

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE,

APPOINTED BY THE

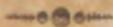
PHILADELPHIA MEDICAL SOCIETY,

JANUARY 24, 1829,

TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE PROPRIETY OF THAT SOCIETY
EXPRESSING THEIR OPINION WITH REGARD TO THE USE OF

Ardent Spirits,

AND TO FRAME SUCH RESOLUTIONS AS THEY MAY DEEM PROPER.



*Published, with permission, by the Pennsylvania Society
for discouraging the use of Ardent Spirits.*



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Report, &c.



The Committee appointed January 24th, 1829, to take into consideration the propriety of this Society expressing their opinion with regard to the use of Ardent Spirits, and to frame such resolutions as they may deem proper,

Respectfully Report,

That they have given their earnest attention to the subject entrusted to their consideration; and hope, in addition to those reflections which naturally arise in a medical mind, from the contemplation of this important public evil, to furnish some interesting estimates from the labours of others. In so doing, they have been in part compelled, from the very nature of the undertaking, to proceed upon the traces of those of their fellow citizens who are now engaged in similar inquiries; but they hope to be able to present the matter in some points of view, and to glean from some documents and other sources of information, which have, as yet, escaped the search of their immediate predecessors.

Your Committee, in inquiring into the destructive effects of drunkenness, and the deep stake which society has in preventing them, have not felt any great room or necessity for an enlarged discussion. The disastrous consequences of this degrading practice are, unhappily, but too apparent to every one who witnesses, with a human interest, the good and evil fortunes of his fellow creatures. We behold them in the destruction of health, strength, riches and respectability, and, according to the views which religion has given us of the counsels of the Supreme, in the future misery of an immortal soul.

To no class of men is this dreadful concatenation of distresses more visible and more forced on the attention, than to physicians. The ordinary course of our engagements, which brings us so perpetually in contact with disease and poverty, obliges us likewise to see, in the production of these evils, the prevalent and steady influence of spirituous liquors. Besides a numerous class of maladies, of frequent occurrence, to which their use obviously and in a peculiar manner gives rise, they are unquestionably the indirect

cause of a still larger number. Their direct effect in exciting to action an existing tendency to gastric and hepatic disorders, or in creating a disposition to them among individuals exposed to the other causes of these morbid derangements, has often been commented on by writers of authority. Nearly as large a share may, with safety, be ascribed to intemperance in the production of diseases of the brain. Although, from the best authorities, it would now appear, that the agency of this cause in producing insanity has been over-rated,* yet, in epilepsy, apoplexy, palsy, hypochondriasis and hysteria, its destructive effects cannot be mistaken; while it has exclusively to itself the responsibility of creating that peculiar and frequently mortal affection, known by the names of delirium tremens, or, less properly, mania à potu. Beyond comparison greater, too, is the risk of life undergone in nearly all diseases of whatever description, when they occur in those unfortunate men who have been previously disordered by these poisons. In attempting to judge of the probability and proximity of death, besides age, strength and general constitution, the physician who wishes to avoid the probable sources of error, always finds it necessary to inquire into the temperance of the subject. The intoxicated are also incomparably more exposed to the ordinary causes of disease, from the imprudence to which their privation of reason and judgment so uniformly gives rise. Thus they suffer from simple exposure to the weather, from falling asleep in improper situations, and from the want of food. In times of pestilence, those who indulge in intoxication are more severely affected, and retain less stamina to resist the onset of the malady; and to all this may be added the deep and powerful influence which mental anxiety, remorse and mortification, during their calmer hours, unquestionably exert, in sharpening the pangs of disordered nature, and exhausting the vitality intended to support them.

One of the most destructive examples of the aggravation of mortality from this source, is the liability of persons of intemperate habits who meet with fractures and other severe hurts, to the disease called delirium tremens, or mania à potu. Great numbers of accidents annually occur among the labouring classes, of which those who are temperate in their habits regularly recover, while their intem-

* Fodere. Also, *vide* the facts collected by Pinel and Esquirol.

perate mates, with equal original injury, sink under a complication of the latter with that affection which arises from their use of spirituous liquors. For the truth of this remark, it is enough to appeal to the experience of any one of those who attend our hospital and alms-house. It will there be found an observation familiar in the mouth of every one, that the intemperate perish of diversified injuries in a ratio altogether disproportionate to the mortality of the other sufferers; a remark which ought to have peculiar terrors for the intemperate among the poor; as the labourer thus finds himself unexpectedly deprived of the safeguard of that strong constitution upon which he depended for his power of supporting hardships, and for his recovery from those accidents to which, from his way of life, he is peculiarly exposed.

This catalogue of destruction may be wound up with those rare and dreadful events, so full of wonder and horror that credulity seems tasked to believe their actual occurrence, the instances of *human combustion*. So strange and incredible do these narratives appear, that the reader may well be excused from lightly yielding credence to their reality; though evidence, the most authentic in appearance, has accumulated to such an extent that we feel constrained to admit them true. From such various quarters do the accounts reach us, so independent are they of each other, so free, in many cases, from visible motive for deception, so public in the inspection of the scorched remains, and accompanied, in one instance, with such authentic judicial forms, that we cannot avoid considering it as proved that the bodies of those who have indulged, through a long life, in habits of intoxication, are liable to become food for the destroying element, and to be consumed while yet alive. While, in our investigations of physical causes, we are bound to adhere, as closely as possible, to the comparison of facts with others previously known, we can hardly refrain from tracing, in this terrific form of death, the direct and avenging interference of an insulted Deity.*

If such be the truly distressing amount of morbid evils to which the unhappy propensity alluded to exposes its victims, its agency in the production of poverty and dishonesty is not less obvious to

* See Appendix, Art. I.

the members of the medical profession. We have frequent and melancholy opportunities of witnessing, in the abodes of the unfortunate, the manner in which pecuniary difficulties are generated; and we believe it is the universal sentiment of those who possess such means of information, that the greater portion of the existing distress in this country, is the result of the employment of ardent spirits. To make good this strong assertion, it is only necessary to recount the poverty which is the result of diseases produced by intemperance, the actual loss of time consumed in spirituous potations, the money expended on them, which, small in each single instance, amounts, by its thousand repetitions, to a heavy draught on the funds of the labouring poor, the loss of character and consequently of employment, the destruction of punctuality in pecuniary engagements, and, as a necessary result, of credit, and the domestic quarrels and waste of the household. Against the combined action of all these causes no human industry can successfully contend; and we accordingly find the habitually intemperate unable to discharge their engagements, *always* in want, and, if they do not either yet possess a fund to expend, or receive assistance from their friends, always in actual suffering.

Your Committee are far from willing to cast reflections upon the poor. There is no station in life which is more entitled, intrinsically, to our high respect, than honourable poverty. Yet, though poverty be the infliction of Providence, and the natural condition of the whole human race, it is notorious in the moral world, as the cruelest thing of misfortune, that it subjects us to temptation; and it cannot be doubted that we meet with that species of moral offence which consists in incurring obligations beyond the power of the individual to discharge them, most frequently as the result of pecuniary distress, and that distress, very often, if not generally, as the consequence of the use of spirituous liquors.

