ALCOHOL IN RELATION TO MOTHERHOOD.*

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THE problem of alcoholism which is being discussed at the various meetings of this Congress is many-sided, and concerned with matters of national importance. But in urgency that aspect of it which is concerned with motherhood and childhood is of first consideration. In these two states are bound up the present and future welfare of our nation; for most of the problems of the present are in some form related to the woman as mother, and our hopes for the future rest upon the nation's little ones.

Motherhood and childhood are so indissolubly bound up together that it would be useless to attempt to disentangle them. So this afternoon, though I shall endeavour to deal with each separately, it will be necessary often to speak of them as though they were a single subject. Whatever tends to the good of the one is likely to have a beneficial effect upon the other, and what is harmful to one will almost certainly be detrimental to both.

In order to act within the suggestions given in your kind invitation, I must restrict myself to the relations of alcoholism to the child life of our country, especially at the periods of infancy and during those early years when parental care and home environment should do so much to mould and develop the unfolding mind and body.

THE CHILD AND THE NATION.

During the last century we have been altering our views regarding the place of the child in our economic and social system. It used to be considered that children existed for the use and

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benefit of the parents, and that those parents had the right of absolute control over them. The first national attempt to improve the terrible conditions of child life was made only as recently as 1833, when a Bill was introduced forbidding the work of children under nine years of age. Since then we have passed laws dealing with factories, education, sanitation, all of which, to a certain extent, interfere with the power of parents over their children. Now we are rejoicing in the fact that a Bill for the consolidation and strengthening of the many points which concern the well-being of our little ones is likely soon to be placed upon our country's Statute Book, and it may be hoped will make it more easy for right to be done to the children, and more difficult for them to be wronged. I think it may safely be said that we have reached that stage when we realize that parents exist for the sake of their children. It is with the rights of the children, and not with those of the parents, that all true patriots are now primarily concerned.

It is estimated that every year 1,200,000 lives are added to the population of the United Kingdom, thus more than replacing the 700,000 lost by death. As a nation we are inclined to rest content with this fact, and we are painfully slow in realizing the importance of securing conditions which will insure health to the mind and body of the coming race.

Our near neighbour France, with its depleted child life, has awakened to this, and is endeavouring to provide suitable remedies; and rapidly developing nations—such as Germany among Western peoples and Japan among Eastern—are acting upon the belief that their future depends greatly upon their care of the growing generation. It is quite true that we have not been heedless or idle, but until lately almost all the measures for the protection of child life from cruelty and from the sufferings of orphanhood have been undertaken by individual effort and private philanthropic enterprise.

John Bull spends large sums on the so-called education of the poor man's child. His school bill for elementary education during 1904-05 was over £22,000,000, and necessitated an educational army of nearly a quarter of a million. Up to the present he has undertaken no systematic inquiry into the health of the scholars, and even now has provided no definite means of instructing them in the all-important principles of hygiene and temperance.

Evidence as to the wastage of child life abounds. The statistical returns of infantile mortality, the enormous number of hospitals, orphanages, asylums, and other havens for cripple and derelict children, all bear their testimony. But it should be borne in mind that death-returns give no adequate idea of the crippled condition of those who struggle through a neglected infancy. The results of physical examination in schools reveal an enormous amount of deformity of body and defectiveness of mind. This not only deprives the nation of untold wealth, but adds a burden which is rapidly becoming intolerable.

We may well ask, What is the cause of this lamentable state of affairs? There are many agencies at work, combining in intricate complexity, but chief and foremost, as most agree, stands out the malign influence of our national drinking habits.

DRINK AND THE INFANT.

The human infant is absolutely the most helpless of all newly-born creatures. The first year of life is one of complete dependence, and an enormous number of babies fall victims during that period to the effects of neglect and ignorance on the part of their natural guardians. It is easy to quote figures regarding infantile mortality, but far from easy to realize their full significance.

In 1904 the number of deaths of children under one year was 137,392; and taking the last five years for which statistics are available, 970,749 died under five years of age. Although the general death-rate has decreased, the infant mortality has remained practically stationary. During the first week of life, when the infant is struggling to adapt itself to its new circumstances and environment, the mortality is so high that it is estimated that were it to continue at the same figure for forty-two weeks, every child born alive would have succumbed during that period.

