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Acute and Chronic Alcoholism

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ACUTE AND CHRONIC ALCOHOLISM.

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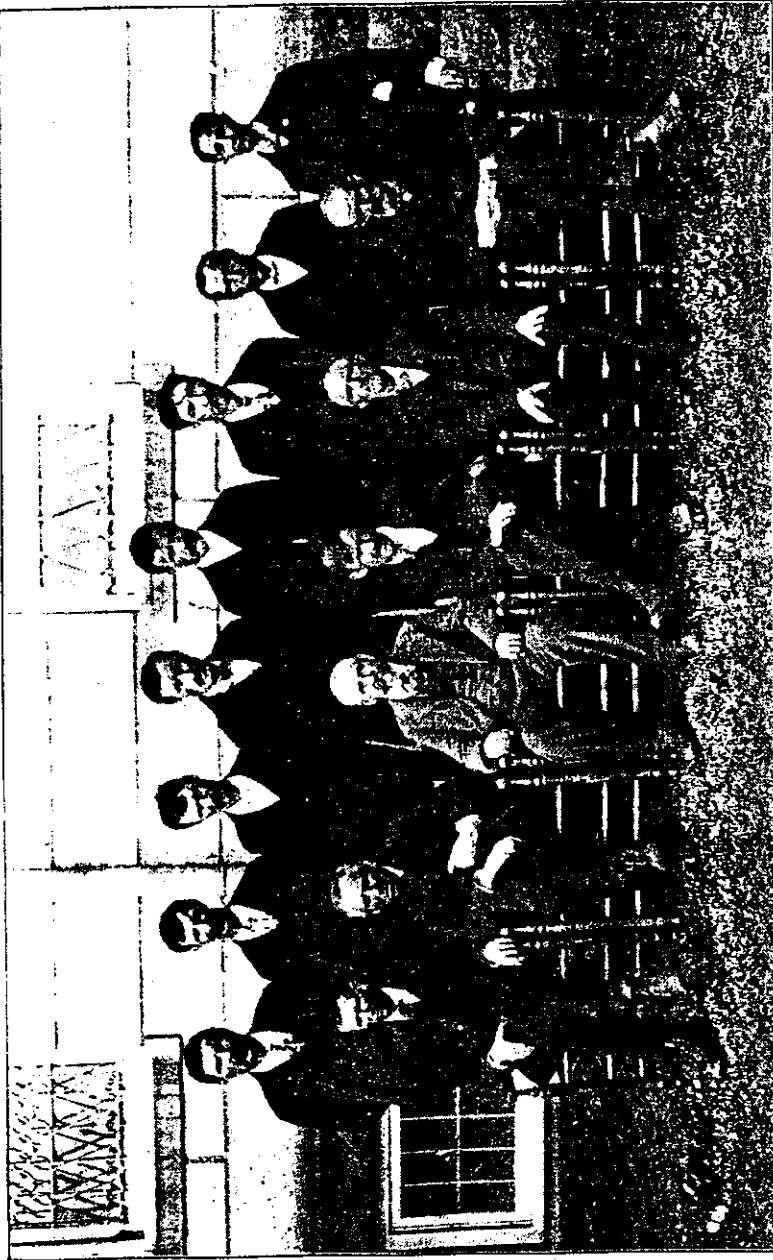
ACUTE ALCOHOLISM.

In the study of alcoholic insanity it is well to have before us a picture of those who use alcoholic stimulants to excess; but who, with comparatively few exceptions, are not treated in hospitals for the insane. From their ranks ultimately comes an endless procession of the insane, while some who are not insane find their way to the hospital:

Some drink liquor because their forefathers drank it and because they have been trained to drink it from childhood on without a thought as to the consequences, and without a knowledge of the fact that it is a toxic agent. Others drink because they feel that their muscular powers are increased thereby, contrary to fact. Many drink for the pleasure it affords them. They learn that even a small quantity of alcohol causes a feeling of exhilaration. They become less constrained and speak and act with more freedom; are more courageous and feel possessed of greater ability and greater physical power. If they go to further excess, as almost invariably follows, they become more communicative and boisterous, the finer sensibilities that formerly held them in check disappear and they have less, or even no regard for the rights of others; they make themselves conspicuous, even forcing their attentions on those about them and interfering in every possible way; becoming finally profane, obscene or insulting. If held to account for their behavior by the offended, their anger is suddenly aroused, they fly into a passion and commit some rash act without regard to the consequences. If the poisoning by intoxication continues, delusions and hallucinations more or less transitory develop; great mental exaltation is sometimes present and not infrequently the climax is reached in an attack of acute delirium, accompanied, occasionally, in a short time by exhaustion and terminating in death.

Group of Chronic Alcoholics in the Independence State Hospital.

They are the cases reported in this paper. A few cases reported are not illustrated in the group.



The abnormal mental manifestations clearly indicate that there are serious physical disturbances. The toxic agent, alcohol, has disturbed the vital functions, otherwise the normal mental balance would be preserved. Accordingly, the alcoholics are observed to finally become sleepless and nervous. Motor restlessness follows; the face takes on a worn and anxious expression and the superficial vessels of the face and of the conjunctivae dilate. The appetite fails and there is sometimes a very great loss in weight. Emaciation becomes extreme in some cases. During each period of intoxication there is experienced a feeling of increase of muscular strength, but after the period has passed it is noticeably decreased; occasionally so much so that the patient cannot even walk. Later on tremor of all the muscles, the so-called alcoholic tremor, makes its appearance. The tremor, either fine or coarse, is best observed in the tongue and extremities. Alcoholic neuritis is rather rare, but was so well marked in one case that there was a complete loss of sensation in the legs. This patient received extensive burns on the feet without any consciousness of pain. Months passed before the sensations were restored.

Two of the cases of acute alcoholism were studied in the Independence State Hospital and the following symptoms were noted: One was perfectly oriented at the time he was received and continued so. He acknowledged that he used liquor to excess and that he did things he ought not to have done, but he positively denied suspicions of any kind, also delusions and hallucinations. His memory was good, he was bright and showed an average degree of intelligence. He had at intervals, for two years past, threatened to kill his wife during and after his periods of intoxication. Sometimes as he was in the act of retiring, he would draw his knife, open it, and say to her: "I will murder you." At other times he would say, "I will get the gun or razor." He would sit up in bed with the open knife in his hand for an indefinite length of time, after making threats, and finally fall asleep with it in his hand. These acts and sayings were often repeated. He made hideous noises. He developed delusions that dead men were lying just outside the door; that someone was coming through the window after him; that his wife was associating with five devils. He said, "Come to my bosom so

I can murder you. I will kill you because you are with the five devils out there." No one was present with her except the children. He started to carry out his threat, but his wife made her escape to a neighbor. He then wreaked vengeance by bursting out windows and by bursting open doors. He also saw vermin crawling upon the wall. When sober he was always kind to his wife and children.

Others are affected somewhat differently. In the height of the intoxication they are no longer able to hold the thread of thought; their conversation is senseless jargon; they stammer; all their movements are interrupted; they stagger about and at last become helpless. Their mental activities cease and they lapse into an unconscious state and are as completely anaesthetised as if ether or chloroform had been given.

One patient thought, after passing through such a debauch, that he could never meet his friends and relatives again; that if he did they would ignore him. He then thought to end it all in death, but failed. He was released from the hospital as not having been insane, after the self-inflicted wounds had healed. One patient recently admitted into the Clarinda State Hospital had terminated his debauch in acute alcoholic delirium, one of the gravest complications in connection with alcoholism, since, in this country, it so frequently results in death, or, if the patient passes through the delirium he is most often left with permanent mental impairment. He recovered from the delirium, but very marked mental deterioration followed. One case of acute alcoholic delirium received still later died of exhaustion on the seventh day after admission.

CHRONIC ALCOHOLISM.