In order to enable the members of this society to judge, at a glance, of the extent of physical evil, in the shape of *disease*, induced by intemperance, your Committee have thought it proper to refer, for this purpose, to the last annual bills of mortality for the City and Liberties of Philadelphia. Your Committee are well aware, that, in order to execute this task with the best approximation to accuracy of which the case admits, it would be necessary

to induce a number of physicians, practising among diversified classes of society, to keep a register with this especial object. Each individual so employed should carefully note down the whole number of deaths occurring under his care during a year; and designate that proportion of them which may, in his opinion, be fairly referred to the cause alluded to. Such a register should be carefully made to embrace those who have passed out of his charge during the continuance of their last illness; unless where the physician who succeeds him is engaged in preparing a similar record. For reasons easily apprehended, this course is indispensable to the formation of a just numerical average. Documents thus obtained would possess a character for accuracy truly valuable; not that they would obtain that absolute certainty which, in this case, is really impracticable, but that they would furnish the nearest approach to it. Your Committee, therefore, would respectfully but earnestly press upon the members of this society the formation, individually, of such a register.

In the mean while, in the absence of such more authentic materials, your committee have thought it advisable to offer those judgments and opinions which they have been induced to form from their experience as practitioners, of the proportion of the deaths enumerated in the bills of mortality which may be reasonably ascribed to intemperance. In doing this they have experienced great difficulty, and they are well aware that their conclusions must necessarily possess a character highly conjectural. By running over the diseases mentioned in the bills, and making an estimate of each, the total amount averages about one sixth of the whole; or 700 deaths in 4292. A very large proportion of accidents, such as burns, fractures, &c. are referrible to this cause; as also are an equally large share of the diseases of the head, as apoplexy, epilepsy, &c. The deaths reported as from drinking cold water, are, your committee believe, not unfrequently really produced by drinking spirituous liquors; which are often given as a remedy where the disease in fact is apoplexy, or at least, congestion in the brain. A considerable share of the fever cases are, they apprehend, owing, directly or indirectly, to the same cause, as well as various inflammations named in the bills. In this estimate are included those cases which were not originally occasioned by intemperance,

but which owe their aggravation and mortality to that source; and it is also believed that a portion of the still-born children receive their death from the intemperance of the mother, or from violence and other mal-treatment received by the latter and produced by the same cause.

To confirm the impression that these opinions and estimates are not exaggerated, by exhibiting an extent in the operation of the cause which may appear adequate to such an effect, your committee take the liberty to abstract a statement of the number of houses in which distilled liquors are sold, from papers which have been already laid before the public. In their opinion, the results are surprising and alarming; they cannot be too often presented to view, and are quite applicable to the subject of their present inquiry. By tables collected under the direction of the Temperance Society of this city, and published in Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania, of the 7th of February, 1829, it appears, from an actual enumeration made in the Summer of 1828, that the City of Philadelphia, the Northern Liberties, Penn Township, Kensington and Southwark, estimated from the taxables at a population of 159,480 individuals, contained no less than 1239 houses in which spirituous liquors were sold; or one for about every 129 persons of all ages and both sexes. In one section, the proportion runs as high as one to every 79 persons, or, of individuals above 18 years of age, one to every 39. That is, there are no 39 persons grown up in the district who have not a tavern to support; or there is a tavern to every twenty men!

Corresponding impressions with regard to the extent of the evil may be gained from the replies to one of the queries circulated by the committee of superintendance appointed by the Citizens of Philadelphia, at a town meeting held Feb. 17th, 1817, "to devise measures for the relief of the poor and the prevention of pauperism." Circulars were sent, on this occasion, to those individuals who were engaged in the management of the various public and private charitable institutions in the city; as well as to such other persons as were deemed capable of imparting the desired information. Public attention being, at that time, strongly directed to this important subject, replies were very generally obtained from the individuals so addressed; no less than thirty out of thirty-three guardians

of the poor alone responding to the printed letters. From the official abstract of the replies thus obtained, we extract the following query, and its general answer.

“Query 10. Is, or is not, the use of ardent spirits the cause of poverty; and do, or do not, those who receive, expend the means afforded for their subsistence in purchasing that article?”

“Answer. All the reports, excepting in one or two instances, reply to the former part of this query in the affirmative. The following extracts, written by different persons, will exhibit, at one view, the almost universal sentiment upon this subject.”

The authors of the abstract alluded to, then proceed to insert nine extracts from different reports, all strongly inculcating the prevalent agency of this cause of poverty.*

Your Committee, in order to correct or confirm their views on this subject, resolved to make an application to the members of the late commission appointed, under a law of Pennsylvania, to investigate the causes of pauperism. Some of their number accordingly waited on Messrs. Vaux and Pettit. From these gentlemen it is unnecessary to state that they met with every politeness, and the strongest disposition to favour their inquiries. The documents collected by the commission are in the hands of individuals amply competent to the task, for the purpose of forming an abstract, which we hope will be soon laid before the public in a most valuable weekly journal, to which we have already had occasion to refer. The members of the Commission above named, in their private capacity, fully concurred in the views which we have expressed in the preceding paragraphs; and this testimony is the more valuable from the very enlarged advantages which they possessed for forming a judgment on this highly important subject. In the mean time, we were allowed to inspect a large mass of documents, furnished by the secretaries of various charitable associations in this city. Many of these omitted, in their reports, to reply particularly to that query which related to the causes of the distress which the societies were intended to relieve; and some of the latter appear, by their regulations, to exclude the intemperate from the benefit of their funds. The reports of nearly all the others mention ardent spirits among the principal causes of poverty; and several of them in very strong language.

* See appendix, Art. II.

Having become thus impressed with a sense of the enormous extent of the evil they are investigating, your Committee propose next to consider the means which we possess for its discouragement and prevention; intending to conclude by some remarks which appear naturally to flow out of the peculiar situation of members of the medical body.

The *means* of preventing intemperance have been recently the subject of considerable public attention and some discussion. They naturally divide themselves into the *medical* and the *moral*.

Of those means afforded by the art of medicine for the cure of that unhappy propensity but little was known till of late years. A few scattered and isolated cases, frequently resting on doubtful authority, are all that can readily be found prior to the inquiries of Dr. Cramer. This physician published, in Berlin, in 1819, an essay on the passion for intoxicating liquors; which he found accompanied by so many morbid symptoms, as, in his opinion, to justify the considering and treating it as a disease. Other cases were collected by Dr. G. Adersbach; and Dr. Hufeland, the editor of a German Medical Journal, of high character, has given the malady the name of *dipsomania*;* which may be paraphrased by "insane thirst," or "thirsting insanity." The catalogue of symptoms, most of which, indeed, can be recognized in many of our own drunkards, your committee will not abstract. Drs. Cramer and Adersbach found this affection varying in duration from a few days to several weeks, and, in different cases, either continued or intermittent, mild or severe, mortal or terminating in recovery. They combated it with bleedings of various amounts, with warm baths, the semicupium, and acidulated watery drinks. They found it the most successful practice not suddenly to deprive the patient of the whole of his accustomed stimulus, but to make the change gradually; and they derived advantages from replacing it by substances capable of deceiving the taste; such as potions made with a combination of alcohol and ether, or ether itself, administered on lumps of sugar, to be held in the mouth. Opium was frequently found necessary during the cure.

