

THE HEREDITY OF ALCOHOL

The most saddening, and perhaps the most serious, of the numerous evils inflicted by alcohol on human kind is the hereditary transmission, both of the drink-crave itself, and of the pathological changes caused by indulgence in alcohol.

Transmitted Disease

I have had under my care a life teetotaler, who has been repeatedly tormented by acute attacks of gout, though by his careful diet and mode of life he has disarmed the disease of half its terrors. He owes his besetting ailment to the alcoholic indulgence of his ancestors, and has inherited this legacy with the rest of the family property. In no other disease is the heredity more marked. In Britain the proofs are everywhere around us.

Many other diseases produced by alcohol are the subject of transmission. Among the most characteristic are alcoholic cirrhosis and alcoholic contracted kidney. In one painful case of the latter, under my own care, the patient had been a total abstainer for nearly forty years, but he inherited the contracted kidney from an intemperate father.

Weakened Constitutions

The blood of the inebriate parent is so vitiated, and his energies are so wasted, that, even when there is a sober mother, the innocent progeny are often brought into existence puny, stunted, and debilitated. Body and brain having been insufficiently nourished, the vital powers of such infants are so defective that, in their earliest years, they are literally mowed down. In the causation of the terrible infantile morality which is such a disgrace to English civilization, the drinking habits of the parent or parents have the largest share.

Even when grown up to manhood, the constitutions of the offspring of intemperate parentage are frequently so enfeebled and impaired, that they succumb to a premature death from their lack of recuperative power after the exhaustion, following some acute illness, which a tolerably vigorous sys-

tem would have perfectly recovered from.

Mental Defects

Alcoholic nervous and mental diseases are also handed down. Hereditary alcoholic epilepsy, for example, is by no means uncommon. Defective nerve power, enfeebled will, and a debilitated morale form a favorite legacy from thoughtless inebriates to their helpless issue.

The nerves of the dipsomaniac are shattered, while the bodily strength is undermined, and thus the family are liable to be mentally afflicted. Some of the circle, generally the daughters, may be nervous and hysterical; others, generally the sons, are apt to be feeble and eccentric, and to fall into insanity when any emergency calls for the display of unusual brain power.

In one household, with a drunken father, two girls were hysterical, and the third was an imbecile; of the sons, the eldest was an epileptic, the second died suddenly of alcoholic apoplexy, and the third was an idiot.

In another family, burdened with the hereditary drink curse, the eldest daughter committed suicide, the second lost her reason, and became quite demented, and the youngest was the incarnation of hysteria. The elder son killed himself by poison through drink, and the younger is an apparently confirmed sot.

Prohibition Demanded

The heredity of alcohol is now beyond dispute. It is no mere dream of an abstemious enthusiast, but the operation of a natural law; no fanciful creation of a nephalian brain, but an acknowledged fact.

Men and women on whom this dread inheritance has been forced without their consent are everywhere around us, bravely struggling to lead a pure and sober life; and would it not be but an act of justice to make every church, every home, and every land, safe for all such afflicted ones by the expulsion of all intoxicating beverages from our sacred services, from our social gatherings, and from within our borders.—Dr. Norman S. Kerr.