

IS HABITUAL DRUNKENNESS A DISEASE?

BY JOHN ORDRONAU, LL. D.,
State Commissioner in Lunacy.

Whatever diversity of views may be entertained touching the nature of drunkenness, all are agreed in regarding it as a self-inflicted wrong to the person, eventuating in a wrong to society. It is not strange, therefore, to find it condemned by the law-making power of every age as a *malum prohibitum* as well as a *malum in se*, intensifying crime and justifying the withdrawal from its subjects of the right of controlling their property. Under these views acquiesced in by the Common Law of England and the United States, it is a strange inconsistency in Legislation, for the State of New York to maintain a State Asylum for one hundred inebriates, while conniving through its excise system at the manufacture of thousands of drunkards, and affixing penalties of various kinds to their conduct. But sentiment is always a disturber of the logistics of legislation, and the moment men undertake to become wiser than their Creator, and to make the basis of legal and moral obligation simply physical, they lose themselves in mazes of self-contradiction and inextricable confusion.

Nothing is more painful in the history of our criminal jurisprudence, nor a greater hindrance to its equitable administration, than the growing tendency to apologize for every sin according to its magnitude. Minor offenses alone are stigmatized with opprobrium, while great ones are casuistically shifted from the regions of human responsibility to the realm of fore-

ordination, and the blame inferentially laid upon the Creator. Struggling virtue may starve unaided and unprayed for in garrets; honest industry may die of a broken heart, wearily waiting for a lifetime in the ante-chambers of success; the toiling artizan may lose his daily bread from an unlucky speculation of his rich but still grasping employer, and the poor scholar hawk his unappreciated essays from door to door in search of sustenance and a sphere of employment, but in none of these suffering mortals will public sentiment interest itself sufficiently to make them objects of special attention. Crumbs may indeed be occasionally thrown to them by some wayfaring Samaritan, but the voice of public prayer will not be heard, and the efforts of the public conscience will not be invoked by press or pulpit in their behalf. The reason is obvious. In a sensational age like our own, nothing that is common-place is interesting. But let a man commit an astounding crime, let him blaze with blasphemy against religion, let him murder with all the fiendish accessories of mutilation and arson, let him throw around his atrocious acts the lurid glare of an irrepressible fatalism, and he becomes at once interesting to a certain order of sentimental minds. In their estimation he is an instrument, divested of his self-hood, and simply performing the bidding of another. What other? Let us see.

Of late a certain order of minds, exploring the more recondite fields of science, have plumed themselves upon the discovery that all moral liberty in relation to human conduct was absurd and illogical. They assert that inflexible laws not only govern matter in its lower chemical affiliations, but even compel the mind to act in settled and irrefragable lines of conduct. They quote Quetelet, to show that a certain number of suicides occur with definite regularity in any given

year, and in any given locality; that a similar number of misdirected letters are annually put into the post-office, thus testifying to a similar numerical recurrence of obliviousness on the part of their writers; and that finally, taking the whole world through, whether in the department of mind or of matter, necessity, and not moral freedom, is the law both of genesis and of action.

This order of things, this new pangenesiis, is both convenient, as well as delectable. It virtually purges man from all sinfulness, and puts the blame upon the Creator for having made him; whereas, in fact, God did not make him as he is, but as he should be, did he but exercise his powers in recovering himself from the downward tendencies that he has both inherited and is in turn transmitting. This is the pivot of the argument, for if God is to be made responsible for the misdeeds of men, because their parent, then Adam, in begetting Cain, was more blameworthy for the death of Abel than was the murderer himself, although God in branding Cain, and not Adam, does not appear to have agreed with these views of our advanced philosophy.

The great center round which now revolves the dogma of human helplessness, fatalism, and irresponsibility, is that of disease. Every vice, every crime is disease, nothing short. And if the crime be so great that human endurance is provoked into an attempt to punish it, the criminal is at once surrounded by an army of sentimental protectors, whose prayers are not so much for his reform, as for scientific light whereby they may explain and extenuate his offense to the world. When insanity can not be invoked, it is something else, but always disease, or that can't-help-it justification which is supposed to admit of no answer.