Of a date subsequent to the above is the following paragraph, quoted from Johnson's Medico-Chirurgical Review for September 1824; and in this is contained all the information which we possess,

* From *dipsa*, thirst, and *mania*, insanity.

from a foreign source, relative to the particular use of sulphuric acid as a cure for intemperance: "In one of the foreign Journals it is stated that a German physician, M. Brühl Cramer, has discovered that the exhibition of diluted sulphuric acid, with occasional bitters, causes, at length, such a disgust towards brandy and other spirituous potations as to eradicate the disposition to inebriety." This brief hint was sufficient for our inquiring and indefatigable townsman and fellow-member of this society, Dr. Brincklé. What indeed appeared "like bread cast upon the waters," became, in his hands, productive of fruitful results. In his essay on the subject, contained in the fourth volume of the North American Medical and Surgical Journal, published in this city, he gives the highly successful results of a number of cases in which he administered the acid with this view. Your committee early felt that they could not do justice to the subject of their inquiries without requesting of Dr. Brincklé the inferences afforded by his further experience. Accordingly, one of their number addressed him a note, to which was promptly returned the polite reply which they have inserted in the Appendix to this Report.*

In addition to the remarks of Dr. Brincklé, your committee have collected but little. Some of their number have made trials of the sulphuric acid; and success has appeared, in a part of the cases, to crown their efforts; while the event was, in other instances, doubtful and disappointing. The general impression which they have received from all which they have seen and read on this subject, is, that the sulphuric acid is well worthy of further trials in cases of habitual intemperance; while, on the other hand, its usefulness is greatly diminished by the frequent unwillingness of patients to take it, by the difficulty of disguising it, and by its occasional failures. They are happy to state that they have met with no instance in which this remedy appeared productive of injury. It is hardly necessary to add that they repose every confidence in the accuracy and candour of Dr. Brincklé's statements. On the whole they will conclude with recommending the members of this society, to make further trials of the acid in conjunction with the other medicines advised by Drs. Cramer and Adersbach.

* See Appendix, Art. III.

With regard to those remedies, the obvious and undeniable operation of which takes place by the production of nausea, you committee find themselves in nearly the same situation. They are obliged, as before, to draw a large share of their information from Dr. Brincklé. They have heard of one or two successful and corroborative cases; and they can adduce trials from their own practice, in which, however, the effect was doubtful. The administration of nauseating remedies for the purpose of producing an aversion to spirituous liquors, would seem to harmonize well with that practice, highly recommended by some, of treating delirium tremens by the same articles. Your committee have only to add, as before, the expression of their anxious wish for the collection of additional facts.

In the class last mentioned is generally ranked the popular remedy of Dr. Chambers. Of this your committee have learned but little. It is generally sold from shops to individuals who employ it without the presence of experienced and scientific men. They are disposed to view a medicine composed of such active ingredients, and empirically used, with great mistrust. It is believed that the principal beneficial effects of this compound are owing to the presence of emetic tartar. One of their members states that two or three cases are known to him in which death followed the administration of this remedy as rapidly as it succeeds that of a dose of arsenic. It cannot be denied, on the other hand, that the use of this article has, in some instances, been followed by an aversion to liquor enduring for a more or less considerable interval of time.

With regard to the *moral* means of diminishing intemperance, the first and most obvious course, the institution of such public measures as are calculated to raise the price of spirituous liquors, would appear to be forbidden by the political state of the country. It is understood that a majority of our fellow citizens have expressed their opinions in opposition to the proposed plans, in such a manner as effectually to prevent any reasonable expectation of their speedy adoption. We apprehend, then, that those are in the right who aim at the suppression of intemperance by acting, in a gradual and persevering manner, upon public opinion; that the friends of sobriety should exert their private influence in their proper sphere, and endeavour thus to increase their numbers, in hopes, by this means, to

accelerate the approach of a period, when a decided and overwhelming majority of the people shall agree with them in their sentiments on this subject. The government of this nation is emphatically one of the people; and when the opinion of the community is once distinctly expressed, the legislature will follow it of course. It is therefore to the private and personal influence of each individual that your committee think the task should be referred; and upon physicians it seems peculiarly imperative, both from their frequent opportunities, their knowledge of the case, which is unquestionably greater than that possessed by any other class of citizens in the community, from the respect attached to their character, and from the wide extent of their influence. Every member of the nation, and, in particular, every physician, aware of the magnitude of the evil, and of the existence of a simultaneous effort to reform it, has it in his power to exert a salutary influence among his acquaintance, by precept, where that is admissible, and universally by example. It is, however, to the latter that we conceive it particularly important, at the present time, to direct the attention of the members of this society. Physicians unquestionably possess greater opportunities for bestowing useful advice on this subject than most other citizens. It is frequently their solemn and imperative duty to forewarn the individual, who tempts the fatal bowl, of the danger he is incurring to his health and his existence; and where their character is calculated to command high personal respect, they are enabled sometimes to give moral and prudential admonition. Yet to the physician these opportunities are frequently, perhaps generally, forbidden by that proud feeling of independence which must be respected, as it forms a necessary ingredient in the character of a high-spirited and honourable population. While the moral adviser, then, finds his arguments always augmented in their influence by a corresponding example, in a variety of other instances, the example is the only means which he can employ.

It is, indeed, surely to be hoped, that the great body of the profession do, at the present moment, discharge this obligation, by refraining from the intemperate use of alcoholic liquors. Yet it is the lamentable fact that instances exist in which this is not the case; and mortifying and distressing are the occurrences to which these exceptions have given rise. But it is not with the unfortunate victims,

as your committee apprehend, that labour can be employed with advantage. The instances of recovery from habits of intoxication, though such sometimes occur, are unhappily so rare as to leave but little encouragement for efforts in these quarters. The united force of all the moralists, and the concentrated voice of numerous friends are too commonly unavailing to arrest the degrading practice. It is then to those who are as yet free from this unfortunate propensity that we are to appeal. With these it may be said that our labour is unnecessary, and that they already furnish the example of which we speak. Yet we apprehend in this point a still more complete and impressive effect is to be desired; and that those of our fellow-citizens are in the right who, at various times, and particularly at the present moment, endeavour to effect the entire disuse of intoxicating liquors. Between the moderate and the immoderate employment of these substances, there is no clear dividing line. They are only separated by insensible and ambiguous gradations; to slide through which is the natural propensity of every one who indulges in them in any degree. Originally adopted for the purpose of producing a vivid impression on the nervous system, and one which forms no part of the gratification of any natural appetite, ardent spirits are notorious for the facility with which the human frame becomes familiarized to them; and, in order to renew the sensations enjoyed at first, it becomes indispensable to increase the dose. This change takes place by such slow degrees that the patient is seldom aware of the fact, and finds himself subjected to an imperious craving, where he fancied he was only enjoying an indulgence capable of being regulated by a proper discretion. It is desirable, therefore, in order to effect a salutary reformation in this respect, to disuse spirituous liquors altogether. It has been well remarked that no man ever became a drunkard without first using intoxicating liquors moderately. On those who consume them immoderately, efforts are generally wasted; and it is only among those who are as yet temperate in their employment that benefit is to be expected.