At about the time the patient approaches the border line between sanity and insanity mental retrogression begins. Mental concentration cannot be maintained for so long a time as when the mental functions were normal. There is no longer a desire nor an inclination for creative mental work. Original work is finally an impossibility; the intellectual powers come to a standstill and the judgment declines. The memory begins to fail and knowledge of new things, if acquired, cannot be retained so well. Even the events of the past connected with the patient's own life

appear before the mind as distorted and indistinct pictures. This mental weakness now gives way to strange false ideas which gradually become more exaggerated and increase in intensity. The nature of those who are so unfortunate as to become addicted to alcoholism is entirely changed. They are easily angered over trifling affairs; are cross and irritable, and become suspicious of their nearest relatives and their best friends. They very often suspect their wives of infidelity without the slightest ground. The wife of a patient expressed her sympathy for a hard-working neighbor who lived across the street. The patient replied by saying, "You had better go and help him." The response was, "I could do it with a good heart." In speaking of this later, the patient said, "That was the first that set me on." From that time on for three years his wife could not go out to make calls or to do shopping during the day or go out of doors in the evening for even a few moments without being accused of being in the company of this man and of having improper relations with him. He would even see her rush out of the house at night for the purpose of meeting him in the yard. Twice he saw them in a compromising position upon the floor in his own house. He secured a weapon, an iron rod, hurried to where they lay with the avowed purpose of taking both their lives. He raised the weapon and was making ready to strike the blow when thoughts of a motherless son came into his mind. These thoughts caused him to lower his weapon and walk away without molesting them. He said, "The boy is all that saved them." He also developed a delusion that his wife wanted to get him out of the way and even saw her stand before him with a butcher knife in hand ready to stab him to death. So harassing did his behavior become that it was necessary to commit him to the hospital. Previous to the onset of the insanity he thought there was no better woman than his wife.

Another patient, after using alcohol to excess for seven years, became very much interested when the battleship Maine was destroyed; worried much, and, after a few days had passed, developed the delusion that the government held him responsible; that President McKinley and Sagasta used him as a tool and that if he could only extricate himself from that situation the whole trouble would end. He said, "The image of Sagasta was brought

right before me. I saw just how he looked and communicated with him. He did not speak aloud, but in my mind I spoke to him. He spoke to me in the same way. Four times I heard a voice say, 'He did it! He did it!' meaning that Sagasta blew up the Maine. When the Maine was destroyed I received the impression that Sagasta sent her down. Then I met him and he told me he caused the destruction of the Maine. The next impressions came when the men were before Santiago. McKinley or I told them to do certain things and they won the battle. McKinley appeared twice to me, once in my sleep. He came right through the door and stopped on the sill. He was determined to have my deposition and I would not give it. Since then I have been hounded, as I would call it. I was drawn and at times they emaciated me and reduced me by their will power. My temples seem to be sinking in, and it is this very thing that makes my head shake so. I know this is all caused by McKinley because I have heard the words, 'How do you like that, old man?' I resist all these influences by firing back my thoughts. Just now my head begins to ache. My sanity is all right. Sagasta wants my life. He wants a double life, and if he killed me his life would be doubled and he would then be able to recover the islands. McKinley threatened me and got me to say the Maine was destroyed by torpedoes. Voices said to me, 'Keep still! Keep quiet!' I received these thoughts and know they came from McKinley. He got it out of me by will power. He wanted to use it against the Spaniards. Just now I heard a voice say, 'Speak the truth, man. for the truth will come out.' My mind leaves the body and goes out into space, has done this a great many times." He also communicates with persons far away by means of a system which he describes as telephoning without wires. He also developed the idea that on account of some physical deformity his wife was not a suitable mate for him. He wrote her to that effect. Soon his hatred for her knew no bounds, and finally while she was visiting him, he told her that he would kill her if he ever got out of the institution. After she was gone he said, "She will not live one month after I get out of here." He told her that the devil had come to America; that even McKinley and the republican party had leagued themselves with the devil, and that she had done the same thing. He said to her, "It is

