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Driving A Man To Drink



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THREEPENCE

DRIVING A MAN TO DRINK

Most people have a fair knowledge of the harmful **effects** of alcoholic intemperance on the drinkers and on our social and national life generally. Equally important is an understanding of the psychological and social **causes** which lie behind intemperance, and of the **steps which should be taken** to treat its victims and to counteract the evil as a whole.

It cannot be overstressed that the problem of intemperance, drunkenness, alcoholism, and liquor in general, is not separate from the social problem as a whole. Intemperance and excess are effects of causes arising in the individual's make-up as he lives amidst certain social conditions and pressures. Scientific understanding of those causes is essential if successful efforts are to be made to deal with the problem; yet such understanding has rarely been sought by reformers or legislators who have attempted to counteract the evil.

Why People are Intemperate.

People who drink too much alcohol do so for several reasons:—

1. To obtain the unique relief it gives from various kinds of inner weaknesses, tensions, inferiorities, and other psychological factors.
2. To obtain relief from the otherwise intolerable pressure of difficulties of all sorts arising in the environment.
3. Because the drinking of alcohol in public houses and elsewhere satisfies a number of felt social needs.

Alcohol ministers to these desires for relief, and to these needs, by its narcotic action on the brain and the nervous system; it induces sensations that cannot be induced by any other known means. It is certain that so long as the predisposing causes continue to exist in any marked degree men and women will find some way of obtaining relief per medium of alcohol.

"Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks—drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over again, and unless this person can experience psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery." (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 4 f.)

The Bar—A Social Centre.

"Primarily, the saloon answers to the demand for liquor, but it goes beyond this and supplies a deeper and more subtle want than that of mere animal thirst. This want is the demand for social expression, and how it is met becomes clear by noting what elements are needed to create what we may call a social centre. These elements are the absence of any time limit, some stimulus to self-expression, and a kind of personal feeling toward those into whose company one is thrown, which tempts one to put away reserve and enjoy their society. Where these three elements co-exist, however imperfectly, they create a social centre, a situation, that is, in which the social instincts find their natural expression. . . .

"The saloon is the most democratic of institutions. It appeals at once to the common humanity of a man. There is nothing to repel. No questions are asked. Respectability is not a countersign. The doors swing open before any man who chooses to enter. Once within he finds the atmosphere one in which he can allow his social nature freely to expand. The welcome from the keeper is a personal one. The environment is congenial. It may be that the appeal is to what is base in him. He may find his satisfaction because he can give vent to those lower desires which seek expression.

The place may be attractive just because it is so little elevating. Man is taken as he is, and is given what he wants, be that good or bad. The only standard is the demand. There is evidently no room for argument here. Persons may disagree in their opinions as to the ethical value of the saloon, as to the extent to which the saloon ministers to the social needs of the community, but it can hardly be denied that even if it be the demand for drink, and that alone, which brings a man to a saloon, the saloon patron finds himself when he enters in a centre peculiarly adapted to the free expression of his social nature.

"Here, then, is a social phenomenon to be studied wholly apart from ethical considerations. It may be a good thing or a bad thing that such opportunity exists. With this we are not for the moment concerned. What interests us now is simply that the opportunity is there. It is not a question whether a man is injured more than he is benefited. The fact to be studied is that he finds in the saloon the answer to a social demand. The saloon is so related in our minds with the question of morals that it is hard to look at it merely as a social institution, hard to assess it correctly upon the basis of precise observation without allowing our preconceived notions of its ethical value to influence our judgment." (*Substitutes for the Saloon*, by Calkins.)

Psychological Causes.

The main psychological traits and conditions which predispose to over-indulgence are:

Ego-centrism, resentment, self-assurance, over-sensitiveness, anxiety, inferiority, fear, boredom, nervous strain, guilt-feeling, sense of failure, lack of worthwhile purpose, depression, frustration. Allied conditions, not strictly psychological, are fatigue, illness, loneliness.

Recent research proves that there is a considerable (and increasing) number of intemperate drinkers who are, as it were, "allergic" to alcohol because of their peculiar psycho-physical composition.

Inebriates are not so much notable for the amount of alcohol or drugs that they consume as for the unusual effect that alcohol and drugs have upon them, by comparison to normal people.