One of the most striking illustrations of this sentimental humanitarianism, which "like vaulting ambition o'erleaps itself," and thus contradicts those very principles of human liberty which it should, in consistency, sustain, is the present attempt to extenuate habitual drunkenness as a special disease, removing its subjects from the sphere of moral accountability. This is the postulate to the argument which thus framed, converts a vice into a disease, and renders its author and its victim, (both combined in the same person,) irresponsible for his own suffering. Precisely who is to blame for this condition, is not told us. Some say ancestry, some say alcohol, some say nature, but all come back to disease as the *primum mobile*. But what do these coefficients mean when taken separately?

FIRST AS TO ANCESTRY.

Every human being has a dual nature, spirit and body. Which part does he inherit from his parents, and which from God? From his parents he receives his physical type, with certain tendencies to repeat whatever they have practiced to excess. And arises a marvelous vindication of God's attributes in that, since there can be no excess in virtue, so parents, however morally good, beget only negatively good offspring, while sin being a violation of virtue, and every step in it but an excess of declination, the morally unhealthy, often beget offspring lower than themselves in either physical or mental attributes, and sometimes in both, as is seen in the descendants of drunkards and habitual malefactors. In fact, there is evidence all about us of a law of moral gravitation through which a soul not ascending Godwards, is as surely descending morally, for it is here that not to advance is to decline, as Milton has so well expressed it:—

“That in our proper motion we ascend;
Up to our native seat: descent and fall
To us is adverse.”

But what does a drunkard transmit to his offspring? Not drunkenness surely? Drunkenness is a result, a climax to successive stages of previous preparation, the first of which has been voluntarily produced. We will admit, for argument's sake, that a child inheriting a tendency to drink, may have liquor given it of whose effects it was previously ignorant, and thus be made drunk, or desirous for more, or that any one may through ignorance be once poisoned in this way. But does this prove any moral or even physical obligation upon an individual to drink habitually to excess? Is any man *obliged* to do what his parents may have done before him, simply because he feels like doing it? Is there any physical coercion about it, when the individual is left to himself? Who tempts him? Himself. Who goes premeditatedly in quest of the liquor, coolly awaits its preparation, and drains with lingering caress of lip and tongue the juggling draught? Were a sane man to commit homicide with such a show of method and deliberation, would any one call it aught but murder, the highest crime known to the law? And why need a man be a drunkard simply because his father was one. Is drunkenness in the order of nature? A man inheriting consumption has the order of nature working against, as well as for him, and he may not be able to escape his doom, because the material forces of the universe overpower his weakness, just as the same breath of air which fans the fire into a living blaze, may, if too rudely applied, extinguish the spark that is to kindle it. Men must breathe, must digest, and must sleep, in order to live; but has any chemist yet found alcohol in the atmosphere which a man must breathe

constantly, or die; has he found it in the water which a man must drink, or perish from thirst; has he found it in the sunshine which glorifies nature, and gives genetic force to living germs? Has he found it in any of the vital stimuli, without which no living bodies, whatever their rank in nature, can long exist? No. And, admitting even the strongest possible appetite for drink as an inherited tendency, did any one at any time, or in any place ever know of a man becoming a drunkard by spontaneous evolution, and without first drinking sedulously and voluntarily?