pretty strong language, but you know it is God's truth and so do I. I feel that this country is ruined. God is not with McKinley, nor is he with the administration. I know I am doing right. I know I was taken in. I know that God is with me, and I know that I will have to live a different life in order to overcome this affliction. I am in enslavement. You know I have been deprived of my personal liberty. You ought to be willing to give me justice and liberty or inform me why you keep me here." Later he thought royal women sought matrimonial alliance with him and said, "Eighteen women are married to me. They marry themselves to me. They are women who rule destiny. Yesterday eight Pharos, men, yes men, married themselves to me." One of the latest and perhaps the most painful of all his delusions was the belief that the ground upon which a picnic was held had a dynamite mine under it. He refused to go for the reason that if he did go the superintendent and assistant physician would cause the mine to explode. These mental symptoms are all still present and there is marked mental retrogression, which has become more noticeable from day to day until the present time. He is no longer able to recollect his thoughts so well as formerly, cannot concentrate so well and is losing interest in his work. He is still willing to do whatever is asked but he does not do it so well.

Another patient, editor, lawyer and author, while in a hotel in Boston became possessed with the idea that he had incurred the enmity of some men there; thought they were toughs, and in a short time began to hear voices in and about the hotel at night; heard voices in conversation about him, calling him names and abusing him. He got up, went down to the bar room and said to the landlord and all present, "You are talking about me. I heard every word you said. What do you mean? They denied it. I went back to my room. In the morning while shaving I heard voices under my window saying, 'I wish he would cut his throat!' I took my rapier, went out and found no one there." He thought that men followed him on the street; that they took kodak pictures of him and that they were writing scurrilous articles about him. He then went to Washington to escape his tormentors, but they followed him. He saw the chief of police but could get no satisfaction. He then boarded a train and went

to a distant state, and when he arrived at his destination he saw nude men standing on the platform. He went to a hotel, told the landlord what he had seen and that he should be on his guard because a mob was likely to come at any time. He made one more effort to escape from his enemies. He went to Chicago, and while speaking of his experience there he said, "The same things occurred. I found the people there to be human vultures. I went to the chief of police and told him about the persecutions to which I was being subjected. He told me I had delusions." He was then taken into custody and to a hospital.

Another patient cannot understand why he is brought to the hospital, and immediately afterwards he said that he could hear voices talking to him all the time. The voices told him to put his shoes on and his tools in his tool sack, (he was a miner on the western coast), go out of doors and stand there; then to run down the street and go into a house, but before he got there the voice told him to go no further but instead to run away; then to run first one way and then another, and then to stand still; all of which he did. He tried to escape from these torments by going from one place to another, but wherever he went and whenever he saw persons singly or in groups he would see them making the "signs" and hear them talking about him and saying, "Don't you know the sign? Are you in it? Are you in it? I don't see how you can live." He said, "Mobs followed me as if I was the only man in the world who had money." He went to a city 1,500 miles away, remained two years, yet he heard the voices, saw the "signs" and still believed that the mobs were after him. He again tried to escape by going to a distant state, but failed as before. Later he drifted into this state and into the hospital.

Some carry weapons about with them and actually shoot at their imaginary enemies, and sometimes even shoot down their friends and relatives whom they regard as their enemies. Others think they are possessed with devils; that the devils take up their abode in their bodies; think that vermin and even animals are within their bodies, perhaps in the stomach or bowels; think the beer or other liquors which they drink or the food which they eat is purposely poisoned by their enemies; imagine that the

house is burning down and that they cannot escape; or perhaps, if out of doors, that everything is on fire and that flames are all about them. They see the devil and other hideous forms. They see rats coming up through holes and running about on the floor; see lizards and snakes running about on the ground. One patient saw snakes and frogs raining down. The air was full of them and they were crawling and leaping everywhere.

