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Medical Treatment of Inebriety.

presented by the author



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MEDICAL TREATMENT OF INEBRIETY.*

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The medical treatment of inebriety appears first in pictorial representations found in the ancient tombs of Egypt.

Here can be seen the states of stupor, nausea, vomiting, administration of drugs, showering by water, massage, flagellation and attempts to counteract the narcotism by external stimulation, also inunctions of the body, convalescence, and restoration, all faithfully outlined on these old tombs whose origin is lost in antiquity.

Fragmentary records of early Greek physicians contain references to the treatment of excessive wine drinkers.

The great philosopher and physician, Hippocrates, clearly recognized the disease of inebriety and left some very sensible rules of treatment.

From time to time, for the past twenty centuries, the question of the disease of inebriety and its treatment has come into prominence at intervals, then died away. Finally, at the close of the last century and the beginning of this, Dr. Rush of this country and several eminent European physicians affirmed the fact of disease, and laid down lines of treatment. But it was not until 1864 that the scientific treatment of inebriety became a practical reality, in the asylum at Binghamton, N. Y. From this time the rational study and treatment of inebriety begins.

Unlike other great medical topics,

public sentiment has gone on in advance of scientific knowledge of this subject in its demands for means of treatment that shall control and cure the victim. In meantime, all rational study and treatment of inebriety has been obstructed by false theories and delusive misconceptions, that cling tenaciously as fogbanks along the shore.

Notwithstanding all the evidence, based on facts and experience, against the present methods of treatment, they still continue.

Temperance revivalists still boast of the number of pledged and converted as cured. As an evolution from this comes the empiric, with his secret specifics, boasting to have first affirmed the theory of disease, and claiming equally astonishing results with unknown drugs.

While the question of disease and treatment is passing through the period of renaissance, there are landmarks and clearly defined facts to guide all future studies.

Some of these outline facts grouped may help to clear away the errors that cloud the present conception of this subject.

The disease of inebriety, like other diseases of the brain and nervous system, follows a uniform movement, controlled by laws of dissolution, and conditions and causes that can be determined.

In the question of treatment, the first inquiry is, What is the present condition, the organic and functional derangements

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of the brain and nervous system, also nutrition and digestion?

Second: What are the special effects of alcohol on the nerves and brain?

Third: Is the use of spirits a symptom of other brain states? or is it an active factor in the causation?

Fourth: What neurosis and conditions of heredity are the active and latest factors in the history of the case?

From a study of these questions the lines of rational treatment will appear. Take a common case as an illustration. You are called to a case of gastritis. The man has drunk spirits for a long time and taken but little food; both digestion and nutrition are seriously impaired. Alcohol has affected the sensory and motor nerves, it has made the brain unstable, and lessened power of control, with evident hyperæmia. If the treatment is based on these symptoms alone but little can be expected. If we go back and find that the use of spirits began after some severe strain or state of exhaustion, or following as an entailment of some disease or traumatism, either physical or psychical, or originated in contagious surroundings and faulty conditions of living, new lines of treatment are indicated. If further inquiry shows a neurotic inheritance, direct as from alcoholic ancestors, or indirect as from insane, consumptive, epileptic, or any other neurosis, new indications appear.

The treatment of a case which checks the brain and nerve irritation by narcotics and, by the withdrawal of spirits and the use of eliminatives relieves the functional disturbances, is only partial. If at this period the pledge or conversion fills the mind by auto-suggestion with confidence that cure has taken place, or if the system is kept saturated with narcotics until the dominant idea of cure prevails or the mind is buoyed up on the delusive hope of final and permanent cure, the results are accidental and uncertain. Should final restoration follow the use of these means, the real causes of cure are unknown and belong to the realm of psychotherapeutics. Cases which recover after these psychical remedies are those in which the drink craze or symptom dies out or becomes exhausted, through the operation of inherent forces, and not by the last means or remedies used.