These arguments, or a part of them, have been extensively used among our fellow citizens; amidst whom physicians have frequently been considered as holding the same stake and incurring the same responsibility with men of other professions. Yet there exist considerations which may well induce the question whether we do

really stand on the same ground with others. Are not physicians in various ways the *means* of introducing habits of intoxication? Are they not, in too numerous instances, instrumental in leading their patients into this destructive practice, by the long continued use of these substances as a medicine, and by speaking of them and recommending them as restorative? How many deplorable cases of intemperance, in men of previously irreproachable characters, trace their origin to a long course of stimulation for the cure of typhus fevers and the recovery of strength! There was a time when this evil existed to a far greater degree than it does at the present moment. We allude to the epocha of the Brunonian theory. Never, probably, was there an instance where the hypotheses of a single man produced such powerful effects upon the minds of his cotemporaries, in disorganizing useful science, and leading the wise into error, as in this celebrated, but ill-starred medical doctrine. After suffering mortification and persecution during his lifetime, Dr. John Brown was destined, after his death, to exert a splendid but destructive influence upon the great mass of the medical profession. By this strange aberration of unfortunate genius, it was taught, that inflammatory affections of different parts of the body, were, comparatively, of but little importance. Pleurisy, pneumonia, phrenzy, &c. derived almost all their severity and danger from the general affection of the whole body with which they were accompanied. This affection was pronounced to consist, in nine cases out of ten, in direct or indirect debility; and this debility was to be met with powerful stimulants. The practice corresponded with the theory; and the wild, though ingenious pages in which the latter is disclosed, but too much exhibit the sincerity of the candid author. Stimulation, to the most extravagant extent, was often the notorious consequence; and at last the patient was not unfrequently landed in habitual drunkenness. Among those diseases in which weakness was most conspicuous was *typhus fever*; and Brown introduced a habit of pouring strong liquors into patients suffering with that malady, which is thought by many physicians to have left a perceptible effect upon the usages of the present day. Your Committee are inclined to the opinion that more stimulation is even now occasionally resorted to than conduces to the patient's speedy recovery; such a prac-

tice being liable to increase and prolong inflammations of the brain, stomach, lungs and other parts of the body, some of which affections occur so generally in fevers. They decline embarking in any pathological or therapeutical discussion; which course they conceive not adapted to the furtherance of their present duty. They take the occasion, however, to remark that what has been called the *physiological medicine*, goes still farther than any former doctrine to discourage the unnecessary employment of spirituous liquors.

Whatever be the practical impression of the physician, and wherever he may be disposed to draw the line at which he would limit the employment of stimulants, your Committee are strongly impressed with a sense of the moral duty of avoiding the unnecessary use of these substances; and, in particular, of employing the weight of personal character to discountenance the future repetition of it. This is alike obligatory for the sake of the patient's health, prosperity and moral character. If the physician recommend spirituous substances, and particularly if he characterize them as a strengthening remedy, calculated to relieve the popular fear of weakness, it is the more incumbent on him to obviate, as far as he can, the mischievous consequences of what he has done, by direct cautions to his patient. He should never leave in the hands of those who entrust him with the care of their health and lives, a poison, equally destructive to their moral and physical nature, but bearing an unqualified recommendation upon medical authority. Yet even here, in the opinion of your Committee, his obligation does not end. It is not sufficient that he should himself avoid the needless employment of these substances in his practice, and, where he is obliged to prescribe them, afterwards make his patient aware of the danger he has incurred; the medical attendant should, where possible, see his patient safely to the end of his stimulating course. Without this, he incurs the blame of having led a human being who has asked his advice into serious danger, and forsaken him before the peril was over.

The importance of these precepts has been fully appreciated by several of those wise and good men who have preceded us in the profession of medicine. The late Dr. Fothergill informed an American physician, then in London, of the success with which he

had treated a slow typhoid fever by means of brandy. He, some time afterwards, took pains to converse particularly with the same individual for the purpose of cautioning the latter against the remedy Dr. Fothergill had himself recommended; as all the patients who had thus taken it by his advice had subsequently become habitually intemperate. This fact we have upon the authority of the physician himself alluded to—the venerable Dr. Thomas Parke; who, through his long and useful life, has steadily continued to inculcate the duty of physicians to discourage spirituous liquors. In the same list may be included our lamented Rush, Wistar, and Griffiths.

There exists a class of cases in which stimulants appear to be really necessary; and in these your committee conceive a sound discretion will frequently discover opportunities of substituting those of another character to the seductive agents which are the source of so much vice and misery. Red pepper, hartshorn, and, where action on the nervous system is required, opium, assafœtida, and camphor, will frequently render these articles entirely unnecessary; while, in other cases, they may be equally superseded in their restorative effects, by pure or aromatic bitters, preparations of iron, and acids, by nourishing food, or, again, by fermented liquors, which contain alcohol in a less concentrated and safer form.

The principles we have above stated relative to the use of ordinary distilled liquors, are in every respect as applicable to the employment of *tinctures*; the spirituous nature of which alone forms a strong objection to them as a class of remedies. There is no doubt that many cases of intemperance have owed their origin particularly to the use of bitter tinctures. Considering the small amount of useful medicinal matter which enters into these latter compounds, and the large proportion of alcohol they contain, it appears to admit of a fair inquiry whether they would not be better expunged from the pharmacopœia. To attempt to cure intermittent fever by the unaided powers of tinctures of bark and quassia, would be considered unwise by any one; while, at the same time, these are abundantly sufficient to produce a habit of intemperance, and, not very unfrequently, are really its efficient cause. One of your committee has met with a case where an individual of the most correct and delicate deportment, actually acquired habits of intemperance;

and was brought to the brink of the grave, by the means, unsuspected by herself, of the *compound spirits of lavender*.

A powerful means of counteracting intemperance consists, as your Committee apprehend, in promoting the use of such innocent substitutes for spirituous stimulants as are calculated to restore the natural feeling of health in persons exhausted by fatigue. One of these, which has had, as they believe, a very great and beneficial influence, consists in the cheap and generally diffused luxuries of Seltzer and Soda-waters. In very many cases, it is thought that coffee might be advantageously employed with this object. Another substitute, to which the industry of our citizens has shown our climate to be well adapted, is the lighter wines. The remark has been often made that the countries in which these are raised in large quantities do not abound with instances of intemperance; and it is to be hoped that such will soon be much more than at present the condition of the hills of Pennsylvania, Maryland and New-Jersey; a change which, it is believed, may take place without any injury to our agriculture. The stronger wines, and particularly Madeira, are known to be combined with so large a proportion of brandy that they are in this respect rather objectionable than advantageous.

In the discharge of the duty to which we invoke their attention, physicians are obliged to encounter various popular prejudices, which greatly tend to the perpetuation of intemperance, and the abolition or correction of which is therefore much to be desired. These, in common with many other opinions, entertained both by the ignorant and the educated, are the result of the medical theories of the last age; and it therefore seems peculiarly incumbent on physicians to do their utmost to remove them; both as a debt due from the medical profession, and for the purpose of demonstrating to an incredulous world that our doctrinal opinions, instead of a succession of mere fluctuations, have undergone a real advancement. One of these prejudices, and perhaps the most important, is the idea that spirituous liquors have a powerful and useful tendency to increase strength.

