ETIOLOGY OF ALCOHOLIC INEBRIETY.

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The causes of alcoholic inebriety may be divided into *predisposing* and *exciting*, and the latter into two forms, *direct* and *indirect*. Inebriety from either of these latter subdivisions may be comprehended under one term, "acquired" inebriety—in contradistinction to those forms of inebriety directly traceable to heredity. This term "acquired" we shall apply to the form of inebriety due to "accidental" causes.

In the great majority of cases inebriety is not voluntarily acquired in the same sense that a person deliberately and as a matter of choice "makes himself an inebriate" so to speak, we use the term acquired, therefore, as we would apply it to other diseased conditions, not necessarily by its use implying a "moral delinquency." The *predisposing* cause of inebriety is latent and has to be called out by some exciting cause, either direct or indirect, usually of a *slighter* nature than would develop an "acquired inebriety."

Heredity is the great underlying or *predisposing cause* of alcoholic inebriety, in the same sense that heredity is the predisposing cause to many diseased conditions—as insanity, phthisis, gout, etc., constituting a diathesis or tendency to special diseases. We can with perfect propriety use the term "inebriate diathesis." We can trace "the pedigree of disease," as Jonathan Hutchinson calls it, in inebriety as in other forms of disease. Dr. Elam affirms that the offspring of the drunkard will inherit either the original vice or some of its countless protean forms. Plutarch, in his essay on "Delays of Divine Justice," asserts this fact; likewise Aristotle and Plato. "The fathers have eaten *sour* grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," writes the Hebrew prophet, and amid the thunders of Mount Sinai the finger of God wrote on tables of stone, "the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children."

Dr. Norman Kerr regards *maternal inebriety* as the chief hereditary cause of inebriety. Statistics show that female inebriates are much more common in Great Britain than with us—in Wales convicted inebriate females to convicted inebriate males stood as 3 to 1, while in the upper classes of English society it is well known that inebriety among females is greater than in America. My own observations trace the hereditary cause in the majority of our cases to an inebriate father.

Hérité croisé, or cross heredity, has been noticed in inherited inebriety—that is inebriate mothers gave rise to inebriate sons; inebriate fathers to inebriate daughters. Giron states that the hunters have a proverb, "*chiennne et chien—chiennne et chien*"—the mother's qualities

in the son, the father's in the daughter. Buffon recognizes that fact, also; personally I have not any observations to give on this point.

Atavism has been observed; that is, where the inebriate tendency or diathesis escaped the second generation and appeared in the third—the grandparents being the transgressors. We notice this fact in other diseases, as consumption, etc.

This is the sequence that is established should an inebriate mother conceive:

1. The foetus may die *in utero*. Miscarriage is a common condition in chronic alcoholism in pregnant women.

2. Should the foetus survive, pass to full term, and a living child be delivered, it may be an idiot or congenital imbecile.

3. Escaping from these conditions, and manifesting a fair amount of intelligence, the child, at or about puberty or earlier, may develop one of the various neuroses—chorea, paralysis, epilepsy, etc.

4. Passing from youth to manhood without any of these manifestations, then suddenly, oftentimes from slight exciting causes, inebriety, or insanity, stand out in bold relief, and the hand of fate, shall we call it? draws the curtain on a life that has struggled from birth with an "inebriate diathesis."

Surely no class of persons in this wide world have a more marked claim on our aid and sympathy than these "*miserables*." Impotent to help themselves; lacking entirely that necessary self-restraint and control that belongs to a healthy, normal constitution. The so-called moderate drinker—we define such a one as a person who drinks habitually every day, so as to keep himself moderately stimulated, and his blood and fluids moderately alcoholized, but is never drunk, never loses his self-control, and is eminently respectable in the general sense of that term. Such a man we assert may be the originator of a long line of inebriates, insane or neurotic individuals. It is a common impression that the bloated drunkard and the debauchee alone gave being to such a progeny, yet so potent, so far-reaching are the effects of alcohol if continuously used with so-called moderation, that who shall say in what quantity it may be used safely, habitually, so as not to affect cell growth in our own organism, and dwarf and degenerate it tenfold in the being whom we may beget. The modified cell in our own organism being much more modified in our progeny.

Dr. Baer, of Berlin, says:

"The extremely delicately organized, very sensitive and easily destroyed construction of the nerve and ganglion cells presupposes for the normal physiological function of this structure the completest integrity of this apparatus, not only anatomically, but also physio-chemically. *Every, even the smallest, inroad* on the nutritive and formative processes produces here a reaction of incomparably graver significance and weightier results than on any bodily tissue."