The medical treatment of inebriety

must depend on the causes and conditions of the case. Without this knowledge all remedies are empirical. From such a clinical knowledge the physician may point out the lines from which a return to health may be expected. He can foresee the oncoming insanity of which the drink impulse is a clear symptom; or the paresis with this stage of exaltation and spirit excess; the acute delirium, the melancholia, the masked epilepsy in the dipsomaniac, and many other conditions that can be anticipated and studied. Many of these cases, in which to a superficial observer only the drink symptom is prominent, are found to have a uniform line of progress and termination. Take a hundred cases of inebriety and from a careful study of heredity, present condition, and the action of alcohol, etc., etc., a prognosis can be made that will be verified in ninety per cent. of all cases. The first question to be determined in a given case is the physical condition of the patient. As a rule all inebriates suffer from degrees of paralysis, both vaso-motor, sensory, and functional. Sub-acute inflammations and reflex irritations are common. The heart's action is variable, and the organ is enlarged. The liver is also enlarged and frequently the seat of low grade of inflammation. The stomach also suffers from both organic and functional derangements. Neurites are very common and of all degrees, usually called alcoholic rheumatisms and neuralgias. These are only the most general and prominent symptoms and call for general eliminative treatment. There is present in all these cases defective elimination of waste matter, also chemical changes of both cell and tissue, due in part to the direct action of alcohol and its indirect action on the nervous mechanism. As a result ptomaine poisonings, new soils for the growth of bacteria, also new centers of congestion and irritations occur. The bath corrects these indications by stimulating the cutaneous surface. Hot air baths or hot water baths, with rubbing once or twice a day, are the first essentials in treatment. Following this should be given what is termed internal lavage, or washing based on the same principle. This is best secured by saline and mercurial cathartics, with copious draughts of warm or acid waters. The patient should be placed in conditions where a certain

amount of control over his habits and conduct can be obtained. Either at home, under the charge of a trusted nurse, or in an institution where all the surroundings can be guarded.

All spirits should be removed at once, and a careful watch of the case be maintained to ascertain any organic or other diseases which may be masked by the use of spirits. Epilepsy, tuberculosis, paresis, hysteria, and other affections often come into great prominence when spirits are abandoned. The remedies most valuable following the removal of spirits and baths are the cinchonia bark infusions, nuxvomica preparations, together with the bromides, codeia, sulfonal, and other narcotics for the control of the nervous irritations. Strychnia is inferior to nuxvomica in my practice. Choral is unsafe and uncertain in many cases. All narcotics should be given in large doses for a short time and changed frequently and discontinued. Beef tea, hot milk, hot acid drinks, are often very effectual as narcotics, allaying nervous irritation. Rest and frequent massage with the baths, mild tonics, salines, and good foods are often all the means essential for restoration. In many cases the drink craze disappears from the use of these means alone. In a certain number of cases the origin of the drink symptoms is associated with syphilis and bad living, or the advent of syphilis has been followed by excessive use of spirits. In these cases mercury, arsenic, and the iodides should enter very prominently into the treatment. In a certain number of cases unusual states of stupor and delirium follow each other with explosive violence, unusual to ordinary alcoholic intoxication. A suspicion of specific poison followed by mercurial treatment gives the strongest confirmatory evidence in the good results from such means.

When inebriety is traceable to head injuries, from blows, heat, shocks, sudden emotional strains, etc., etc., sub-acute inflammation and degenerative cell and functional changes present are noted in the impulsive exhaustive drink symptoms. Both the prognosis and treatment should anticipate grave brain troubles.

Direct heredity, noted by inebriate ancestors, demands in the treatment total change of life and long periods of brain and nerve rest. Where the heredity is

indirect, coming from allied states of brain degeneration, such as insane, idiotic, criminal, pauper, epileptic, and other profound brain diseases, the medication should be directed to lessen and favor return to states of health. In some of these cases the action of spirits varies widely. The insanity of the drink symptoms and the organic degeneration is so pronounced as to suggest various causes. These are the cases which become drug-takers of all kinds, and the cure or subsidencer of one drug addiction is followed by another. These are the cases which appear in every community as shining examples of cure by "gold specifics," by prayer and pledge, and who very often secretly use opium or other narcotic drugs.

The hysterical confidence in permanent cure by unknown measures in a brief time is always open to grave suspicion of hysterical credulity or duplicity.

In neurotic cases where alcohol is quickly followed by intoxication, especially in young persons, a grave prognosis is present. The treatment should be a radical change of life and also include all the constitutional remedies found valuable, such as baths, tonics, foods, and mineral drugs.