The inebriate, because of his supersensitive feelings, is prone to worry over matters which would be of small moment to the average person. He readily becomes a

prey to anxiety state. Then it is his super-ego which demands that he be released from this state of mind. A person who was merely sensitive would be prepared to put up with the anxiety, but not so the inebriate. Once he finds the soothing effect that intoxicants have upon his mind he becomes the slave of those intoxicants. It is impossible for an average person to even start imagining what a delightful effect, at once so soothing and exhilarating, intoxicants have upon a hypersensitive mind."

As the authority, just quoted (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), puts it, "abnormal drinking is but a symptom of personal maladjustment to life . . . as a class, alcoholics are apt to be sensitive, emotionally immature, grandiose in their demands upon themselves and others. They have usually "gone broke" on some dream ideal of perfection; failing to realise the dream they have escaped cold reality by taking to the bottle. This habit of escape finally turns into an obsession — a compulsion to drink so subtly powerful that no disaster however great can in most cases seem to break it."

The essential core of the inebriate's personality pattern is ego-centrism, "narcissism," self-centredness. The most frequently occurring emotions are resentment, anger, anxiety, fear — all in extreme degree.

No human is entirely free of ego-centrism; none is altogether unaffected by resentment, etc.; but once a man or woman who has a more than usual "dose" of these characteristics finds escape in alcohol, the next downward steps are inevitable.

Will the reader please look again at the list given above, taking each item separately and pondering it well? It is rather staggering to take into one's mind the realisation that such a high percentage of intemperance of varying degrees is due to the irresistible urge to escape from psychical weaknesses (emotional even more than intellectual or moral), the deadly origins of which go back to infancy; for which the individual is little or not at all to blame; and which are aggravated and deepened year by year by countless environmental pressures that are part and parcel of our present-day society.

What Does Society Do?

Environmental and (in general) social factors which create or intensify such traits and conditions include:

Faulty training in character and emotions by parents and teachers; various inadequacies in the home and marriage situation; malnutrition; poverty; overwork; insufficient education; insecurity; unemployment; conditions of living and working in cities; drabness and monotony in home and/or workplace; inability to use leisure time constructively; inadequate provision for youth and adults in leisure time; lack of attractive social substitute for the public-house; inadequate provision for special needs of women and of single men; the emptiness of life (not least for the well-to-do); the strain of competition and struggle in commercial life; pressure of social groups, whether constant or occasional; strength of profit motive in the liquor business, with resulting strong advertising appeals to various feelings of need; lack of scope for expression of social feelings on a high and worthy level.

In general it must be said that many of the most characteristic features of modern industrial civilisation combine to exert a persistent and manifold pressure, to which a natural though deplorable reaction is, and will be, intemperate resort to alcohol.

Every one of these items deserves to be considered separately and at length. Such consideration will show with increasing and startling clarity that so long as the main features of our present "Society" and its human products are allowed to persist we shall be developing more and more men and women doomed to fight — most of them hopelessly — against the multiple and varied psychological and social pressures that constitute the "temptation to drink too much."

Long Range Remedies.

Any efforts to reclaim drunkards, to prevent drunkenness, and to rob the public house and the bottle of their attraction, must be deliberately and far-sightedly based on thorough understanding of the facts just outlined. Whatever legislative and repressive measures may be at once desirable in themselves and acceptable to a majority of citizens (a subject beyond the scope of this survey), lasting success will require a long-range plan of reform in every important aspect of our social, economic and educational set-up. Some of the most obvious and important aspects are:—

Housing (and the related factors): parent-education; more realistic schooling; education for youth and for adults; community centres, clubs, etc.; parks, playgrounds, leisure time facilities of every kind, and education in the use of leisure; the development of art and culture among the people; full employment; high living standards; economic security; amenities and better conditions in workplaces; decentralisation, rural development, curtailment of urbanisation; replacement of competition by co-operation in industry and commerce; attainment of worthier purposes for social striving.

Such **Government Departments** as Health, Education, and Local Government must be led to take definite action in ways which should be fairly obvious in the light of the above.

The Churches can help by initiating such of the proposed activities and reforms as they can, by urging Governments (Federal, State, Local) to take their full share, by stirring and educating the public mind and conscience, by adopting a more Christian attitude to and understanding of the drinker, and by supporting in every possible way the sound approach — religious, psychological, social—of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Although the questions of prohibition, local option, etc., are outside the scope of this summary, the writer expresses the opinion that in view of the position which the production and sale of alcohol have reached in Australia no solution—and not much mitigation—of the evil can be expected until the varied steps described in this outline have been resolutely undertaken and persevered in over a period of years.

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from
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