Bad housing, poverty, and the cruel struggle for mere existence among the poorer classes, all help to keep up this annual sacrifice of human life, but we shall not be far wrong if we say that parental, and especially maternal, alcoholism, with its associated evils, is greatly, if not chiefly, responsible. It is impossible for the half-starved, drink-sodden woman to do justice to herself or her infant either before or after its birth.

For the first few years a healthy and well-governed home should afford the proper training-ground for the developing life. In the alcoholic home the requisites of suitable and sufficient food, clothing, warmth, air, and light, are usually conspicuous by their absence. A great deal of this is due to ignorance and carelessness on the part of the mother, engendered and maintained by her alcoholic habits; but we should remember that the question is largely an economic one.

The condition of the working classes, especially in the towns—and 70 per cent. are urban dwellers—is at its best fraught with difficulty for the upbringing of healthy children. Even a steady worker, when aided by a sober, industrious wife, feels the keen stress of life, and finds it wellnigh impossible to provide for sickness or premature death. But when the all too scanty wage is expended in drink by the husband, it inevitably means loss for the children and deprivation for the mother. The indulgence in alcohol is not only of no benefit to the man, but often causes serious impairment of his wage-earning powers. It has been estimated that on an average each working-class family spends 6s. a week on drink. If this amount were spent in providing suitable food or more commodious dwellings, the condition of the children might not be so lamentable.

THE ALCOHOLIC MOTHER.

Large numbers of our mothers are, or are in danger of becoming, alcoholic. Whilst probably there has been general improvement in the drinking habits of the upper and middle classes, particularly among the younger men, it is generally believed that alcoholism, often in not easily recognized forms, is increasing among women and girls, especially among the working classes.

The early earnings of girls, the desire for excitement, the liberty and licence now accorded to women, the temptations of town life, the persuasions of companions of both sexes—all or any of these may tempt the unwary and unthinking girl into commencing a habit which may ultimately bring poverty to her home, disgrace to her husband and family, and disaster to herself.

With “home” is inseparably associated the idea of the wife and mother. Here should be woman’s true realm, and wifehood

and motherhood, if wisely exercised, should leave their mark for good upon everything. But when, by the mother, drink enters the home, love is apt to fly out of the window.

Domesticity without sobriety is practically impossible among the labouring classes, and the converse also holds good, that sobriety without domesticity is also an impossibility.

Some of the effects of maternal alcoholism on the children and the home are of such importance that they call for special consideration.

PRE-NATAL ALCOHOLISM.

It is well that we should not forget that a drunken mother means an alcoholized offspring. Alcohol taken by the mother passes directly to the child, and so even before birth the babe may be subjected to the poisonous action of alcohol. Although the child may not enter the world with an actual alcoholic craving, it is often born with badly-nourished tissues, with unstable brain and nervous system, and limited in its powers for normal development. It is, therefore, much more liable than an ordinary healthy person to fall under the influence of drink, and is less able to resist the assaults of disease and the privations of poverty.

In this connection Professor Arthur Thomson's remarks in his recent work on "Heredity" will be of interest. "The predisposition which facilitated the hyper-alcoholic habit in the parent is transmitted. There may be intra-uterine intoxication of the unborn child if the mother is a drunkard. The tradition in favour of alcohol may persist. The conditions of nurture may also tend to induce the alcoholic habit in the offspring; but *there is more*. Much evidence points to the conclusion that the germ cells may (in cases of extreme alcoholism) be prejudicially affected along with the body of the victim. . . . If the germ cells are affected, the offspring will also be affected." Professor Thomson further says: "The alcoholic habit is prejudicial to the race, not merely through custom and tradition, not merely by affecting maternity, but directly through inheritance. There are so many cases of unhealthy, insane, and criminal persons among the offspring of drunkards, that all possibility of coincidence is excluded. . . . The offspring of alcoholic parents are not necessarily predisposed in any one particular direction, except that the nervous system is most likely to be affected.

They may be epileptic, paralytic, idiotic, insane, or sterile. The variety of result is great, but it is never on the right side."

NURSING FUNCTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD.

A careful study of infant life has shown how important the first few months are in the process of development. During these months the infant needs to be surrounded with special love and care, and above all to be suitably nourished. Many a little one, however, bears the marks even to and through adult years of deprivation in this direction.

In every rank of society women are neglecting, and even losing, their power to provide the foremost and most important means for the upbuilding of healthy bodies and minds in their children. Neglect or inability to provide natural nourishment may result in lifelong crippling. That protean disease which we call rickets, with its many consequences, is often induced, and may lead even to permanent impairment of life's usefulness.

