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Editorial.

THE ALCOHOL HABIT.

No nurse who studies the underlying causes of the disease and suffering with which she is constantly brought in contact, can fail to be profoundly impressed by the effect of the alcohol habit as an influencing factor. We are learning constantly that if we would help to raise the standard of national health we must fight the forces which are productive of poverty, with the attendant evils of overcrowding, underfeeding and physical deterioration, and probably no one cause is more productive of all these things than the habit of drinking to excess. Whether a nurse works in a hospital, in a poor-law infirmary, in private houses, or in the homes of the poor, she is constantly confronted with the fact that where drinking prevails, unhappiness and lowered vitality are the rule, and one of the saddest effects of the alcohol habit is that it not only affects the person who indulges in it, but causes widespread misery to those dependant upon him.

Take the case of a patient admitted to a hospital suffering from acute pneumonia, who is evidently the victim of alcohol. The prognosis is bad from the first. His strength is undermined, his powers of resistance lessened, and the stimulant which is so valuable an aid to treatment in some of these cases has little or no effect upon him. He does not "respond" to it. Visit his home and you will find ample cause for his predisposition to disease. The poverty-stricken room, the contents of which have found their way to the pawnshop to satisfy the insatiable craving for alcohol; the empty grate, where a fire should be burning to afford warmth and comfort when the worker comes in cold and wet; the barren cupboard—are all potent testimony to the conditions which

have favoured the development of disease.

Talk to many of the derelicts who find their way into our workhouse infirmary wards, from all classes of society, and a large proportion of them will frankly attribute their poverty to the one cause—drink. Or pay a round of visits with a district nurse, and words are unnecessary to indicate the homes upon which drink has hold. The curse is written plainly in the sordid poverty of the surroundings, in the stunted, half-starved and ragged appearance of the children.

As nurses, it is no part of our work to judge, to blame, or condemn, but it is profoundly our duty to study the underlying causes of disease and poverty, to do our best to remove them, to create a healthy environment, and so long as a fictitious demand for alcohol is created by placing at every corner in the slums the gin-palaces which we would not tolerate near the houses of the rich, so long will the drink habit be a curse in the land, and the people, with constitutions undermined, fall easy victims to tuberculosis and other diseases which follow in the wake of lowered vitality and poverty.

To some nurses it will seem that they should wage war on all consumption of an agent which has worked such havoc as alcohol; to others the remedy will appear to be in creating a more healthy opinion as to its use and abuse. When once the alcoholic habit has been established the safety of the patient, no doubt, lies in total abstinence. Alcohol should be cut out of his diet as sternly as sugar from that of the diabetic, or albumen from that of the victim of kidney disease.

On all abstemiousness is incumbent, for self-indulgence and luxury in any form are the enemies of the high ideals and the simplicity of life, which are the strength of a nation.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)