Immediately after swallowing a spirituous draught, the functions of the mind undergo a lively and irregular excitement; the imagination is quickened, in a majority of persons cheerful emotions are

produced, and the individual is so occupied with his internal sensations that he loses a portion of his consciousness to impressions received from without. His passions, which constitute the impulse urging him to exertion, are increased in their force and vivacity; while his reasoning powers, partaking in the general jubilee, become more quick and less accurate in the execution of their task. It is in this state of things that the intemperate labourer delights: he executes his toil or converses with his friend with a cheerful mind and a disregard of actual hardship or future calamity; he feels nothing but his present strength, and leaves care till the morrow. These halcyon moments, however, are soon followed by a change. The acquisition of strength is found to be only temporary; dullness, both of the passions and intellect succeeds, together with a diminution of the muscular power; a tendency to sleep ensues; and it is seen that the subsequent exhaustion is in reality proportionate to the previous excitement; in short, that the drinker, instead of *increasing*, has only *used up* his vital powers, and is now weaker than before. Hence it is that, although spirituous liquors create a temporary energy, which many, under some circumstances, possibly enable him who drinks them to accomplish more than at another period, yet the reverse is the case in the long run; and, both as regards a consecutive series of daily labour, and the prolongation of life, alcoholic drinks are a real disadvantage. The experience of all those who have employed numerous workmen, and who have made comparative trials, is decidedly confirmatory of what we here allege. It is, we believe, uniformly found that those individuals who have refrained from spirituous potations have actually done more work than they themselves had performed at a time when they indulged in this injurious practice. Along with this come corresponding improvements in health, order, neatness, and domestic comfort; advantages, which, though they preach loudly in favour of abstinence, yet do not immediately bear upon the question at present before us. Not only, however, is there a greater absolute amount of work done, under equal circumstances, by those who abstain, but the work which is done displays marks of a superior condition of the mental faculties of the labourer—it is not simply more in quantity, but better adapted to the purpose in view. Thus it appears that although spirituous liquors may excite to greater exertions in a

task which requires but little assistance from the intellect, and may thus the better enable men to carry some particular points, yet, in the course of time, they really occasion a waste of strength, while, even in the sudden and temporary effort, the range of their applicability is confined within narrow limits. They may augment the headlong and unthinking courage which flings the horseman upon the bayonet; but wo to the array whose directing heads are under such influence. They may encourage and assist the writer to bolder flights of imagination; but his temulent efforts will betray the Hippocrene from which he derived his inspiration. In all the arts which benefit the human race, whether by accumulative toil, ingenious fancy, or grave and profound reflection, your Committee believe that stimulating potations will always be found to produce a heavy diminution of usefulness. In mechanical strength, in the capability of enduring hardship and fatigue, in the force and clearness of the intellectual powers, the intemperate can stand no comparison with individuals endowed with the same natural advantages, who abstain totally from the use of ardent spirits.

Similar results are also met with as regards the effects of spirituous liquors on the prolongation of life; and, in general, popular opinion sufficiently bears us out in the assertion. We sometimes, however, hear it said, when physicians would proscribe the stimulating draught, that facts may be produced in direct opposition to this opinion; and that hundreds have been known, who, though almost daily intoxicated for year after year, have yet arrived at a great age, and enjoyed the same good health as those who have followed the strictest rules of temperance, or who even, like Cornaro, have lived by weight and measure. Some, but very few, instances of this kind we grant might be adduced; but they form no proportion to the number who fall early victims to what they may perhaps have considered a moderate indulgence. Exceptions are said to prove the correctness of a rule. A seaman has been known to fall from the mast-head of a ship, and to be taken from the deck with his limbs uninjured. To attempt to infer, from the instances above alluded to, that spirituous liquors are not unfavourable to longevity, would be exactly as rational as to conclude, from the sailor's escape, that it was equally safe for his ship-mates to repeat his desperate experiment. It is the unanimous experience of every record-

ed age that temperance in all our actions is the only probable means of insuring a continuance of life and health, and of prolonging to an advanced period our physical strength and the integrity of our mental powers; and in no respect is this more emphatically true than as regards the use of alcoholic liquors.

The question might here be asked, "to what extent may the use of distilled spirits be indulged in without injury to the constitution, or what is the smallest quantity capable of producing pernicious effects?" This query is very readily answered. Under ordinary circumstances, ardent spirits, in any quantity, whether great or small, are injurious to the health of the system. Pure water is confessedly the most natural and most proper drink of man; but if one more stimulating is required, it should be sought in the less pernicious class of fermented liquors. Your committee would not wish to be understood as classing among the intemperate those who are in the habit of occasionally making use of moderate quantities of ardent spirits. Nevertheless, they cannot avoid remarking that such a practice is productive of bad effects, to a less extent, it is true, and more slowly, but not less surely, than when the quantity is sufficient for the production of intoxication. The individual who indulges in this habit, is also exposed, let his resolution and strength of mind be what they may, to the danger of gradually falling into the excessive use of a daily beverage, subversive of the health of his system, both corporeal and mental. He resembles, indeed, the traveller who prefers a dangerous path along the brink of a precipice, trusting in the strength of his brain and the accuracy of his eye, and neglecting the safe and ample road in the valley beneath.

A class by no means inconsiderable in their numbers become drunkards from an absolute persuasion that stimulating liquors are in some degree necessary, or at least that they contribute to the well-being of their constitutions. To these, ardent spirits are what the pretended Panacea or Elixir Vitæ was to the older chemists. They guard their votaries from the effects of cold and damp on the one hand, and from those of excessive heat on the other; and when not required as a shield against these evils, they are frequently taken from a vague idea of their benefiting the stomach. It is well known to physicians that cold and dampness have a more pernicious

cious influence upon the bodies of drunkards than upon those of the temperate. The abuse of alcoholic liquors acts in different ways in subjecting the patient to the attacks of disease from the influence of cold. Although, when under the immediate excitement of the intoxicating draught, they may perhaps expose themselves with impunity to a degree of cold and moisture which would be injurious under other circumstances, yet, when the effects of the liquor have passed away, their systems are left in a condition far more liable to suffer from these causes than those of individuals habitually sober. At the same time, from the neglect of person and clothing invariably attendant upon a state of inebriety, the drunkard is almost constantly exposed to circumstances peculiarly favourable to the production of disease. In regard to rheumatism, in particular, that scourge of the labouring classes, an eminent physician* has laid it down as a general rule that those who live a life of sobriety and drink water only, are but rarely affected with it. We have already alluded to a truth daily experienced by medical men, that all morbid affections occurring in the body of a drunkard are less readily managed and more frequently fatal than when they occur to the same extent in the temperate. Similar statements may be made in relation to the supposed effects of ardent spirits in obviating the injurious consequences of extreme heat. They may, by benumbing or obscuring the sensations, diminish the inconvenience actually felt at the time; but so far are they from a real protection that directly the reverse is the fact. Every year, during the summer months, numbers fall victims, in this and other cities, to the effects, direct and indirect, of the solar heat. Many of these deaths are ascribed to drinking cold water; and though this might appear to furnish an argument in favour of tempering the latter fluid with an admixture of spirits, yet the result of experience, both in New-York and Philadelphia has been, that by far the greater part of these are in reality instances of apoplexy, caused by the heat and augmented by spirits given as a remedy; while, on the other hand, the majority of cases actually caused by cold water have occurred in the intemperate. The latter are also more exposed to the diseases of warm climates; which in them, are more unmanageable and more frequently fatal than in the temperate.

* Poincart.