The tendency to deprive the infant of its natural food has apparently increased of late years. It is due to a variety of causes. Selfishness born of luxury and indolence, thoughtlessness and ignorance, a limited outlook on life and its duties, the conditions of work of many women both before and after marriage, the neglect and malnutrition of many wives, and a genuine inability among a few, all go to deprive motherhood of much of its God-given power.

But what concerns us more particularly is the part played by alcohol in producing this condition. No doubt many of you are familiar with the investigations into this subject made by Professor von Bunge. They are so striking, however, that I will venture to recall them. He contends that the failure of mothers to nurse their children depends, in many cases, directly or indirectly on the far-reaching influence of alcohol. He says: "I made it my task to find out the causes of this inability by means of statistical procedures. I first of all found it to be hereditary. When a woman is unable to suckle, it is almost without exception that her daughter cannot do so, and the power appears to be lost for all the next generation. . . . There are some cases, and these are not rare, where, the mother having been able to suckle, the daughter has not been able to do so. Here we are close to the causes of the incapacity, and shall find it in the father, and we at

once encounter alcoholism. In 78 per cent. of these cases the father is an immoderate drinker. . . . That the daughter of a drunkard is able to properly suckle her infant is a rare case. The rule is that, if the father is a drunkard, the daughter loses her power of suckling." Even when the alcoholic mother is able to nurse her own child, it must be remembered that in this way a certain proportion of alcohol may actually be taken into its system along with its natural food. The growth of the rapidly developing and increasing tissues may in this way be stunted and deteriorated, for alcohol exerts a harmful influence on all immature growing cells. The milk of an alcoholic woman in many cases may be still further unsuited to the needs of the child, since it often lacks the presence of the constituents in proper proportion on which normal development greatly depends.

Infantile neglect is not limited to the offspring of the poor. Its evidences are only too apparent in many children of the well-to-do. Dr. Clement Dukes has published the results of consecutive examination of a thousand boys at the Rugby School, and he states that a large number of the deformities met with were the direct result of early defects and deficiencies in infant feeding.

The more we probe into the conditions inimical to child life the more do we see that parental alcoholism is a potent factor—often, it is true, an indirect and not easily recognized one, but, nevertheless, most powerful and pervasive in its consequences. We shall agree, I feel sure, in recognizing the immense importance that all mothers, whether actual or potential, should be made to understand how, directly through their individual action, and indirectly through domestic and economic conditions, they may, as far as their child is concerned, be prejudicially influenced by indulgence in drink, and by those associations which are almost inseparable from the drinker's pursuits and manner of life.

ALCOHOL AND HOME HYGIENE.

It is practically impossible—at least among the poor—for the alcoholic home to be hygienically healthy. The drink-enthralled woman spends a large part of the hard-earned wages of her husband in personal indulgence, with the result that the home and children suffer. There is an insufficiency of food, that which is provided being usually poor in quality and almost invariably badly cooked. The sense of pride in the home is lost,

and neglect, carelessness, and apathy lead to a breach of all the laws of personal and domestic hygiene. By the narcotizing influence of alcohol on the nervous tissues of the mother she becomes neglectful of herself, forgetful of her children, contented with her unnatural environment, and unresponsive to all incentives for the betterment of herself or her family. And lest it be said that I am only telling part of the truth, let me add that the like applies in great measure to the husband and father.

What can be the fate of children whose lot is cast in such a home? Ushered into life with powers perhaps already handicapped, accustomed to the smell and taste of alcohol from earliest infancy, starved and neglected in body, and it may be stunted and warped in mind, living among insanitary and unwholesome surroundings, with the street for a playground and the public-house as the chief and daily resort, habituated to a drink-desolated home, and knowing no other guardianship than that of a drunken parentage, it is little wonder that the impressions of school life are quickly effaced, and that sooner or later they recapitulate the miserable life-history of their forbears.

THE PROTECTION OF THE SCHOOL CHILD.