One patient, at first, saw God and conversed with him. Later he thought the world was about to be burned; that his house and everything about him was on fire. To quench the flames, he rushed about with a hand sprinkler in one hand and a bag with some salt in the other. He sprinkled the water and threw the salt on everything. He thought he was safe as long as he had salt and water. He also thought all the dogs he saw were devils, begun to wage war on them and nearly exterminated them from the neighborhood. He thought he could see devils in the air in swarms like bees, thought they were getting into his ears, and to prevent them from doing this, he plugged his ears with cotton; thought the devils were trying to smother him and in order to prevent their doing this he would try to blow them away by forcing air through his nostrils; thought also he could smell them.

Sometimes the devils appeared to him to be as large as cattle and he thought they were trying to kill him. He showed signs of great fear and kept lamps burning all night for the purpose of preventing them from coming into the house. Finally the devils came into his room and he rushed out to get an ax with which to kill them.

Another patient thought his coffee was drugged and said that he could taste the strychnia which had been put into it; thought the liquor which he kept in his own house was poisoned by enemies who came to his house; that they had also strewn poisonous powder upon his bed while he was away. Finally he heard voices about the house at night and then began to think that his neighbors and everybody about him were murderers. His disposition changed; he became quarrelsome and was taken into custody and sent to the hospital. These delusions persisted and similar ones made their appearance from time to time.

Others, when they develop the delusion that they are being hunted down by their enemies, hear them saying, "There is the rascal! Tar and feather him! Shoot him! Hang him! Burn him at the stake!"

Not a few, being unable to rid themselves of these torments, seek relief in death by their own hands in various ways.

The physical disturbances are in the main identical with those described in connection with acute alcoholism. In chronic alcoholism, they become more exaggerated and in addition there is in a very great number of cases extensive arterial sclerosis and chronic nephritis. Contracted liver is much less frequent and occasionally a case of general paralysis is met with.

Diagnosis—Having the mental and physical pictures of both acute and chronic alcoholism before us, the diagnosis as a rule is quite easily arrived at. It can nearly always be confirmed by a history of excessive alcoholism.

Etiology—In addition to excessive alcoholism, in the nineteen cases studied, for periods of time varying from five to fifteen years, there were in seven cases the following ascribed causes: In one case, the mother had heart disease and the father paralysis; in two cases, a sister of each was insane; in one case, the father was an alcoholic, finally became unbalanced mentally and later a hemiplegic; one paternal aunt died with apoplexy. In one case, both parents used intoxicating liquors. In one case, the patient was a seven months child and lay apparently in an almost lifeless condition for two months, after which time he became active, grew quite rapidly and appeared to be a strong and healthy child, but was small and remained undersized all his life.

Treatment—First, removal of the patient to a hospital or to some retreat where total abstinence can be maintained is of great importance. Second, the use of such supportive treatment as may be indicated in each individual case. Third, massage and inunctions of some nutrient oil, in certain cases where there is much emaciation, loss of strength and nervousness, give very satisfactory results in connection with the supportive treatment. Fourth, suggestive therapeutics is recommended by some and its value cannot be questioned. I doubt if a physician ever prescribes for a patient without, either consciously or unconsciously,

sending along with the prescription a large element of suggestion; otherwise the patient would soon discontinue his services, saying that he had no faith in that doctor. Of all patients, alcoholics are the most susceptible to suggestion, and a step farther than unconscious suggestion may be taken with good results. Fifth, hydrotherapy as devised and put into practice by the great psychiatric, Kraepelin, of Heidelberg, Germany, is coming to be regarded more and more as a most important adjunct in treatment. This method of treatment is in constant use in the hospital for insane in the above named city and the results obtained are most flattering, not only in the treatment of alcoholics but in the treatment of other forms of insanity. With its proper use, restraints and sedatives are almost entirely done away with in the former named hospital, and a much larger percentage of acute delirium cases recover than anywhere else in the world.

