

[Health and comfort in old age : and the safety of immediate and entire discontinuance of spirit drinking described and exemplified; being the substance of a speech].

Contributors

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British and Foreign Temperance Society.

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HEALTH AND COMFORT IN OLD AGE.

AND THE

SAFETY OF IMMEDIATE AND ENTIRE DISCONTINUANCE

OF SPIRIT DRINKING

DESCRIBED AND EXEMPLIFIED,

BEING THE

Substance of a Speech by Mr. Shillitoe.

AT EXETER HALL. MAY 21, 1833.

MR. SHILLITOE, of Tottenham, addressed the meeting to the following effect:—I believe I am safe in saying that duty has brought me here to-day, to prove, from my own experience of more than thirty years, which is said to be the best schoolmaster, that ardent spirits are not essential to the health and to the comfort of mankind; and also to prove the fallacy of the opinion abroad, that where individuals have been in the habitual use of them, it is dangerous for such to abandon their use all at once.

A fright when a lad brought on a very severe nervous complaint, which increased as I grew up. At the twenty-fourth year of my age, my health became so impaired, that my medical attendant ordered me to quit London altogether, and put me on a very generous diet; a beef-steak, and some of the best ale that could be procured, were ordered for my breakfast, and, at my dinner and supper, plenty of good ale and wine, and, to avoid obesity, vegetable diet. This mode of dieting myself I pursued for twenty years; my health gradually declined; my nerves were so enfeebled, that twice I was confined to my bed from the sudden sight of a mouse. These frights, too, which proceeded from different causes, produced such dread, such horror, such debility, and such sinking, and frequent craving for food and stimulants, for several days afterwards, and my frame became so overcharged with the quantity of food and liquids, and my nervous irritability so increased, that I felt as if I could not live. Smoking, and spirits and water, were

then recommended. Although the quantity was increased from time to time, they did not produce the effect I desired. I became alarmed at the consequences, not knowing where it would end. These not producing sleep, I was then advised to have recourse to laudanum. I began with ten drops, yet I found I was obliged to increase my dose three drops every third night, until I got to one hundred and eighty drops; I left off at that quantity. In addition to my nervous attacks (I apprehend in consequence of my generous and high manner of living), I became bilious, rheumatic, and gouty; I frequently had very bad colds and sore throat; and I can only describe the situation I was brought into, by saying I went about, day by day, frightened for fear of being frightened, a dreadful situation indeed to be living in. I made a visit to a medical friend of mine in Hampshire, where I spent some time. This afforded him an opportunity of observing the state of my health, and the effect which my manner of living had on my constitution; and before I quitted his house he advised me to make a general change in my manner of living, to abandon my beef-steak, to abandon the use of all fermented liquors, and to use animal food but very sparingly.

At first it appeared to me as if human nature could hardly be willing to submit to my friend's prescription, for my physician in London had desired me to double my portion of ale in the morning, saying my hypochondriacal habit required it. At last I called upon him for his advice in as debilitated a state of body, I think, as I well could be to walk about. His advice to me was, to procure some of the oldest Madeira wine that could be got, and to take a bottle of it in as short a time as possible. A friend of mine provided me some, which he told me was twenty years old. I believe it is best thus to go into the details of what I suffered. I took the bottle of wine between the hours of eight and ten at night, and it produced very little more effect (such was my state of debility) than if I had taken so much water: but feeling satisfied of the sincerity of my friend, who had enforced on me the necessity of a general change, I made up my mind to be willing to seek for help from Almighty God, that I might give it a fair trial, satisfied as I was, that nothing short of his help could enable me to endure the conflict I must undergo. When I returned

to my own home, favoured, as I believe I was, with that holy help that would bear me up in making the attempt, I proceeded all at once, for I found tampering with these things would not do, and gave up my laudanum, fermented liquors of every kind whatsoever, and my meat breakfast. My health began gradually to improve, although I felt some of the effects of my old complaint in my stomach after I had taken my dinner meal: I therefore confined myself wholly to vegetable diet, and my health has gradually improved from that time to the present; so that I am able to say, to the praise of Him who enabled me to make the sacrifice of these things, that I am stronger now, in my *eightieth* year, than I was fifty years ago, when in the habit of taking animal food, wine, strong malt liquor, and spirits and water, and my bilious, my rheumatic, and my gouty complaints, I think I may say, are no more. Nor have I, since this change, ever had an attack of that most dreadful of all maladies, hypochondria. I call it most dreadful, from what I have felt of it. It exceeds derangement, because when derangement takes place, the mind is gone. I find, from continued experience, (it being thirty years since I ate fish, flesh, or fowl, or took fermented liquor of any kind whatever,) I find abstinence to be the best medicine; I do not meddle with fermented liquors of any kind, even as medicine. I find I am capable of doing better without them than when I was in the daily use of them.

It is an opinion that it is necessary to take ardent spirits when people are travelling, to defend them from cold. Now I will mention two striking instances of my experience to the contrary. Having to travel from Copenhagen, in Denmark, to Christiana, in Norway, eleven days' journey before me, in carts that would have no covering over them, in the twelfth month, that is December, when the frost was very severe, my friends told me I must have spirits. We sometimes started at four in the morning, and travelled till ten at night, at that season of the year, fearing the falls of snow might have a tendency to impede our journey; and I never took any thing stronger than coffee, while the man whom I hired to take charge of me was taking his spirits, and seemed as if he could not do without them. I have reason, however, to believe I suffered less from cold than he did. I spent

the greater part of the winter in Petersburg, and travelled on sledges, without having recourse to any thing stronger than coffee. I do not say my mode of living would do for all constitutions, but I am sure that if persons had but courage to *make a trial of it*, it would suit a great many, and be the means of procuring and preserving their health better than living in a more generous way.

When I think of my friend who put me in this mode of living, I am satisfied that he did more towards my comfort here, and towards my endeavouring to seek after a better inheritance in the world to come, than if he had given me ten thousand sovereigns. It is probable that such a present would have promoted an increase of the indulgence in which I was living; and it would have been almost sure to increase that state of disease which I had from time to time been labouring under.

And another way in which I was favoured to experience help, in my willingness to abandon all these things, arose from the effect my abstinence has had on my natural temper. My natural disposition is very irritable, and was not helped in my nervous complaint, irritability being very much attached to such complaints. I am persuaded that ardent spirits, and high living, have more or less effect in tending to raise into action our evil propensities, which if given way to, war against the soul, and render us displeasing to Almighty God. When I recur to the effects that the use of ardent spirits had on my health and on my mind, I am renewedly confirmed in the belief that the good Power never had any thing to do in producing them, and therefore, they must have been produced by the evil power—that power which envies our happiness here and hereafter. (*Applause.*) And I am now about to close with some expressions of a physician to one of the duchesses of Marlborough; “Madam, eat less, take physic, or be sick.” (*Long-continued cheering.*)

(A gentleman present said Mr. Shillitoe had walked from Tottenham, six miles, to attend the meeting, and would probably walk home again.)

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