God intended the home to be the child's true shelter and first training-ground. Here are made some of the earliest and most lasting of impressions. But as life is now circumstanced, the school has become essential for the development of the child's mind and his equipment for the day's work. Often, however, the teacher does not get a fair chance. Many of his pupils come to him in such a condition as to be unable to benefit by his instruction. These children, usually the offspring of alcoholics, may often be recognized at a glance. They are commonly underfed, unsuitably clad, unclean, and undisciplined. But the passing glance does not always detect what the teacher soon discovers, namely, that these children are intellectually dull, backward, or even mentally defective. Such scholars, when placed with others of similar age, lag behind, and are found to be more or less incapable of learning any but the simplest lessons. They are generally lacking in brightness and powers of application, and their moral sense is often blunted. Laxity of mental and moral discipline is often the outcome of a home atmosphere in which cruelty, injustice, and disorder prevail.

Much thought is being given to the condition of widespread inherent mental deficiency among so many school children. Inquiries show that about 40 per cent. of mentally defective children come of an alcoholic parentage. In the London County Council special schools for feeble-minded children, Dr. E. Sayer found that in 42 per cent. there was a history of drunkenness in one parent, whilst a similar history was found in only 6 per cent. of the children in ordinary schools. In Birmingham, Dr. W. A. Potts obtained very much the same results, 41·6 per cent. of the defective children having one or both parents alcoholic, and 22 per cent. of the ordinary school children being of alcoholic inheritance. It will readily be understood that such defectives, lacking in will power, fall easy victims to inebriety, and will in all probability ultimately join the large army of feeble-minded, lunatics, criminals, and unemployables. Dr. Welsh Branthwaite, H.M. Inspector under the Inebriates Act, states that upwards of 62 per cent. of over 2,000 cases admitted to reformatories have been proved to be either insane or defective in varying degrees.

A striking example of the disaster wrought by one inebriate woman is given by Dr. Archdall Reid in his well-known book on "Alcoholism: a Study in Heredity." "Of the lineal descendants of one Ada Jurke, who was born in 1740, and died from alcoholism in 1800, 7 were convicted of assassination and punished accordingly, 76 others were convicted of minor crimes of all grades, 144 were mendicants by profession, 64 were cared for by various public charities, and, finally, 181 were prostitutes. The sum total spent by the Government on the maintenance, surveillance, prosecutions, etc., of the members of this one family amounted to 6,000,000 dollars."

The visitation on the children of the sins of their fathers, and in this case, especially, of the mothers, needs to be more realized and emphasized, especially by those who in any way have the care and responsibility of child life, or the instruction of parents or those likely to become such. It is a side of the subject sometimes forgotten, or at all events passed over in silence. Nature unrestricted works for the elimination of the unfit, but we in our imperfect civilization often allow, and even encourage, their propagation. We willingly weight ourselves with the burden of these human derelicts, and are slow to arrest the evil at its source and in its beginnings.

THE PREVENTION AND ARREST OF INTEMPERANCE.

What can be done to stem the tide of intemperance in the coming generation? There are two forces on the necessity for which all are agreed—*legislation* and *education*. It is only when we come to details concerning them that disputes arise.

At the present time our interest and attention are focussed on the application of the former. The Children's Bill, to which I have already referred, promises to be an invaluable aid in safeguarding the coming race, but it needs to be supplemented by a strengthening in the Licensing Bill of those clauses which deal with the presence of women and children in public-houses and the employment of barmaids.

Our public-houses at the present time overflow with women. No disgrace is attached to entering these places, and women and girls—not only the poor and degraded ones—are shameless about being seen in them. And if the mothers are habitual frequenters, it necessarily follows that the unhappy babies in arms and the toddling mites who cannot be left at home or in the street, also breathe the tainted, vitiated atmosphere, and run risks innumerable both to body and mind.

An official White paper of the Home Office has recently been issued showing the appalling frequency with which women resort to the public-house, not only in London, but in other parts of the country. Thus, in London twenty-three houses were watched for four days, and into these over 39,000 women and over 10,700 children (1,164 in arms) were seen to enter. In Bristol 2,441 children entered 472 houses during fourteen days. The Chief Constables under whose directions the investigations were carried out are practically unanimous in condemning the custom of allowing young children to be exposed to the atmosphere, sights, sounds, and associations of the public-house. The Chief Constable of Manchester says: "I respectfully submit that, considering the environments of a low-class vault or beerhouse, and the profanity and obscenity that characterize the ordinary conversation in such places, the effect upon children cannot be otherwise than most prejudicial to their future career."