The greater rapidity with which alcohol acts upon one man as contra-distinguished from another, does not alter in the least the moral significance of habitual drunkenness. What we insist upon is that no man is by either physical or moral constitution obliged to become a drunkard, and the plea of a drunken ancestor raised by way of demurrer to our right to adjudge him a criminal, is about as weak as would be that of a murderer who should ask an acquittal, on the ground that his father had been a wholesale murderer before him, and he had inherited a tendency to imitate him. Any man may so love the taste, or the effects of liquor, as to prefer to drink rather than to combat the initial impulse towards it, and the same may be said of every other animal instinct. In doing this he only exercises the prerogative of a free moral agent, and because he chooses to do a particular form of wrong, no more proves him to be laboring under disease, than because he chooses to do some other and equally reprehensible act. He has his choice and he makes it, and in order to show that he is not a free moral agent, and to that extent therefore is coerced to drink, one must have evidence that habitual drunkenness, or the love of drink is a natural disease, and not a vice.

THE THEORY OF DISEASE.

Pathologists will hardly agree that a mere craving for alcohol is, in itself, a disease. All organic activity ultimately rests upon the application of certain stimuli to living parts, and organs habituated to stimuli of a particular grade, whether natural or artificial, will, in time, fail to respond to those of a lower degree. Nor are the organs always discriminating in their demands. A pebble in the mouth will provoke the flow of as much saliva as the smell of a sumptuous repast. And in proportion as taste becomes blunted, will the palate tolerate inferior substitutes among stimuli. Hence the demand for fresh supplies of alcohol by the drunkard, not because his system naturally craves it, but because he can not obtain the response and gratification of exaggerated sensation, or the bliss of benumbing narcotism from any other substance in so pleasant a way. Yet if he can not get it, he will put up with something inferior; and if he can get no stimulants at all, he will instead of losing his health, as is the invariable rule with those who are deprived of vital stimuli, enjoy better health. So here is a disease which, the worse it rages in a man, the more surely he will get well of it, if he pays no attention to its symptoms.

Now, if habitual drunkenness be a disease it must be amenable to some, at least, of the laws governing disease. No one at the outset pretends that it exists in any animal but man, and no one pretends that it exists where alcohol is unknown, or unconsumed in some form. Hence it fails to show a basis either in the anatomy or physiology of animal life, what then does it rest upon? It is not due to an atmospheric cause—to germs of infection carried *in fomites*—it is not capable of being produced by cold, starvation, filth, overcrowding and bad air, lewdness, or any *physical* cause whatsoever sav-

ing alone alcohol. Strange disease, forsooth, that has no cause in nature, neither in sun, air, earth, ocean, or waters under the earth. Not even an assumed baleful agency distilled by malignant stars can furnish any physical reason for its existence. Yet if it belongs to the sphere of vitality as acting upon matter, it should move in obedience to some of its laws. Does it? One of the chief and omnipresent results of vitality, whether in health or in disease is, that it expresses conditions above the control of the human will. Its external manifestations may indeed be tampered with, interrupted, and temporarily suspended, but its action is nevertheless continuous, self-consistent, and self-sustaining. Hence no man can will himself into or out of a disease, until vitality has first prepared the proper conditions for its production or elimination. In families inheriting phthisis or insanity, or cancer, *all* the offsprings do not necessarily succumb to the same disease as their parents. Why not, if this physical fate be so inexorable?

Yet we are here presented with an alleged disease called confirmed drunkenness, and described as consuming a man's vitals, and converting him into a mass of organic degeneration; a disease compared with which cancer or malignant erysipelas are merely benign processes of elimination, and which stranger than all, that same confirmed drunkard can, and did produce at will—which he can extend or shorten in duration—which he can accentuate in degree from simple hilarity to swinish stupidity, or unconsciousness, and lastly, and with a superhuman power approaching that of the Deity, can absolutely prevent from *ever* attacking him, if he pleases. Was there ever such another disease known, or over which man was permitted to be omnipotent both to create, and uncreate?