One source of intemperance in this city yet remains to be noticed, and may enter here. Your committee allude to the custom of serving out liquor, and that without measure, to the individuals engaged in extinguishing fires. Many young men and even boys are, on these occasions, induced to partake of it to a great extent, and, in not unfrequent instances, have to date from that moment the commencement of intemperate habits. The fatigue and exposure to cold and heat to which our high-spirited youth subject themselves in their praise-worthy efforts to stop the progress of destruction, the thirst engendered by their muscular exertion, the forgetfulness of self with which they frequently sacrifice their health to preserve the property of others, the light, the clamour, and the example of their comrades, all unite to prevent them from being really aware of the quantities which some of them too frequently consume. Your committee would earnestly press upon their fellow-citizens, in these alarming and spirit-stirring emergencies, the use of *coffee*, as a grateful and efficient substitute for spirituous liquors, and one much better calculated to preserve that clearness of the intellectual faculties, for the want of which much valuable property is occasionally lost, or even actually destroyed.

Never did man commit a more gross mistake than when he had recourse to ardent spirits as a strengthener of the stomach—an agent to excite his appetite for food, and augment his power of digesting it. When the stomach is in a state of health, the smallest quantity of distilled spirits is productive of a proportionate diminution of appetite and derangement of the digestion. When diseased, almost any thing can be introduced into that organ with more impunity than alcoholic liquors. The majority, perhaps the great majority of the chronic affections of that part of the body owe their origin to intemperance in eating and drinking, particularly the latter.

Another popular impression, which occasionally has considerable influence in furnishing the drunkard with an excuse for continuing the habit he has already incurred, is the medical precept that it is dangerous suddenly to break off from the established use of ardent spirits. Your committee cannot deny that there exists some foundation for this doctrine. Yet they conceive that it is true in so small a number of cases, that far more mischief is done by the remark than it is capable of preventing. They apprehend it may be in some

measure disarmed of the injurious consequences occasionally drawn from it by a depraved ingenuity, if the practitioner, by the silent force of ocular example, will make the spectators of his operations aware of the extent to which other stimulants can be substituted for these more destructive ones. Your committee have already enumerated some of the former; and, without embracing any therapeutical discussion, will recommend their adoption, so far as the judgment of the physician shall approve, in the gradual diminution of the temulent excitement, and the treatment of its frequent consequence, delirium tremens.

It is perhaps sufficient to allude to the numerous other instances in which, from popular habit and opinion, alcoholic stimulants are employed for the cure of various diseases, as cholic, recent catarrhs, &c. in some of which, articles of an analogous class may be substituted, while, in others, all irritating matters ought to be avoided. Few errors are more commonly met with than to see the domestic practitioner either doing to the health of his patient an unmitigated, unmodified injury by the imprudent use of these articles as a medicine, or purchasing the partial stupefaction or the perspiration which they produce, and which might be much better obtained with other remedies, at the heavy expense of seriously increasing the malady he wishes to relieve.

To the observations which have been offered in the course of this Report, your committee hope that much need not now be added to place in its proper light the large share of responsibility which rests upon the members of the medical profession with regard to discouraging the use of spirituous liquors. At the present moment a great and powerful effort is in progress to promote this desirable purpose, by a very large number of our fellow-citizens, who have associated themselves under the title of Temperance Societies. Similar and persevering efforts have been made for many years by several religious bodies; among whom it is an act of justice to name, for old and long continued exertions, the society of Friends. Yet at no period has there been so large a portion of the community interested in this subject, and so hopeful a prospect afforded of producing a considerable change in public feeling respecting it, as at the present time. While we earnestly wish success, then, to the efforts of our philanthropic fellow-citizens, your committee cannot

help deeply feeling that this is no time for physicians to remain irresolute, or to pass with indifference a labour in which they are called upon to interfere by so many considerations. They stand implicated in this duty by their peculiar knowledge of the evil, by their widely extended opportunities of aiding in its correction, and, in a particular manner, by the fact, that, as practitioners, they are unavoidably the frequent though innocent cause of its further dissemination. And, while we leave to other bodies of men that sanctity and solemnity of appeal which belong to the character of the public officers of religion, it is our most imperative duty to forewarn the imprudent of the evils which impend over their physical systems; and, at the same moment, it is equally our obligation, as men, to alarm them, wherever the case admits it, for their safety from the other and multifarious disasters attributable to the unhappy practice of drinking spirituous liquors.

Your committee, therefore, respectfully beg leave to propose for the consideration of this Society the following

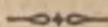
RESOLUTIONS:

- Resolved*, That this Society earnestly advises its members to employ their personal and private influence for the suppression of the moderate use of spirituous liquors; and that, for this purpose, the members are advised themselves to abstain from the use of spirituous liquors under any circumstances, except as a medicine.
- Resolved*, That the members are advised to diminish the employment of ardent spirits in their practice as far as is compatible with a careful and prudent consideration of the welfare of their patients.
- Resolved*, That the members residing in the city and liberties of Philadelphia are particularly requested to preserve an annual record of the whole number of deaths occurring in their practice, and also of the proportion of these occasioned, in their opinion, by the use of spirituous liquors.

CH. D. MEIGS,
D. FRANCIS CONDIE,
R. M. HUSTON,
EDW. JENNER COXE,
B. H. COATES.

The above Report was read and ordered published, and the Resolutions adopted, July 11th, 1829.

APPENDIX.



ARTICLE I.

CASES OF HUMAN COMBUSTION.

1. Mary Clues, aged 50, of Coventry, England.—Philosophical Transactions, vol. 64, p. 340.

2. Case mentioned by Vicq D'Azyr, aged 50 years.

3. A female at Paris, mentioned by Henry Bohanser.

4. The wife of Millet, at Rheims, in 1725, related by Le Cat. This curious case was the subject of a legal investigation, and may serve to show the necessity for legal and medical men being aware of the occurrence of human combustion.

“In 1725, the wife of a man named Millet, an inhabitant of Rheims, perished, the victim of a spontaneous human combustion. Her remains were found in the kitchen, a foot and a half from the fire-place. Some portions of the head and of the inferior extremities, and some of the dorsal vertebræ, were the only parts that escaped destruction by the fire. Millet had a young and handsome servant girl; and the most shocking suspicions were raised against him. He was subjected to all the rigour of a criminal prosecution; from which he appealed. An examination was had by professional men, who recognized it as a case of spontaneous human combustion. Millet, thus proved innocent, escaped from opprobrium and a public execution.”—(Marc.) He did not escape, however, from the ruin of his health and fortune; and he ultimately died in a hospital.—See Beck's Medical Jurisprudence, vol. ii. p. 89; where the case is related more at length.

5. Mary Jauffret, at Aix, in Provence; the case related by M. Muraire, in the Journal de Médecine.

6. Mademoiselle Thouars, at Caen, in 1782; the case related by M. Merdle, in the same work.

7 & 8. Two anonymous cases at Caen, mentioned by M. Lair, in his work on this subject.

9. A case of a female at Paris, in 1779, mentioned by Foderé.—Med. Leg. vol. iii. p. 207.

10. The case of the priest Bertholi, near Fenile, in Italy; related by M. Battaglia, surgeon, of Ponte-Bosio.

This case is highly interesting from the circumstance of the patient surviving nearly four days, and being able to give an account of his sensations.

It is not mentioned that he was intemperate. On arriving from a journey at the house of his brother-in-law, he immediately requested to be shown to his room. Here he passed a handkerchief

between his shoulders and his shirt, and then betook himself to his prayers; the rest of the company leaving the room. In a few minutes a singular noise was heard in his room, and the cries of the priest were distinguished. On the family entering, they found him stretched upon the paved floor, and surrounded by a light flame, which receded as they approached, and was finally extinguished.

