

ART. XXVI.—*The Use and Abuse of Tobacco.*—By JOHN LIZARS, late Professor of Surgery to the Royal College of Surgery, etc. etc. From the eighth Edinburgh edition. 12mo. pp. 138. Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1859.

To determine with anything approaching to accuracy the influence upon the human organism of the habitual use of tobacco, whether in snuffing, smoking, or chewing, will require a far more extended and carefully conducted series of observations than we now possess. In the brochure before us, Mr. Lizars has presented, it is true, an imposing array of testimony, which, at first sight, would seem to prove very conclusively that the habitual use of tobacco is not only productive of some of the most serious and intractable maladies to which man is liable, but that, even when it does not give rise to actual disease, it invariably undermines the vigour of the constitution of those who are addicted to it, destroys their memory, hearing, and vision, and is the cause often of emasculation and cowardice. When, however, we come to examine the quality of the evidence thus adduced, and subject it to a careful analysis, it will be found that much of it consists of mere opinion, based upon one-sided and partial observations, and of isolated facts which admit of an easy explanation very different from that which Mr. Lizars is inclined to give to them.

We can scarcely be required to receive as valid testimony, in respect to the effects of the habitual use of tobacco, the statement of "Dr. Budget," in his treatise on tobacco, quoted by Mr. Lizars, on the 41st page of his essay—which is, that in America "it is no uncommon circumstance to hear of inquests on the bodies of smokers, especially youths; the ordinary verdict being '*died from extreme tobacco smoking!*'" Nor a whit more valid is the following libel upon the American people, gravely quoted by Mr. Lizars, on his 62d page, as a pathological fact, from the *London Spectator* of July 5, 1856: "It is in startling contrast with our ordinary train of thought about the United States, to hear it even whispered as a possibility that the race of men which inhabit that country is undergoing a process of physical and moral degeneration; that the symptoms which we have been accustomed to consider as evidences of growth, are real proofs of decay; that the people are, like medlars, rotten before they are ripe, and that a premature senility is the true characteristic of the great Anglo-Celtic Republic of the West; that such a theory should have been started gives one a shock which does not pass off when the facts upon which it professes to rest are calmly considered. It is said, for instance, that the bulk of Americans live thoroughly unwholesome lives; consume inordinate quantities of spirituous liquor from youth upwards, and at all hours of the day, *smoke and chew tobacco* to excess; eating greedily, and giving themselves no time to digest their food; always in a bustle and excitement; enjoying neither quiet nor rational recreation, nor domestic peace. And how few Americans has any Englishman known, of whom he could say that they were genial or happy! What an *anxious, nervous, haggard expression of face, is that by which we instinctively recognize a Yankee everywhere!* How completely the manners and countenance, and figure of the typical Yankee answers to the account of the *usual life* of the people. What if the bad habits of men and women, acting with a *climate which tends to exhaust vitality*, should really, in a few generations, have produced a palpable inferiority of physique? The positive assertion of this degeneration would, indeed, be most unphilosophic, on a basis of facts such as are patent to common observation; but *that these facts are patent* is sufficient to excite the alarm and sharpen the self-watchfulness of all classes of Americans, who can look forward to the tremendous consequences of a degradation of the national nerve and muscle through intemperance and bad habits of living."

Such is a specimen of one class of facts upon which Mr. Lizars bases his verdict against the habitual use of tobacco. He would seem to estimate as alike in value all denunciations of the "foul weed," as King James denominates it, from whatever source they emanate. He has been very industrious certainly in bringing together the opinions which have been uttered against tobacco, and yet he has overlooked not a few more pointed even than those he has collected, and bearing the appearance of much greater exactitude than do many of them.

We would not for a moment be considered as advocating the use of tobacco in any form, or to any extent—in moderation or to excess. It must be manifest to every one who has made himself acquainted with the active toxicological properties of tobacco, that it cannot be introduced into the healthy living organism, even in very minute quantities, without deleterious consequences resulting; and that these must necessarily be more decided and serious when the article is habitually indulged in. Consequences which, though they may be reduced in speediness of occurrence, and in their intensity, by certain processes to which the tobacco is subjected to fit it for man's use, nevertheless sooner or later make their appearance—effectually subjugating their prey before he is at all aware that his health and strength are completely and too often irrecoverably gone. The exact nature and extent of the deleterious influences which tobacco exercises over its votaries have never yet been carefully investigated, care being taken to exclude all the more prominent sources of error. There has been as much error committed by those who exaggerate the baneful effects of the habitual use of tobacco in chewing, snuffing, and smoking, as by those who, on the other hand, have endeavoured, in our day, to show that tobacco habitually but moderately used is absolutely beneficial to man, by retarding the metamorphosis of his tissues, and thus enabling him to bear up for a time under the depressing effects of deficient diet, or the wear and tear of violent and prolonged muscular exertion. Neither verdict is the true one.

To prove that man may live healthful and vigorous, and bear up under fatigue and privation without the aid of tobacco in any form or quantity, there can be adduced an overabundant mass of positive and indisputable testimony; while, on the other hand, it must be very evident that, in the production of much of the evil that has been attributed to the habitual use of tobacco, it constitutes only one of several, perhaps many, morbid causes. They who are in the constant habit of excessive indulgence in the use of tobacco, by smoking, chewing, or snuffing, most commonly belong to a class of the community by whom the laws of health are not the most implicitly observed, and who incur disease by exposing themselves habitually to other morbid causes than simply an indulgence in the use of tobacco.

We are fully persuaded of the truth of the following general conclusions to which Mr. Lizars has arrived in respect to the effects of one of the most common forms in which tobacco is used in this country:—

“1st. That excessive *smoking*, long persisted in, is injurious to man in the highest degree—physically, mentally, and morally.

“2d. That the commencement of *smoking in early life*, and indulgence in the practice *early in the day*, cannot be too strongly condemned, as leading to most pernicious effects on the constitution.

“3d. That smoking even in what is called a moderate degree is, to say the very least of it, indirectly injurious, more especially to the young; because, it is not denied, it acts as an inducement to drinking—thus becoming the source of intemperance, and all its accompanying evils. It is notorious that the practices are, almost without exception, inseparably associated.”

Although these conclusions relate only to the practice of tobacco smoking, they will apply also to the use of the article in chewing and snuffing. Either of the latter practices, commenced early in life and largely indulged in, is productive of most pernicious results—Dyspepsia, nervous tremors, etc., are of common occurrence in tobacco chewers, while carcinoma of the stomach has in repeated instances been traced to the use of tobacco in the form of snuff.

As to the direct agency of the habitual use of tobacco in the production of some of the maladies which are attributed to it by the authorities quoted by Mr. Lizars, we are still without the amount and kind of evidence necessary to establish the fact beyond any reasonable doubt. That it often acts as a co-agent in the establishment of certain morbid states and conditions is, we think, a very well established fact.

Upon a review of all the well attested observations that have been adduced in reference to “the use and abuse of tobacco,” we can very fully indorse the advice which constitutes the motto of the treatise before us: “Snuffing, smoking, and chewing tobacco are bad habits, and we advise any gentleman, who is not hopelessly abandoned to either, to give it up.”

D. F. C.