In cases where cell and brain exhaustion from imperfect rest and food are present, the treatment must be nutrient and hygienic, rather than by drugs. Dyspepsia and the various disturbances of the stomach and liver, which are relieved by spirits concealed in bitters, are always grave troubles. Faulty or no mental control and unstable brain equilibrium, with its irregularities and exhaustion in inebriety require long persistent treatment. Many of these neurotic cases are benefited by mental treatment. There is a realm of psycho-therapeutics in which the medical man can foster dominant ideas and direct the activities of the brain along hygienic lines of living. Hypnotism has been tried in this way with indifferent success, so far. New surroundings, with change of thought and impulse, have been very patent in some cases. A primary condition in all these cases is exhaustion of the central brain structure. In most cases full restoration never occurs. The drink craze dies out, but the weakness and lowered vitality remain. In periodic cases the explosive character of the brain energy accumulating and discharging at

intervals suggests a line of treatment which will afford an outlet for this abnormality. In some cases restraint by drugs at the period of discharge is valuable; in others baths, exercise, cathartics seem to divert the energies and relieve the paroxysm. In one case a prolonged hot air bath, with severe massage, avails; in another, a long tramp in the country, with dog and gun, and severe exercise; in another, cessation of all work and rest in bed, assisted with bromides; another case abstains from food at this period, and in other cases eats to excess for two or three days, and thus avoids the paroxysm.

Various measures to control the drink paroxysm in these cases will depend on a study of the case. The premonitory symptoms are often very clear, and means of prevention can be provided. Where the case is in an asylum the application of means are more positive, but when the case is not under control greater skill is required. Many of these periodic cases drink only on holidays, or days of general rejoicing. If they can be carried over these periods they remain sober until similar occasions recur again. For many years I treated a case who never drank except during the holidays. A week before the approach of this season he was given mineral waters, nux-vomica, bromides at night, severe exercise and hot baths, with sharp rubbing, every day. This was continued for two or three weeks, then discontinued, and the drink craze was averted. In one case a man never drank except when on the seacoast; change of residence to the mountains was followed by perfect abstinence. States of contagion are very patent causes in some cases, and when recognized can be remedied. A form of hypnotic influence prevails, in which men drink to excess in certain surroundings and in certain company, and abstain where conditions are removed. Asylum care and study reveal many very curious facts along this line. Often pronounced cures follow from a careful study and recognition of these symptoms. The tendency to epilepsy, suicide, dementia, and other grave diseases should always be considered in such cases, and both local and constitutional remedies be persistently applied.

The continuous drinker, either in moderation or excess, has always the strong possibility of paresis, dementia, and cere-

bral hemorrhage before him. The continuous action of spirits is that of a paralyzant, disturbing and breaking up all the chemical and vital processes, either slowly or rapidly. The condition to be treated, after the removal of the active or apparent causes, is that of brain anæmia and profound central exhaustion, and degeneration of all the vital processes.

Institutional care and treatment of these cases are obviously the most important and practical. In the near future, when the disease of these cases is recognized, their early treatment at home by the family physician may be practical. His knowledge of the family history and surroundings will enable him to apply preventive means and measures that are impractical later on.

Public sentiment permits these cases to grow up in every community under the impression that all excess of spirits is simply moral weakness, within control of the victim. Thus, the period of curability is passed, and only when the disease and insanity of the victim is unmistakable are rational means applied. In an experience of seventeen years in asylums for these cases, I have rarely seen recent cases of inebriety coming for treatment. As a rule, all persons admitted to asylums are those who have exhausted every other means for relief, and who have used spirits until both the brain and organism are obviously diseased. To expect cure or permanent restoration in a few weeks from any form of treatment in such cases is impossible, or cure even from long medical care in any very large number of cases cannot be reasonably expected. Yet, the most reliable statistics show that fully thirty per cent. are restored from institutional medical care extending over ten or twelve months. I am sustained by the best authorities in asserting that the inebriate is more curable than the insane, but the treatment must be based on his actual condition and extend over a long period of time, and be founded on general principles of rest and organic restoration.