Dr. Baer refers to the brain particularly, for upon the brain and nervous system alcohol produces its most marked (probably functional) changes, and slight changes in cerebral or nerve tissue mean a great deal more than similar changes in other tissues or organs. We do not feel that we are making an extravagant statement when we say that these slight cerebral and nerve changes may occur in the progeny of so-called moderate habitual users of alcoholic liquors. If so, here is the "initial lesion," the starting point of the long line of inebriates and insane with which this world is cursed.

"Total abstinence" is the safest remedy for this evil, and until it is universally practiced the production of idiots, imbeciles, insane, and neurotic individuals will not cease. But, it may be asserted that the so-called moderate habitual user of alcoholic liquors will not be answerable for "this train of consequences" if he does not exceed his "physiological quantity." Will any one state what is that safe or "physiological quantity?" We shall certainly lay this waif of hereditary inebriety, insanity, and kindred evils at the door of the so-called moderate habitual user of alcoholic liquors.

But it may be added there are cerebral changes produced by causes other than alcoholic; very well, eliminate from the etiology of cerebral disease one of the most potent of these causes—the habitual use of alcohol in any quantity. Not only inebriety or insanity in ancestry, but all hereditary diseases that tend to weaken the nervous system or give rise to a so-called "*congenital neurasthenia*" are the fertile soil from which inebriety may spring. How many persons born with "a tendency to diseased cravings and paralyzed control," as Dr. Clouston aptly styles it, cannot resist the ordinary shocks of life, readily yield to the seductive influence of some narcotic, alcohol, opium, chloral, cocaine, and become veritable narco-maniacs! What a birth-right!

The question naturally arises, must all born with such a diathesis succumb eventually to inebriety or insanity in some form? We are not prepared fully to answer this question. There are in every community those who are aware of their being possessors of this unfortunate tendency. There are also those who inherit a consumptive diathesis. Instances are on record in which those having a consumptive diathesis have, by selecting their environments, as to climate, occupation and habits of life, successfully warded off the inroads of special disease. May it not be that a person who inherits the inebriate diathesis may also escape the usual results of the same in his own person by observing certain rules, regulations and habits of life? Children born of parents who have not yet become inebriates escape, while children born after parents have become inebriates inherit the inebriate tendency.

Children who inherit the mental or physical traits of either inebriate parent are apt to inherit the inebriate tendency, while other children in the same family escape it.

Moral causes are written down as the chief prevalent causes of insanity proper, second only, in productiveness, to alcoholism. How often, as we have stated, do these congenital neurasthenics, these unfortunates born with a diathesis either inebriate or insane, yield to grief, strong mental emotions, loss of friends or estate, and become either inebriates or insane, when such causes would have produced neither result in a healthy, nervous organization. There are other causes, to which we think the term *accidental* might also be properly applied, and where we generally use the term "acquired inebriety," with which predisposing causes have nothing to do, and where we might with propriety say: "Neither did this man sin nor his parents." Whether inherited or acquired; inebriety is produced by certain exciting causes which may act directly or indirectly upon the nervous system.

Direct causes are those that operate directly upon the cerebro-spinal axis, more especially the cerebrum, viz., sunstroke, head injuries, including concussion and fractures of the skull, cerebral syphilis, and brain tumors.

Moral causes producing more or less mental shock act through the different nerves on the great nerve centres, leaving behind them a profound cerebral disturbance that has as its outward manifestation insanity, or inebriety, or some other form of narcomania. Other causes act indirectly by *peripheral irritation* through the afferent nerves on the central nervous system. Such are painful ulcers, dysmenorrhœa, urethral stricture, chronic neuralgias, chronic painful diseases of any nature; tænia solium has been known to cause inebriety, when relieved of the cause the patient recovered.

Any cachexia that debilitates the nervous system, or that may result in neurotic changes, must be classed among the causes of "acquired inebriety." Chronic malarial poisoning, syphilis, etc., are among these.

Neurasthenia, or nerve exhaustion from under-feeding and over-work, especially if combined with mental anxiety, is a fertile source of inebriety or insanity. *Moral causes* produce this condition usually before plunging the patient into one or the other of these conditions. Certain employments, by their unsanitary surroundings, may produce the tendencies that lead to inebriety. The explanation for the reason that any condition producing unrest, insomnia, pain, mental worry, or mental and physical exhaustion, causing the subject of these conditions to turn to alcohol for relief from exhaustion, insomnia, or pain is found in the fact that *alcohol is a stimulant, an hypnotic, an anæsthetic, a triple capacity*; hence the neurasthenic from any causes flies to it for relief. The

victim of dyspepsia and mal-assimilation, for faintness, and sinking sensations, etc.

