

THE CRIMINAL INEBRIATE WOMAN.

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TO one whose daily task brings him into contact with the female inebriate in three different institutions, there are many pressing evidences of the complexity of causation and treatment. The criminal aspect, which in varying degree attaches to these classes, does not make for any common solution. The habitual drinker, whose offence consists solely in the annoyance caused by her disorderly habits, may in time come under the scope of the Inebriates Act, and may even, after years of debauch, find herself ultimately in the lunatic department; but the relation between crime, drink, and insanity is not constant nor is it very clear. However wasteful and futile may seem the prophylactic measures of the police in sending back to prison the habitual inebriate—sometimes within twenty-four hours of her liberation—there is as yet no other very successful method. The economic aspect is hampered by the absurd importance that attaches to the liberty of the subject, and probably not a little by the over-laboured medical significance given to sociological questions.

CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

A few days ago I carefully examined every female in the prison proper who was convicted of being drunk and disorderly, fifteen in number. Of these only two were mentally defective in the ordinary sense of the term, and they were the only ones who made a really respectable effort to earn a living outside; both were fairly astute hawkers, who at long intervals took drink and became helpless, when their wanderings brought them into the company of the city habitual. The others were able-bodied women, of Irish extraction with one exception, who made for their old haunts when liberated. In spite of deploring their

imprisonment and always promising to do better, they like the life in most cases; they have no work to go to, and, if they have no money, they can, as one of them says, "easily get drink where you can't get food." They have all had reforming assistance in their early stages. They work well during their short terms of imprisonment, and have only the most trifling reports for misconduct. Some of them have already been in the State Inebriate Reformatory, where, however, their conduct was very different. They have a strong sense of the importance of their liberty and a corresponding idea of the proper penalty that should attach to a "simple drunk." The moment they feel that too much of their liberty has been curtailed, they set all authority at defiance, and behave in such a manner that they derive no benefit from their detention, and make the task of their attendants a trying business. Nowhere could there be found treatment better fitted to make up for all that is meant by loss of liberty than that in the reformatory, and yet the treatment of such cases has been a long record of discontent and disorder during detention and failure after discharge. They do not wish for treatment at the expense of liberty. In most cases their plea of "simple drunk" is reasonable as far as it goes, for in this class it usually takes very little alcohol to bring about their disorderly state.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INEBRIATE.

Unfortunately the elementary psychology that has been applied in this dilemma neither explains nor helps very much. The defective self-control that enters into the vicious circle of dipsomania does not entirely meet these other conditions. It is not sufficient to say that their drinking, their irritable conduct, their crimes, may all be put down to the same defect. Most of them return, not to drink, but to the company where drink is to be easily got from those who drink far more, but do not get into prison. Their aversion to authority and their irritation at a long detention are as much to blame for their conduct in the reformatory as their inability to control their tempers. One inmate, who has returned to prison life and there behaves "like a lady" during sentences of twenty days, frequently postponed her destructive protests till five minutes precisely after the reformatory was locked up for the night, just as many of similar protests in prison are reserved till the staff are off for meals. Many inmates who are conditionally liberated under guardians do well till the date of expiring of their sentence, when they know they cannot be returned to the reformatory, and decamp

the next day to their old associates, frequently refraining from alcohol for quite a long time, and returning to prison for other minor offences.

PHYSICAL SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS.

A physical examination of these inmates invariably shows the absence of the usual sequelæ of excessive drinking. Nervous temperaments are as common only as they are everywhere at the present day, while epilepsy and nervous disorders are too few to be of any definite general significance. No one will deny that all this conduct is abnormal; all crime is so, but to fall back upon the very loose explanation of mental defect is very like an excuse for the failure of present methods, and is misleading as to future efforts. Mental defect conveys to the public mind the idea of total irresponsibility, and treatment on that score would be impossible. If self-control can be re-established by moral training the defect disappears, and this is what the reformatory has tried to do in circumstances that cannot be improved upon under detention upon any other grounds. Self-control may be better strengthened in the presence of temptation than in its absence, and longer periods of conditional license after discharge might help much. For those who require long continuous detention, a compulsory labour colony capable of affording graded inducements to better conduct, with deprivation of privileges such as cannot be carried out in one building, may be useful. Anything is better than setting down under the ban of mental defect, doing nothing but the hopeless and trying task of tending them as if they were asylum imbeciles. The inebriate with criminal tendencies in the lunatic department is the most unmanageable of all. There the "sentence" is not only long, it is wholly indeterminate. Too vicious to be allowed full scope, or to be liberated on any form of license, and too sane to be contented with what seems unjust detention, her perversity knows no bounds. It is little wonder that the apparent futility of detention as a means of cure, and the annoyance to the public with the comparatively better behaviour of the inebriate under the ordinary law-restricted periods of liberty, suggests to many "islands" with unrestricted liberty for the delinquent and peace for the community.

RESULTS OF TREATMENT.

The better record of discharges that has been noted lately from the reformatory is due largely to the fact that these undis-

ciplined persons have given place to many cases of cruelty to children. When the offence actually amounts to cruelty there is obvious mental defect or something of the disposition and temperament of the former class. In most cases, however, the crime is, strictly speaking, "neglect of children" by women who repeatedly drink themselves into states of helplessness, and are then not fit to look after themselves even. Few of the latter are mentally defective. Though the histories are not always reliable, and drinking often dates back long before it is admitted, there is a large proportion of these cases that have first taken alcohol as a solace for physical and mental pain, and most frequently in those most depressing states of female pelvic disorder. Very few of them are quite normal in this respect. The effects of alcohol in aggravating, or even producing, these conditions must not be overlooked, nor their prevalence amongst the well-conducted community.

In determining the part that mental deficiency plays in all these cases, one must not forget that the normal self-control that aids in desisting from wrong or avoiding hurt cannot be rashly compared with the exercise of abstaining from that which, though actually a toxic substance, whatever its effects, has attractions and temporary results such as are not conferred by any other easily obtainable drug. If we pinned our faith to mental defect and abnormal self-control, our national drink consumption might well make us afraid.