

TEMPERANCE COLUMN.

HYGIENIC CONGRESS.

Discussion on Alcoholism and Public Health.

Dr. Norman Kerr, F.L.S., London, President of the Society for the study of Inebriety, said that the loss of life through alcoholism was appalling. As the issue of an extended series of inquiries into the mortality from alcohol (the figures having been laid before the British Medical Association and other learned societies and pronounced 'moderate' and 'within the truth'), he had estimated the number of deaths prematurely occurring in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, every year at 40,000 from personal intemperance. To this direct annual premature fatality of 40,000 inebriates there must be added double that number of deaths of individuals occurring not directly from their own habit, but indirectly, through accidents, violence, starvation, neglect, and disease, occasioned by the alcoholic indulgence of persons other than the slain by alcoholic poisoning. A terrible slaughter truly; and achieved at great pecuniary cost. The average worth of an adult to the community had been reckoned at 2s per day. Deducting Sundays, this made £31 6s per year (313 days at 2s). If they allowed five years of working capacity on an average to each adult life thus cut short, this would give £156 10s, as the current value of each life (5 years at £31 6s per annum). 40,000 lives prematurely lost from inebriate addiction, at £156 10s per head, would amount to £6,260,000 of wealth lost to the nation every year from alcoholic personal excess.

The waste from alcoholic disease, over and above the waste from alcoholic deaths, was most serious. There were generally acknowledged to be at least 39 cases of non-fatal disease to each case of disease ending in death, with (as they had seen) an average value to each individual of 2s per day. The average duration of each such illness was 18 days. The 40,000 deaths prematurely happening through the alcoholism of the deceased, multiplied by 40, gave 1,600,000 as the total number of illnesses yearly. This, multiplied by 18 (the average number of days in each illness), gave 28,800,000 days in each year, during which adults were incapacitated for work from alcoholism. At 2s per day, there would therefore be a money loss during the twelve months, from alcoholic intemperance, of £2,880,000.

Dr. Norman Kerr said that on that occasion he left out of the reckoning altogether the considerable number of premature deaths and of attacks of non-fatal maladies, arising from alcoholic indulgence in quantities commonly called 'moderate,' 'free,' and 'generous'; though the records of the United Kingdom Temperance and other insurance companies and friendly societies showed that this would have made a very substantial addition to the saddening tale of alco-

holic death, disease, and consequent money extravagance. To these fell to be added a large proportion of expenditure on pauperism, the administration of justice, the police, and other expensive charges. Still further, there was a mass of mental unsoundness, moral disorder, and social tumult. Looking yet further ahead, reading the future from the experience of past and present, there could be discerned an enormous increase in the next and succeeding generations of mental impairment, defective control, paralysed will, and degraded morale from inherited brain degeneration through the poisonous influence of alcohol on parental organ and tissue.

[To be continued]

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