Surely, if in the presence of these allegations of disease we should venture to ask for proofs to sustain them, we can not justly be charged with a design to chop logic, or to split hairs. Diseases have symptoms, else how do we know of their existence? Hence we ask, what are the symptoms, the leading symptoms, of this mysterious malady of the human body which may be produced, regulated, dismissed, or absolutely prevented, at the *will* of its victims? Where is its seat? No one seems to know. Passing strange indeed is this bodily disease that has no local habitation or home, but leads a vagrant life about this tabernacle of flesh. One gentleman indeed located it in the brain, meaning thereby the entire contents of the cranial cavity. But this is rather an indefinite territory and with many mansions in it for excluding the ganglia of special sense, there are seven independent forms of brain substance within the skull, in any one of which this alleged disease may reside. Will the advocates of this theory please to make a choice? We are told by them that the one point of specific differentiation between it and other human distempers is the thirst for alcoholic beverages. This is the pivot of the whole problem, the alpha and omega of this physical riddle. There is no disease recognizable until the appetite for strong drink is formed, and there is none left after the appetite is subdued. The disease, therefore, is a fleeting condition not incorporated in the system, but superimposed by the successive installments of alcohol consumed, and passing from a state of nonentity to one of actuality, at the will of the victim. Doubtless every drunkard suffers from the consequences of excessive organic stimulation, and is to that extent diseased; but the diseases developed in him are objective and visible, hence may be localized and distinguished, and what is particularly

noteworthy, none of them are under the control of his will, except the alleged originator of them all, the appetite for drink.

Again, none of these diseases, or more properly anatomical changes in the structure of organs are the exclusive property of drunkards. Thickening or thinning of the walls of the stomach, chronic diseases of the liver, or brain, or kidney are found in those who have never been drunkards, nor in turn, does the presence of any one or more of these diseases in a person tend necessarily to produce a craving for alcohol, and to precipitate him into habits of drunkenness. In other words those diseases do not inevitably destroy man's moral liberty, and although more common in the drunkard than in others, they do not *per se* produce the evil habit in him because the habit ante-dates the disease, and if so, can not be its result.

Again as soon as the individual has enough of what he *prefers*, and of what gratifies him, and loathes it from satiety, the appetite and the disease vanish together, so that in producing the disease by cultivating it, he extinguishes it at the same time by a surfeit, and it never overpowers him again until he re-awaken it by drink. Does this look as if the germs of this metaphysical disease pre-existed in his body, or does it not look the rather as if he planted them there purposely? If they pre-exist, then they should be able to grow and develop themselves independently of any act or will of his own, which is never so. The problem of self-abasement, or self-redemption is entirely within his control, provided he exercises a continuous determination of his will not to partake. The key to the riddle of this alleged disease lies in a man's own will, and without this will-effort, no physician can cure or even relieve him; with this will-effort, no physician is needed to cure him, for the distemper is always within his own control.

One of the most brilliant and distinguished advocates of the disease-theory surrenders the whole case by an admission of an irretrievably damaging character, when he says that, "The question of the successful treatment of inebriety hinges on the simple fact of *re-formation*, re-formation of the mind and will, as well as of the corporeal man generally." True. These are precisely our views, but they are views which entirely exclude the idea of disease, for what organic disease would reasoning with a man, or re-forming his will, rid him of?

It might enable him to break a habit, but not to re-make organs compromised by indulgence in it; for structural changes involve disease as their cause, and are not controllable by the will, as habit is. Again, there is no disease of any organ of the human body whose natural termination is in confirmed drunkenness. If any one laboring under any disease whatsoever, and which belongs to any age, sex, or organ, becomes a confirmed drunkard, it is because he has made himself so. Knowing it to be a fact that mankind suffer everywhere from organic diseases, why is it that such diseases are never associated with even symptoms of drunkenness except where men first introduce alcohol in excess into their systems? The reason is obvious. Inebriety is not a disease, but a self-provoked temporary perversion of our natural functions, induced for purposes of sinful gratification.

THE SCRIPTURE VIEW.