Next morning, M. Battaglia examined the patient. He found the whole integuments of the humeral portion of the right arm, and the skin of the fore-arm, almost entirely detached from the flesh, and hanging down. Nearly the same was the condition of the space between the shoulders and the thighs. The most terrific symptoms followed; general mortification of the wounds, burning thirst, "horrible convulsions," continual vomitings, fever, delirium, a putrid bilious diarrhœa, and finally a state of stupor continuing for two hours, in which he died on the fourth day. The smell was intolerable; the nails separated from the fingers, and worms were produced in the ulcers.

The patient stated that he had felt a stroke like that of a club on the right arm; and that he then saw a spark of fire attach itself to his shirt, which was immediately reduced to ashes, with the exception of the wristbands, which remained uninjured. The handkerchief on his shoulders was uninjured, as well as his drawers; but his cap was entirely destroyed, though the hair escaped.—The night had been calm, and the air pure—No smoke nor empyreumatic or bituminous smell was discerned in the room; but the lamp, which had been full of oil, was now empty, and its wick reduced to ashes.

11. A female at Paris, aged 68, in 1804; the case related by Dr. Vigné, and noticed by Foderé.

12. A female, aged 28, in France; case related by Dr. Prouteau, in Leroux's *Journal of Medicine*.

13. Madame Laire, at Saulieu, in France, aged 60 years, in 1808; published by M. Ballard.

14. Ignatius Meyer, aged 48, in the village of Waertelfeld, in Schwalenberg, Germany, in January, 1811; related by Dr. Scherf, of Detmold, and noticed in the *London Medical Repository*, vol. 3.

15 & 16. Two cases mentioned by Smith, as having occurred lately in France; perhaps the same with Nos. 11 & 12.

17. The Countess of Cesena, in Italy, aged 52, in 1763; related by Bianchini and other writers.—See Lair, referred to below, and also the *Annual Register* for 1763, and the *Philosophical Transactions*, vol. 43.

18. Grace Pett, of Ipswich, England, aged about 60, in 1744.—*Philosophical Transactions*, vol. 43.

19. Madame de Boiseon, of Plerguer, near Dol, in France, aged 80 years, in 1749; related by M. Boinneau, the curate of the parish, and published by Le Cat.

20. An elderly woman in Massachusetts, in March, 1802; related by General William Shepherd, and published in Coxe's *Emporium of Arts*, vol. i. p. 326; where it is quoted from Tilloch's *Philosophical Magazine*, vol. xiv. p. 96; also published by Foderé, vol. iii. p. 208.

21. A young woman, admitted into the General Hospital at Hamburg. A case of partial combustion.

While working at her needle, she perceived a "sudden and extraordinary heat pervade her whole body, attended by a violent burning heat in her fore-finger, which became encircled with a blue flame to the extent of an inch and a half." Water had no effect in extinguishing the flame; but it was quenched in some milk. She recovered in the hospital.—Hecker's *Annals*, 1825, vol. ii; quoted in *Johnson's Medico-Chirurgical Journal*; and again in the *North American Med. and Surgical Journal* for 1826, vol. ii. p. 423.

22. Case related by Professor Rudolphi, in the *Journal de Pharmacie*, of a man who suddenly perceived a pain in the arm as if he had received a blow from a stick, and immediately observed, at the same spot, a small flame which burned his shirt.—*North American, &c.* for Oct. 1828, quoting from *The Lancet* of May 17th, 1828.

23. Case of combustion of both hands, in a temperate subject, who survived.—*North American, &c.* Oct. 1829, vol. viii. p. 403, from the *Archives de Med.*

We have compiled most of the above catalogue from Beck's *Medical Jurisprudence*, vol. ii. pp. 84—90, where a fuller account, of a highly interesting character, will be found. The narrative sketches which we have inserted are from other sources; nos. 4 and 10 from the French. Dr. P. A. Lair's very curious memoir on this subject is translated, and may be found in Dr. J. Redman Coxe's *Emporium of Arts and Sciences*, vol. i. p. 161.

Most of the persons found subjected to these living combustions have been advanced in life, and had been for long periods habituated to excessive indulgence in spirituous liquors. A considerable majority were females; and they are said to have been nearly all excessively fat, while a few were excessively lean. The body has never been found entirely consumed; portions of the head, hands, and feet always escaping, while the trunk generally suffered most. A little ashes was left, together with a small portion of fetid, fatty matter, a fetid, greasy, and penetrating moisture, frequently infecting the clothes and other articles contained in closed drawers, &c. with a light unctuous coal, and sometimes a few pieces of bone. The flame was light and bluish, communicating fire to but few of the surrounding combustibles, and apparently incapable of being extinguished by water. These are qualities of an inflammable gas containing hydrogen; such as the combinations of that substance with carbon, sulphur, and phosphorus. They have likewise some resemblance to those of the vapour of alcohol. This latter fluid is well known to contain hydrogen in large quantities.

Physicians differ in regard to the question whether these combustions are capable of being *spontaneous* or not. Most of the sufferers were found near lamps, hot coals, or other bodies in a state of ignition. Those who incline to the former opinion cite the well known fact of the frequent emission of electrical sparks from our inner clothing in hard frosty weather. Our 10th case seems to favour this opinion.

ARTICLE II.

Extracts from the various replies to queries distributed by a Committee of a Town Meeting, held Feb. 17th, 1817, to devise measures for the relief of the poor and the prevention of Pauperism.

“We believe the use of ardent spirits is the principal source of poverty, depravity and wretchedness.”

“The use of ardent spirits is probably, in nine cases out of ten, the cause of poverty.”

“The use of ardent spirits appears to be the primary cause of the poverty and distress which prevail among the lower class; and a large proportion of their earnings, as well as the sums distributed for their relief, is expended in tippling houses.”

“It is a melancholy fact that the excessive use of ardent spirits is the cause of poverty of a very large proportion of those who receive public charity, probably two-thirds; and there is no doubt but the alms which are bestowed on such are frequently expended in purchasing this article. We believe more money is expended, in the course of a year, by the poor, for this destructive article, than would be sufficient, if husbanded, to provide for all their wants during an inclement winter.”

“We have no doubt but the immoderate use of ardent spirits is the principal cause of poverty, at least in seven cases out of ten; and many of those who receive public charity expend a part in purchasing that article.”

“It cannot be doubted that ardent spirits are a principal cause of poverty; and it is to be feared that many who receive charity expend the means in purchasing that article.”

“Habitual intoxication of the husband, sometimes of the woman, is the most fruitful cause of pauperism: in fact, it is generally to be traced, in some ramification, to this vice. There is no doubt of the frequent abuse of public charity in appropriating it to the purchase of spirituous liquors.”

“A great portion bring on their poverty by a too free use of ardent spirits; and a part sometimes apply the means afforded for their relief to the purchase of that article.”

“The great cause of suffering is the intemperate use of ardent spirits.”

Report of the Library Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Public Economy. Philadelphia, 1817, p. 17,—a document drawn up, as we understand, by the indefatigable Mr. Samuel Hazard.

ARTICLE III.

Letter from Dr. W. D. Brincklé to a member of the Committee, on the use of sulphuric acid as a remedy for Intemperance.

DEAR DOCTOR,

Palmyra Square, Feb. 4, 1829.