The one who cannot sleep finds, especially if the cause of insomnia is mental worry, that *alcohol* is to him a true hypnotic. As an *anæsthetic*, alcohol is very pronounced, and in degree will relieve pain as much as opium, chloroform, or ether. The older surgeons recognized this fact, and before the days of modern *anæsthesia* alcohol was used for this purpose. The laity have found out long since this peculiar quality of alcohol, and many victims of pain have sought relief in its *anæsthetic* effects.

The great lesson that all those who attempt to cure the inebriate is that his inebriety has a *cause*, that the inebriety itself is only a symptom of a nascent condition—as some one has said “*neuralgia* is the cry of a diseased nerve,” so inebriety is the cry of a diseased nervous system, produced by causes acting directly or indirectly upon it. “*Tolle Causam*,” the motto of every practitioner in dealing with all forms of disease, should also be the motto of every specialist on inebriety. A careful analysis of the cases of inebriety presented to us would show that there are many cases directly traceable to causes or diseased conditions that can be removed, and upon which the inebriety depends. It is the duty of every specialist on inebriety, every physician who would deal successfully with such cases, to trace out and eradicate the cause of the disorder. We cannot remove the cause in all cases; we cannot eradicate hereditary tendencies or certain lesions of tissue resulting from disease or injury; but, in many instances, we can relieve the patient of a painful or exhausting disease and thus cure his inebriety or other form of narco-mania.

MEDICAL CASES IN THE COURTS.

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THE DANGERS OF FOREIGN IMMIGRATION.

The steamship companies are making a hard fight to avoid the penalties imposed for violations of the recent law passed by Congress against undesirable immigration. The United States officials have refused to allow a considerable number of pauper and vicious immigrants to land, and the agents of the steamship companies claim that it is a hardship to be obliged to care for them until they can be sent back. The conclusive answer of the Government is that the law is clear on the subject, and the companies should not have brought the unhealthy, insane, vicious and pauper immigrants whom it is desired to shut out. If they are brought, any expense connected with their return must be paid by the steamship companies. The figures of immigration are somewhat start-

ling, and the arrivals from countries where the immigrants are of the most undesirable classes show the largest totals.

The countries of Southern Europe are now outstripping Great Britain and Germany in the number of arrivals. During 1890, 40,883 persons arrived from Russia, 29,994 from Hungary, 62,492 from Italy, and 19,737 from Poland. It would be one of the alleviating circumstances of the disgraceful massacre at New Orleans if it checked in whole or in part the present inundation of Italian immigrants. There is hardly any problem connected with the duties of Health Boards which is so serious and so perplexing as how to deal with the insane and sick foreigners who crowd the steerages of the ocean steamships. It seems difficult to devise a practicable scheme for inspection in foreign ports, and it will perhaps only be a heavy pecuniary loss which will teach the steamship companies to exercise some supervision themselves. It is proposed, among other things, to photograph all rejected immigrants, so as to see that they do not slip in at some later time.

COSMETICS AND SPECTACLES IN COURT.

There have been various attempts in New York to convict of illegally practicing medicine a famous dealer in cosmetics, face washes, etc., whose advertisements, consisting mainly of his own face, are to be found in journals all over the country, but his business seems to go on thrivingly. It is somewhat difficult to distinguish clearly where the line between business and professional dealings lies in such cases, but we think it would be a wise stroke of policy if the aforesaid face washer were to become the *bona fide* holder of a medical diploma by a conscientious course of study at some reputable medical school.

In this connection it may be noted that the optician holds a somewhat doubtful position in regard to the practice of medicine. If he furnishes a customer glasses to cure errors in sight, does he practice medicine so as to run counter to the law requiring the possession of a license? If he investigates the troubles of the eye, determines the errors in refraction and prescribes a combination of lenses such as will remedy the affection, has he crossed the line which makes him an offender in the eye of the law? The French courts have recently held to the narrow, technical theory, and have decided that it is illegal for an optician to give pathological information on the state of the eyesight and to prescribe for any visual trouble a combination of lenses. The optician may be a physiologist, but cannot do anything to remedy the troubles he discovers. It is not unlikely that a broader principle of legal construction would be adopted in this country if the question arises, as it may at any time, concerning the status of opticians.