One most important clause in the Licensing Bill is that which affects the employment of barmaids. All who have studied the subject acknowledge that the physical and moral atmosphere of the public-house is not one to which young women should be

exposed. I say "young women" because there are very few barmaids over twenty-five years of age. The long hours, the fatigue, the hot polluted atmosphere, soon take away a girl's youth, and many find themselves out of work and with no definite means of employment at a very early age; for the publican usually only cares to keep a barmaid as long as she is pleasing and attractive to his customers, and when he has turned her out it is not easy for her to find respectable employment. It would appear, also, from a statement before the Labour Commission in 1893, that many barmaids drink to excess, and are discharged in consequence. Considering the temptations to which they are exposed, this is scarcely to be wondered at.

Our leading medical journal, the *Lancet*, has declared: "It appears to be true that 'learning the bar' has no tendency to make a woman a better wife or mother, that it often permanently injures her health, and that it exposes her to exceptional risks of seduction and intemperance, with the consequence both to herself and her offspring that these conditions entail." It is very desirable that women should realize the facts in regard to this and other matters relating to themselves and their children and temperance reform, for unfortunately, there are not lacking discordant and, as I think, misleading voices seeking to confuse these high issues.

EDUCATIONAL MEASURES.

Whatever may be the fate of the Licensing Bill, the application of our second force—*education*—will remain as an ever necessary means, not only of maintaining and enforcing legislative enactment, but of guiding individual practice and precept. When all is said and done, education, not only of the mind but of the heart, affords the surest, strongest and best weapon wherewith to meet the powers of darkness. Never in our history has it been more necessary to realize that this matter is one of the highest moral importance.

Education should begin at home, and parents should lay the foundations for habits of self-control. Carlyle has said, "Habit is the deepest law of human nature"; and there is an ancient saying, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Certainly it is interesting at the present day, in connection with insurance and other work, to note how large a number of those who do not indulge in alcoholic

drinks return themselves as "life abstainers," thus showing the permanent influence of sound home tuition.

In the elementary and secondary schools there is great need for more definite instruction in the principles and practice of hygiene and temperance. Much of school teaching fades from the mind of a child, but much remains; and good seed sown upon apparently unlikely soil may ultimately bring forth fruit. Herbert Spencer has defined education as "preparation for complete living," and no child can be said to be completely prepared for the battle of life who leaves school in ignorance of those laws of hygiene and temperance on which the integrity and safety of his personal and domestic well-being depend.

It is not only the children of the poorer classes who need teaching in these subjects, but the boys and girls who attend our higher grade and public schools should also be given sound instruction. Character at this period of life is exceedingly plastic, and anything that tends to train it in a wrong direction should be avoided. Boys and girls before being sent to face the temptations of boarding-school life should be wisely warned, and encouraged to take a firm stand on the side of total abstinence. Habits of intemperance leading to permanent enthrallment have not infrequently been initiated during school days. Parents sending boys to public schools should insist on the exclusion of alcohol from their dietary. In certain of our schools the old custom of giving the boys a regular allowance of beer still exists. These, however, are becoming fewer in number, and Sir Victor Horsley states that at the present time about 72 per cent. of our secondary schools may be said to be conducted on the lines of total abstinence.

Among the working classes in certain districts schools for mothers have been started, and one cannot say too much in praise of this movement. The mothers are instructed in the care and hygienic management of themselves and their infants, and, among other things, have the harmfulness of alcohol pointed out to them. If women are to fight the temptation to drink, they must have a sound knowledge of the nature of alcohol and its harmfulness, and be taught the risks they run when taking it, either regularly as a beverage, or temporarily to relieve feelings of faintness, sickness, and pain.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS.

If we are to progress as a nation, it is essential that men and women—and especially women—should look at the subject in all its bearings. It is only by wide and comprehensive study that we can fully grasp the pervasiveness and powerful, permeating influence of the evil. We need thorough knowledge, sound judgment, and wise action, if we would prevent and arrest the deteriorating influence of alcohol upon our nation.

Above all, we should remember that this subject is not one merely for scientists, statesmen, and educationalists ; it concerns every one of us, and particularly every one of us women. It is a part of that great moral war between right and wrong in which each human soul, whether willingly or unwillingly, has to bear a part. The powers on the side of evil are antagonistic to true parentage and patriotism, and would sacrifice children, home, and country in the lust for vice and greed for gain. We may well hope that the day is not far distant when truth and justice shall prevail ; for then women will look on motherhood as their greatest glory, and little children will enter into their rightful heritage.