholds it is paling before the moral force of an enlightened public observation and opinion, and, having reached its acme, it is rapidly on the wane.

During the last ten years this delusion of the medical profession, and fraud upon true medical science, has received many a telling thrust, and it is quite probable that its deathblow may follow ere long; for, as the common proverb has it, "all evils cure themselves," which this promises, through its own inconsistencies and deceptions, speedily to do. But there are many in the profession who, while anxious to confine this drug, like its sister opium, to its legitimate limits, yet consider it to be possessed of some value as a therapeutic agent, and indispensable in the treatment of certain diseases and under peculiar circumstances. This view is that expressed in a recent manifesto published in London, England, and signed by two

hundred and sixty of the leading members of the profession in England.

For some years past, at one time and another, eminent members of the profession in various countries have raised their voices against the merits of this article.

Among these may be instanced Professors Lehman, Lallemand, Perrin, and Duroy, of Paris; Dr. Edward Smith, F.R.S., Dr. Markham, Dr. King Chambers, Dr. W. Carpenter, Dr. Sidney Ringer, Dr. Wilks, Sir A. Carlisle, and others, of England; Professor Gardner, Dr. Russell, and Dr. Lyon Playfair, Dr. Balfour and others, of Scotland; and many more, to whom I shall have occasion to refer in the course of this paper.

The remarkable document published in London in December last, has attached to it the names of sixteen Physicians in Ordinary to the Royal Houses, the President of the Royal College of Physicians, that of the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, the President of the General Council of Medical Education; and an array of names which are household words in the profession as authorities in medical science, in fact the flower of the profession in England. And if these men deem it necessary to promulgate such a document and to give it as their opinion that "while unable to abandon the use of alcohol in certain cases of disease, they are yet of opinion that no medical practitioner should prescribe it without a sense of grave responsibility;" and, further, "they believe that alcohol, in whatever form, should be prescribed with as much care as any powerful drug, and that the directions for its use should be so framed as not to be interpreted as a sanction for excess or necessarily for the continuance of its use when the occasion is past. That they are also of opinion that many people *immensely exaggerate the value of alcohol as an article of diet*, and since no class of men see so much of its *ill effects*, and possess such power to restrain its abuse as members of their own profession, they hold that every medical practitioner is bound to exert his utmost influence to inculcate habits of *great moderation* in the use of alcoholic liquids."

When such men as Burrows, Busk, Watson, Paget, Holland, Ferguson, Quain, Cooper, Sieveking, Pollock, Chambers, Ackland, Farre, Spencer Wells, Balfour, Maclean, Parkes, Aitken, Bird, Druett, Sir Duncan Gibb, Tilbury Fox, Bence Jones, Marshall, Playfair, Rees, Radcliffe, Reynolds, Richardson, Wilks and Budd, make such statements, I think I need have little hesitation in broaching this most delicate of all other delicate subjects to the pro