Prognosis—In the first class of cases, acute alcoholics, recovery is almost always certain. They will as a rule remain so permanently, if they can be induced to desist from using any kind of alcoholic stimulants. The moral degeneracy, however, which is so easily acquired by all alcoholics and which as a rule remains as a permanent inheritance, increases the possibility of a relapse, makes it almost certain. In chronic alcoholism, the prognosis is unfavorable. Some recover if treatment is begun before the delusions become permanently fixed and before mental retrogression has set in or is at all far advanced, but a large proportion of them relapse as soon as they meet with temptation. There is almost no hope for permanent recovery in those cases in which mental deterioration has become very marked and in which the delusions have become fixed. Of the fourteen cases of chronic alcoholism illustrated, all but one showed very great mental deterioration, while the five acute cases showed no such failure. The average time in the hospital of the nineteen cases was two years and eight months. The shortest time for any one case was seven days, at the end of which time death ensued. The longest time for any one case was six years.

Argument for detention and treatment—The alcoholic, acute or chronic, is a menace to the peace, to the welfare and happiness of the community in which he happens to be a resident. Often

uncouth in his appearance, he leaves a lasting and unfavorable impression upon the innocent youths who know him and unavoidably meet him. His vocabulary is as a rule made up largely of obscene and profane words. He is much freer in the use of profanity in his own home than anywhere else. Not only does he use such language, but he speaks gruffly to the members of his family and often curses them and even strikes and kicks them. He comes into his home, which is cheerless and without comforts, simply because he has squandered his earnings for liquor instead of supplies as he should, and because his home is as it is and because food is not prepared as he desires it should be, he beats his wife and turns her and all the family out of doors. They perhaps escape to a neighbor's house, while, he, conqueror as he feels himself to be, seeks to avenge himself still further by overturning tables, breaking dishes and destroying furniture. Then, satisfied with his heinous acts, he retires with clothes and boots on and sleeps the sleep of the wretch that he is. Finally, he comes to look upon the members of his family and his neighbors as his enemies. He arms himself and threatens and often does shoot these supposed enemies. Cases are on record where friends and relatives have been shot at and injured and even killed in this way. One of the cases studied, carried a revolver with him while at work in his field and finally shot his hired man, whom he thought had become his enemy, without warning. Another case prowled about his house and out-buildings at night with revolver in hand and kept up a fusilade at imaginary enemies, thus endangering the lives of passers by and the lives of his own family. Another walked into a room where his father was, brandished a butcher knife, and said, "I ought to kill one before I go." Another struck his wife on the head with a meat ax and nearly caused her death. I witnessed another alcoholic get up from the dinner table in his own house, raise a butcher knife over his wife, and, looking like a demon from the infernal regions, threaten to stab her to death on the spot.

Such outrageous acts from the least to the greatest should not be tolerated by the innocent members of a family nor by a community. Such a man ought to be taken into custody at once and removed to a proper place for care and treatment, and there

should be no great hurry in making him a free man again unless the home and the community are safely guarded. This could be accomplished in a measure by legislation, such as would give us laws preventing the marriage of those habitually addicted to the use of alcoholic stimulants; laws making acute and chronic alcoholism good ground for divorce. But the law should not stop there, as good as such laws may seem, it should go a step farther; it should look to the welfare of the race—to its future. It should not allow these alcoholics to propogate their kind, for such propogation by these alcoholics, these moral degenerates and physical wrecks, contaminates the life stream and insures the premature death of the race. Such propogation is a crime against our race—a crime against our twentieth century civilization. What sane man or woman, if she or he thoroughly understood that about one-half of all the living children born of alcoholic parents in Germany become epileptic, and that about one-third of all the imbeciles and idiots are the direct offspring of alcoholic parents, would think of sanctioning such propogation? I trust, not one. They should avoid union with the alcoholic and such propogation with more dread than they would union with a leper. They should understand that we on this side of the water are no exception to the rule; that alcohol is as far reaching in its effects upon us as it is upon our kindred race across the sea. They should demand laws that would compel the life retention of such alcoholics, or laws that would compel the administration of such treatment as would prevent them from reproducing their kind, and yet leave them able to live useful lives.