Your note of the 2nd inst. was received yesterday. I am exceedingly pleased to find that the medical society has taken up the subject of intemperance, and appointed a committee so well qualified, in every respect, to do justice to the investigation. There is probably no vice which leads to more melancholy results than that of intemperance. Whether we view it in its relation to temporal, or eternal concerns, we find the same disastrous consequences following in its train. Dispensing wretchedness, pauperism, infamy, and depravity, in abundant profusion, to its deluded devotees; impelling them too often to the commission of crimes, to expiate which they are doomed to suffer an ignominious death; it finally consummates the ruin of its debased and infatuated victims, by excluding them from the felicity of a future world.

Moral remedies* having been administered for ages past unavailingly, the only hope of success, save in the fiat of the omnipotent ruler of the universe, is in physical remedies. Knowing as we do, that other propensities have been subdued by physical means, analogy would lead us to repose a degree of confidence in similar measures for the relief of intemperance. What might thus be inferred from analogy has been confirmed by observation and experience.

The facts which have come under my personal notice, since the publication of my paper on the subject in the North American Medical and Surgical Journal for October, 1827, are amply sufficient to satisfy me that intemperance is by no means incurable. But alas! how few, comparatively, are there, who are willing to be cured. The more I meditate on this subject, the more firmly am I persuaded of the propriety, and indeed necessity, of establishing an asylum for the intemperate. Even could the managers of the Alms-House be prevailed on to appropriate a ward to the reception of those who are so unfortunate as to be addicted to this deplorable vice, and allow them to be subjected to proper medical treatment, much benefit, I have reason to believe, would result from such an arrangement. To render the plan, however, completely effective, some legislative enactments might perhaps be required.

* Though moral remedies cannot be advantageously employed in eradicating the habit of intemperance, they can do much towards its prevention, which is assuredly a matter of primary importance. It is in this way, the beneficial operation of the society for the suppression of intemperance is mainly to be expected; and we sincerely trust that the result will be so encouraging as to lead to the formation of other associations for a purpose so laudable.

With regard to the cases detailed in the paper just now alluded to, only one has relapsed. This patient has refused to take the acid again, fearing, I am inclined to think, that it would again deprive him of the enjoyment of the fascinating beverage. The others, so far as I can learn, continue to abstain from the use of spirituous liquors. Since the publication of those cases, frequent opportunities have been embraced by me of giving both the sulphuric acid, and the Ipecacuanha, and I am happy to say, that they have, in most cases, when properly taken, accomplished the object for which they were given. They have not, however, succeeded in every instance; though this may have been owing as much to their use not being persisted in for a period sufficiently long, as to any real inefficiency of the medicines. The desirable impression made by these remedies, as might very naturally be imagined, sometimes becomes obliterated after the lapse of weeks, months, or years; and the patient regains a desire for his former indulgences. But when we see so many individuals become addicted to inebriation, to whom the practice previously had always appeared extremely odious, and about which to them there never was any thing enticing or alluring, we certainly ought not to be surprised at seeing those, who have been emancipated from its thralldom, occasionally become again subjected to its fascinating control. Nor do I consider this circumstance a very material objection to the remedy, since its administration can be resumed with the original prospect of success. With quite as much propriety might we object to the use of Sulphate of Quinine in intermittent fever, because, on exposure to the exciting cause, the disease sometimes returns. Those who have been intemperate, it should be recollected, are commonly exposed to the continual operation of temptation.

Respecting the *modus operandi* of the sulphuric acid, I am unable to offer any thing authoritatively. It may be conjectured, that it probably acts by occasioning an unpleasant sensation in the morbidly sensible and irritable stomach, which sensation is associated by the individual with the presence of the spirituous liquor. This medicine sometimes causes sickness and vomiting, while in other persons no such effects are manifested; and yet in both instances, I have known it to occasion the desired disgust to spirituous potations. But the ipecacuanha, to prove effectual, must always excite nausea. In a few instances, where its impression on the stomach was not sufficiently powerful, I have succeeded by adding a small portion of emetic tartar, not more than a grain or two to each drachm of ipecacuanha. The tartarized antimony alone is not so well suited to popular practice; since its violent operation on the stomach, unless given in doses judiciously regulated, would render its exhibition extremely hazardous. In giving it, and indeed the

ipecacuan also, the main intention should be to excite and keep up constant nausea; vomiting, though not absolutely necessary to their successful operation, materially tends to promote it.

The production of nausea is the main principle to be kept in view, in the treatment of these cases. Whatever, therefore is calculated to produce this gastric uneasiness, promises to be serviceable in removing intemperance. We are all familiar with the powerful impression which is made on our appetites by the association of ideas. Articles which have been regarded by us the most pleasant and agreeable, may be thus made to appear completely disgusting. Indeed there are few of us who have not experienced in our own persons, at some period of our lives, the force of this remark; and in our patients we have all witnessed it. But in order that the inebriating draught may be inseparably connected with the nauseous impression that may be produced, it has appeared to me indispensable that the remedy should be administered in some description of ardent spirits. A case, however, which apparently has an unfavourable bearing on this point, has occurred to me, and ought perhaps to be mentioned, especially as the result was quite different from what I had anticipated. A lady called at my office in the spring of 1828 for the purpose, if possible, of having her husband cured of intemperance. She had not consulted him respecting her intended application to me, knowing that he would be averse to taking any thing that would deprive him of his favourite potation. As it would, on this account, be necessary to administer the remedy clandestinely, it was of course impracticable to get him to take the sulphuric acid. I therefore advised the Ipecacuan to be given, and gave the necessary directions respecting its administration. But she informed me that it would be impossible for her to give it to him in any kind of spirituous liquor. She then made the inquiry whether it would not answer as well if given in coffee. I mentioned to her, that I thought it very probable she might give him a dislike to the vehicle in which the medicine was taken, without affecting in the least his inclination for ardent spirits. Perceiving that she was extremely desirous of giving this mode of exhibiting the medicine a trial, I directed a small emetic of Ipecacuan and tartarized antimony to be taken daily in coffee. It was ordered more with the view of creating nausea than of exciting vomiting. She pursued this course for some days, and had the satisfaction of finding, contrary to my expectation, that it had the desired effect. His disgust for ardent spirits continued until about a month or six weeks ago. The wife then returned to inform me that his intemperate habits were again beginning to be manifested. She was, however, fully impressed with the belief that the former mode of treatment would prove as successful as it had done on the preceding occasion. The same plan was accordingly prescribed, but with what result, I am

unable to say. I cannot help thinking, however, that she would again have called on me had it failed to benefit him. The name and residence of the patient are unknown to me. There is usually, in these cases, so much reluctance manifested to give the name of the individual, that delicacy has prevented me from requiring it. This is the only instance in which the same mode of exhibiting the remedy has been adopted by me. Where it proves successful, I feel disposed to attribute the success to the circumstance of the person resorting to spirituous potations before and during the time the stomach is nauseated with the emetic. This explanation seems to me the only plausible one, and is reconcilable with the principle of cure; which require that the ingestion of ardent spirits, and the nauseous impression should be intimately associated in the mind of the patient.

Having already encroached too much on your time and patience, I will only beg leave in conclusion, to refer you to the paper in the North American Journal, for the mode in which I am in the habit of administering the remedies I have employed, and for other information respecting them.

I have the honour to be,

My dear sir,

Your obedient servant,

W. D. BRINCKLÉ.

B. H. COATES, M. D.