The restraint and care of an asylum is of more value for its control of the surroundings, and the facility for the application of exact methods of treatment, than for its removal and restraint from alcohol. Rest and building up of brain and nerve tissue takes away the demand for alcohol

more positively than locks and barred doors.

The central object of all treatment is to remove the causes which demand spirits for relief. To silence this craze for alcohol is not curative any more than the narcotism of opium removes the cause of pain.

While the use of alcohol will create general organic degeneration, the demand for its use is always symptomatic of grave central irritations and lesions.

Locks and bars, pledges, chemical restraint by drugs, appeals to diseased higher brain sections, appeals to the credulity and disordered senses and emotions by "gold cures," or specifics, are all empirical. Yet, excepting imprisonment in jail, all these measures claim to be curative, and refer to examples whose conditions can be explained by other and more rational causes. The drink symptom is in many cases self limited and will change and disappear as a natural dissolution process, sometimes merging into organic disease of the stomach, heart, liver, kidneys, nerves, and brain. Cerebral hemorrhages, organic diseases of the lungs, kidneys, and nerves are very common entailments following the excessive use of spirits. The examples of cure by specifics or moral means are as a rule diseased, and the change of the drink symptom is followed by other concealed or pronounced organic lesions. The breaking up of the drink craze by narcotics and other powerful drugs will of necessity increase the degeneration, and directly predispose to insanity.

Another central object of all treatment is to restore the organism so that the narcotic effect of alcohol or other drugs will not be demanded. This is a brief outline of some of the more prominent facts in the treatment of inebriety. It will be evident that we have scarcely touched the subject. Only in the most general way have the real facts and principles of treatment been recognized. The noise and confusion of empirics and specific vaunters are only foam bubbles on the surface, whose only significance is the agitation and movement that presages the oncoming truth. No question of practical medicine appeals more strongly to physicians in every community for solution. What shall we do with the inebriates is answered to-day by quacks, pietists, politicians, and reformed

inebriates. The mystery, credulity, and dogmatism of their answers is "confusion worse confounded."

From scientific studies by medical men the correct answer must come. They are the real teachers of the nature and treatment of inebriety, and yet to-day nearly half a million politicians, empirics, reformers, clergy, temperance men, and reformed inebriates are talking, writing, and teaching what inebriety is and how to cure it, and not a single score of physicians in this country have given the subject any study. What a startling reflection this is on medical science and medical men. Some of the facts which may be considered as starting points in the study and treatment may be outlined as follows:

The treatment of inebriety extends far back to antiquity. Public sentiment is to-day far in advance of any real knowledge of the nature and treatment of inebriety; hence, the armies of specific vaunters and temperance revivalists who claim such remarkable results. The disease of inebriety, like all other diseases, follows a uniform line of events, from certain special causes and conditions. Its treatment must begin from a knowledge of the present condition of the case and the effects of alcohol on the system; how far the use of alcohol is the symptom of other diseases and what heredity and neurosis enter into the case. A study of these and other conditions point out the lines of rational treatment.

The prognosis and treatment depend altogether on a clear apprehension of the case. The first thing is to place the patient in the most favorable conditions for cure, where all the surroundings can be helpful, and the best means applied to build up and restore his brain and nervous system. This may be done in an institution or at home under the care of a nurse.

The withdrawal of spirits and the use of baths and massage daily, with brain rest, are essential. Remedies such as the bitter tonics, mineral salts and acids, nux-vomica, and often the bromides and the iodides are valuable. The use of nutrients, with rest and baths, fulfill most all the demands of each case. Reconstruction of cell and tissue is the object to be sought.

Specific poisons such as syphilis, or injuries to the head, starvation, and other conditions require special lines of medica-

tion. Heredity and all its allied neuroses are constitutional states of degeneration, to be treated on general principles; change of living and surroundings, with appropriate medication to build up the entire organism, must be applied in all cases.

Restraint, protection, liberty, and the application of means to meet all the demands and abnormalities must be applied.

The public treatment of the pauper in-

ebriates must be in military hospitals, especially organized for this class. The treatment for those able to pay can be more completely carried out in special hospitals, which will combine all the best appliances of science to meet the wants of each one.

The entire subject must be studied from a higher level, and along the line of accurately observed facts.