But whatever men may say, on this or that side of any question of ethics or physical law; however, much they may dispute and divide upon this bearing, or that conclusion of the problem, dare any one doubt that the Author of all being and of Law had forethought in

His omniscience, every possible condition of our humanity? If habitual drunkenness be a disease, who first discovered it? If sin be a disease, who first discovered and gave it that name? Was it God, or was it man? Let us be just. God did not create sin—neither did He create disease, since both are perversions of our original state. But, inasmuch as disease is essentially independent of the human will, and the quality of *wrong intention* can not inhere in matter, God does not punish disease, as disease. Only so far as it is associated with sensuality, does he rebuke the self-provoker of it. He knows better than we the condemnation of physical suffering and mortality under which we labor, nor has He ever turned His face, or withheld the soothing influences of His grace from the sick in body or in spirit who sincerely besought His aid. All through the Scriptures are allusions to His sympathy with the physical sufferings of mankind—now in times of plague—now in times of famine, and nowhere has He shut the gates of mercy against natural and unavoidable disease. Surely Omniscience can not err. He knows best the conditions of matter who was himself the author of it, and what does He say, speaking by the mouths of His inspired apostles. Listen to that well-trained, dialectic Paul, who of all men knew best the weight and worth of words, singly or in context, whose legal training made him the equal of the keenest sophist, and whose inspiration armed him with the irresistible spear of an Ithuriel; hear him as he thunders into the ears of the dissolute Corinthians, this divine message: “Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor *drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Does that look as though

he considered drunkenness a disease? If physical disease had been included among the divine prohibitions which worked a forfeiture of salvation could he by any possibility have overlooked them, and would he not have said, "neither consumptives, idiots, maniacs, dyspeptics, nor blind, deaf, dumb, or cripples shall inherit the kingdom of God?" Yet Paul was not an extremist. He was not a teetotaler. He had no prejudices against wine as a medical agent, for he advises Timothy to use it. But note the critical lawyer and careful guide, "Keep thyself pure. Drink no longer water, but use a *little* wine, for thy *stomach's* sake, and thine *often infirmities*." The reason goes with the advice, preceded by the injunction to keep pure. Pure from what? The context furnishes the key to the answer, pure from drunkenness. And why is drunkenness a vice so reprobated by the Diety? Because of all material conditions it is that one which most emphatically obscures, defaces and degrades the only divine elements within us, the mind and soul.

Will men in the face of these Divine teachings still continue to call habitual drunkenness disease? Will they nurse and treat on pillows of down its subjects, and foster their pride, while at the same time paralyzing their self-reliance, by telling them that they are the victims of disease, inherited or otherwise, and so are not morally responsible for the continuance of the malady? Is there anything more demoralizing to a man than to convince him that he has lost his moral liberty, and is the slave of a blind physical necessity? Let him be taught that his redemption is in his own hands, and the noblest victory that which he accomplishes by his *will*. To say that, his will is subjugated, is not true in the passive sense. He alone subjugates it actively, and if he will but avoid *doing* (that is drinking,) his will-

power to abstain will both continue and strengthen with time. It is a mistake to do too much for weak, sinful men, even by way of charity, for charity with all her tenderness, "rejoiceth not in iniquity," and the truest charity is that which teaches men to win their own independence, by convincing them that they are never morally enslaved except by themselves.



ON THE GERM-THEORY OF DISEASE.

BY THEODORE DEECKE,

Special Pathologist of the New York State Lunatic Asylum.

I.—THE LIFE QUESTION.

No recent theory has given a greater impetus to scientific investigation than that of evolution. We can not avoid its influence, upon the elucidation of histological processes, of the morphological changes in diseased structures, formation and decomposition, and upon the theories of disease, since cellular-pathology, and the germ-theory, have directed attention more and more to the minute forms and phenomena of life. Everything living is subjected to a continual change of its constituents produced by constantly operating causes. The single cell itself represents life, and where heterogeneous cells are bound in a state of interaction, they may support each other, or the process of life of the one may destroy the life of the other. Assimilation and excretion are the two active preservers of life, and as one or the other predominates the phenomena of growth or of decay will occur. Growth or decay! "Where are the beginnings?" "What are the ultimate laws of life?" And again arises the question: