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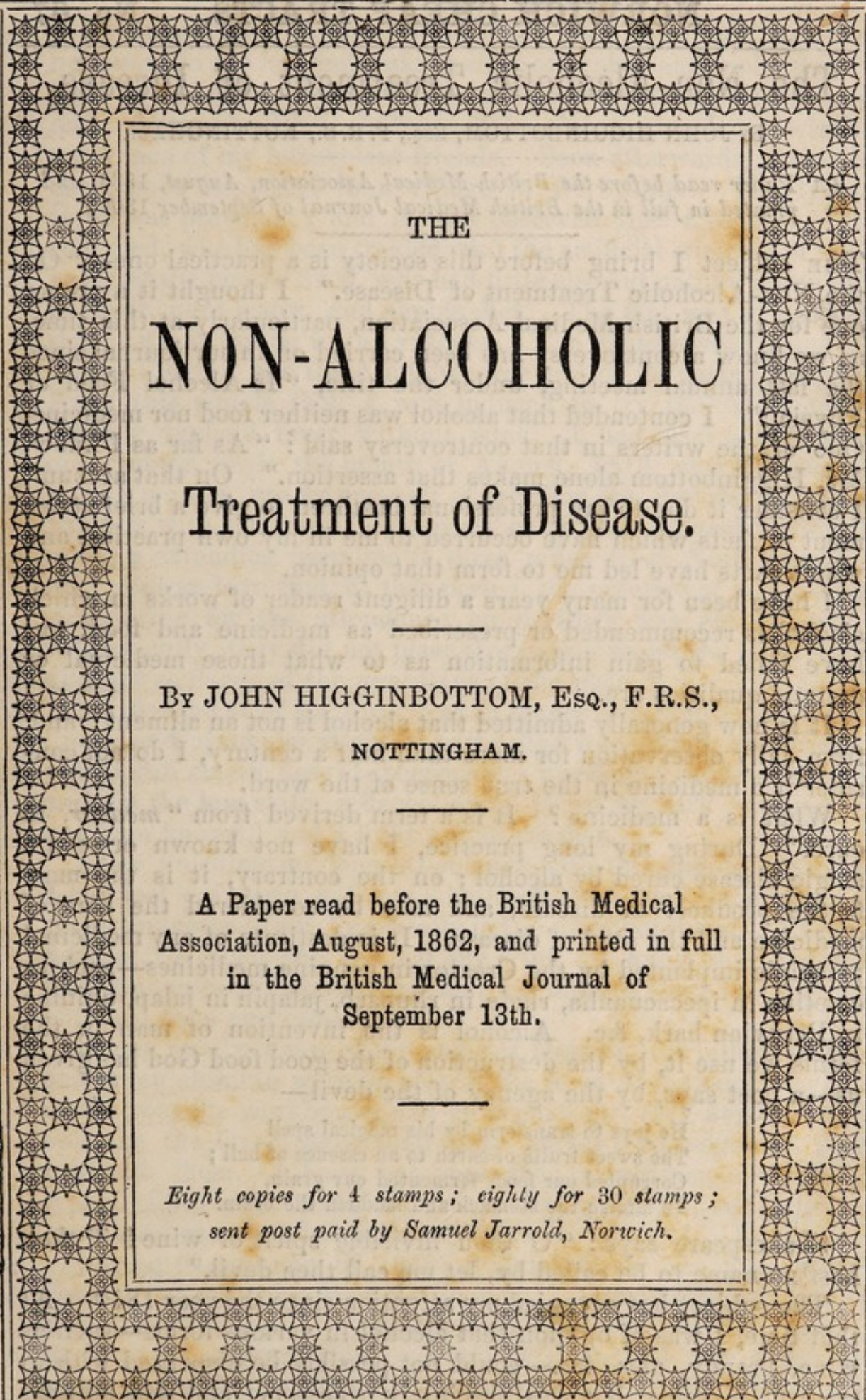
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THE  
**NON-ALCOHOLIC**  
Treatment of Disease.

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By JOHN HIGGINBOTTOM, Esq., F.R.S.,  
NOTTINGHAM.

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A Paper read before the British Medical  
Association, August, 1862, and printed in full  
in the British Medical Journal of  
September 13th.

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## The Non-Alcoholic Treatment of Disease,

By JOHN HIGGINBOTTOM, Esq., F. R. S., NOTTINGHAM.

(A Paper read before the British Medical Association, August, 1862, and printed in full in the British Medical Journal of September 13th )

THE subject I bring before this society is a practical one—"On the Non-Alcoholic Treatment of Disease." I thought it a proper one for the British Medical Association, particularly at this time, as we know a controversy has been carried on in our journal since the last annual meeting, under the title, "Is Alcohol Food or Physic?" I contended that alcohol was neither food nor medicine. One of the writers in that controversy said: "As far as I know, Mr. Higginbottom alone makes that assertion." On that account, I consider it due to my professional brethren to give a brief statement of facts which have occurred to me in my own practice, and which facts have led me to form that opinion.

I have been for many years a diligent reader of works in which alcohol is recommended or prescribed as medicine and food, but have failed to gain information as to what those medicinal or dietetic qualities are.

It is now generally admitted that alcohol is not an aliment; and, from daily observation for more than half a century, I do not consider it a medicine in the true sense of the word.

What is a medicine? It is a term derived from "*medeor*, to cure." During my long practice, I have not known or seen a single disease cured by alcohol; on the contrary, it is the most fertile producer of disease, and may be considered the bane of medicine and the seed of disease. It is destitute of any medicinal principle implanted by the Creator in genuine medicines—such as emetina in ipecacuanha, rheim in rhubarb, jalapin in jalap, quinine in Peruvian bark, &c. Alcohol is the invention of man in the forms we use it, by the destruction of the good food God has given us—a poet says, by the agency of the devil—

He joys to transform by his magical spell  
The sweet fruits of earth to an essence of hell;  
Corrupted our food, fermented our grain,  
To famish the stomach and madden the brain.

Shakespeare says: "O thou invisible spirit of wine! if thou hast no name to be called by, let me call thee devil."

The subject has occupied my attention since the year 1810. At that time, I was of opinion that alcohol in various forms—such as wine, brandy, ales, &c.—could not possibly be dispensed with in medical practice, but was absolutely necessary, and that nothing could be substituted for it in the treatment of some disorders and diseases. I believe many of my professional brethren are of that opinion at the present time.



I was educated in the opinion that port wine was absolutely necessary in the low and sinking state of typhus and typhoid fever; and, in order to procure it for my poorer patients when I commenced practice, I was desirous of forming a wine depôt, with the assistance of my benevolent friends. Soon afterwards, a singular occurrence happened in a village in Derbyshire. The typhoid fever was prevalent; and it was observed that a number of the rich died, who had been treated with the artificial stimulus of wine; and that the poorer lived, who had little else but natural stimulants, pure air, pure water, and simple diet. The fact was so apparent, that it was a saying in the villages, "The doctors were blamed for killing the rich, and the Almighty was praised for curing the poor." From this simple fact, I was induced to try the experiment of treating typhoid fever without wine. I had soon a very ample opportunity, for in the month of August, 1813, and the four following months, nearly one-half of my time was devoted to visiting patients with the fever in the parishes of Basford and Radford—villages extending from one to three miles from Nottingham. I may observe here that, at that period, the practice of medical men contracting for the attendance on parishes was not prevalent; consequently, they did not place themselves under the often degrading surveillance of the guardians of the poor.

My treatment of the fever was to secure free ventilation, cleanliness, and particular attention to the digestive organs, commencing with a full emetic dose of ipecacuanha, aperients, saline medicines; and, in the low state, a decoction of Peruvian bark (quinine was not then known,) and a light nutritious diet.

After finishing my long attendance with this simple treatment, I had lost only two patients; both of them had wine given to them, unknown to me, by a family in the neighbourhood. I believe none of the other patients had any wine. I know they had none from the parochial authorities, and I could not learn that any was obtained from any other source.

In one family alone, of the name of Dawson, the father, mother, and seven children were all sick of the fever at the same time. A nurse from the workhouse, and an orphan girl they kept (who did not take the fever) were their only nurses; no neighbour dared approach them. I have not prescribed or recommended wine in typhoid fever since that time, nearly fifty years ago, and my treatment has been attended with eminent success.

During the autumn of 1848, typhoid fever was prevalent in Carrington, a hamlet near Nottingham. The disease was fatal in a number of cases. I attended, conjointly with my son, twenty-seven patients at one time; several of them had bad symptoms, great depression, delirium, intermittent pulse, &c. The same treatment was pursued in the commencement of the fever, as before stated. In the low and sinking state, the sulphate of quinine, with the compound infusion of orange peel, was given three times



a day ; and the strength sustained by mild nutriment, a little given at very frequent intervals, night and day ; and the result was most successful. All the patients recovered. I believe the wine treatment would have been fatal to several of them ; they would have died from exhaustion. There is no doubt patients often recover in typhoid fever, in spite of the wine given ; but, after long experience and observation, I am of opinion that its administration in typhoid fever is always injurious in its operation, and often fatal in its effects. I believe this opinion is contrary to that of many of my brother practitioners, but I declare it as a fact in my own practice.

The next complaint which I thought required wine or brandy was *post partum* hæmorrhage. I need not give a detailed account of my practice in these cases, as they may be found in the *Lancet* of June 25th, 1845, March 6th, 1858, and August 4th, 1860.

I may relate the case which led me to consider wine and brandy as injurious. I had attended a delicate female in labour three times in the years 1821, 1823, and 1826, each time with the most severe flooding immediately after the separation of the placenta. I used all the ordinary remedies ; pressure, cold in various ways, also opiates, wine and brandy each time ; it was a case of most intense anxiety, and I had to remain three or four hours after delivery before I could safely leave her. In her third labour, I was afraid she would die, after having used all my usual remedies. I had given her half a pint of brandy and a pint of port wine, in about three hours, which was of no avail ; she was evidently fast sinking. It occurred to me that, in her two former labours in which I attended her, when I had made use of the same means to check the hæmorrhage, there was no amendment until she had ejected the contents of the stomach. I was then most anxious that vomiting should take place, in hope of relief, as she was rapidly sinking. I thought, as vomiting had been so beneficial to her before, I was in this instance justified in producing it by giving an emetic dose of ipecacuanha ; a full vomiting soon succeeded, and a large quantity of fluid was ejected. I was much struck with an expression of my patient which I had heard in similar cases after the vomiting : after a deep sigh, she said, "Oh, I'm better, I'm better now." The hæmorrhage ceased immediately and did not return ; the symptoms of sinking subsided, and the patient appeared in her usual state of body, but very feeble. A little plain gruel was all the nourishment given her ; and she gradually recovered from her weak state of body. I attended the same patient in labour three times afterwards, in the years 1827, 1829, and 1831 ; and, what is satisfactory in favour of the *secale cornutum*, which was about that time becoming more used in Nottingham, I gave her half a drachm of the powder before the birth of the child, and a similar dose after the birth, before the separation of the placenta. This remedy had the desired effect of preventing the hæmorrhage, so that I had no necessity of ipecac-



uanah, or indeed any other remedy. I would here mention that there is a difficulty in procuring the *secale cornutum* good. A physician accoucher informs me that he gathers it fresh for himself, and can testify to its effects in cases of uterine hæmorrhage.

In extreme cases of uterine hæmorrhage, when other remedies have failed, I have continued the use of ipecacuanha emetics with success, in my own practice, and also in consultation. A medical man in the town of Nottingham, engaged in a most extensive obstetric practice for the last ten years, informs me that, having commenced the emetic plan at my suggestion, he never knew it to fail in checking the hæmorrhage, although he does not resort to it until ordinary remedies have failed. From the confidence he has in the remedy, he never fears the result in the worst of cases. He related to me an instance. A lady in the neighbourhood had, after the birth of twins, the most uncontrollable flooding; an emetic was given her and as it did not act speedily, the fauces were irritated with a feather; vomiting ensued, and the hæmorrhage ceased immediately. Upon two subsequent confinements, when syncope was setting in, she exclaimed, "Oh make me sick; I shall not be better till then." This was done, and the hæmorrhage and the syncope ceased together. For about thirty-six years, I have lost all confidence in diffusible stimulants such as wine, brandy, &c., in uterine hæmorrhage, from a conviction that they increase the action of the heart and consequently the hæmorrhage.

I should not think it right to take up the time of this society, by detailing my treatment of many disorders, and diseases in which alcoholic stimulants are usually prescribed or ordered by my professional brethren, but only several of those in which they have been generally given. I may name *delirium tremens*. For the first twenty years of my practice I treated *delirium tremens* on the stimulo-narcotic plan, with brandy and opium, and followed the directions of the most approved authorities of the day. During the last thirty years, I have laboured to prevent as well as to cure *delirium tremens*. The prevention is by no means uncommon now in men, arising from their entire abstinence from intoxicating agents, such as alcohol, tobacco, and opium.

This has been successfully the case with many men, who have quite reformed their habits; but I am sorry to say, that I have never known a female really reformed. In women, ebriosity and its sequences appear quite incurable, so far as my strict observation has extended. Females addicted to excessive use of stimulants do not appear to possess mental and physical powers sufficient to enable them to abstain therefrom.

In the year 1834, I attended, with the late Dr. Andrew Blake, of Nottingham, a patient with *delirium tremens*. He published the case in his well-known work, "A Practical Essay on Delirium Tremens," (second edition,) in which he states—"The patient was a fat and robust publican, who lived in an atmosphere charged



with alcohol; in addition to which he daily indulged very freely in ale and spirits, and had done so for years past." I wished this patient to remove altogether from his public-house; he took my advice, and reformed his drinking habits—a very rare instance at that time, now twenty-eight years ago. He is still living, seventy-four years of age; and to use his own words when I called upon him a few days before I published his case in the *Lancet*, on my saying to him—"Why, you are still alive!" he answered—"I'm but a lad yet." His wife died of *delirium tremens*, about a year after her husband's attack of the disease. I have discontinued the use not only of alcoholic stimulants in the treatment of *delirium tremens*, but also the use of opium, having been much dissatisfied with its effects, and have been led to consider it only as a palliative, which hides, and often aggravates disease.

The emetic treatment in *delirium tremens* is invaluable. I prefer ipecacuanha to the tartarised antimony, as being safer and more effectual; but I will not enter into details, but rather refer you to the *Lancet*, of November 28th, 1857, where I have given some account of the treatment of that disease.

I may mention here also the cure of *periodical drunkenness*, which may be considered as a disorder. It is observed that, in the intervals between the attacks, the person is quite sober, and often remain so for two or three months, or for a longer period; when the mania comes on, the desire for alcoholic stimulants is so strong as to destroy all power of self-control, while the sensation of depression and sinking is so great as to compel him to use those stimulants as his only remedy. When a person is in that state, it will be found that his stomach is in fault, and that the unnatural appetite arises from a vitiated secretion; if half a drachm of ipecacuanha be taken so as to produce a full vomiting, the desire for intoxicating stimulants is immediately removed, and the circulation, which has been previously languid, is restored. From the experience I have had of ipecacuanha emetics, I am of opinion that, if a patient can be persuaded to follow up the emetic plan for a few times when the periodical attacks come on, he will be effectually cured, and the dipsomania (for such I look upon it) will be overcome.

There is another subject which demands the most serious attention of the profession at the present day; that is, the alcoholic forcing system—falsely called "a generous diet"—by taking rum and milk in a morning, and wine and malt liquor several times a day with food: a most injurious and dangerous method of treating disorder or disease, which is now frequently adopted by some of our junior practitioners. Whatever present relief may be obtained from it, it must terminate injuriously, if not fatally, to the patient. I will not enter further into the subject, as my opinion has been so lately given in the *British Medical Journal* for January the 18th of the present year.

In quitting this part of the subject, I would refer to ipecacuanha



in emetic doses as an invaluable remedy in disorders and diseases, in which alcoholic stimulants have been thought necessary. I do not know another medicine equal to it in the whole of our materia medica, both in the commencement of the disease, and also in the sinking state of disease. I give ipecacuanha emetics nearly as freely as I would a purgative; nor have I known any injurious results, but have always found them perfectly safe and satisfactory in their effects.

After twenty years of constant and unremitting attention to the effects of alcoholic stimulants on the human system, in an extensive practice as a general practitioner, I discontinued them altogether both as food and medicine, now about thirty years since, from a full conviction of their insufficiency and dangerous qualities, even before the origin of the Temperance Societies. Some years before the establishment of Temperance Societies, these convictions were thrust upon me; and upon their formation I gave my most hearty concurrence and assistance. It favoured me with an extensive field of observation, and I particularly marked the changes which occurred in the habits, personal appearance, and health of the members. The chief motive I had in joining the society was for the purpose of preventing and curing drunkenness, disregarding altogether any pecuniary loss. I consider it a legitimate employment for me as a medical man. Previously to the institution of these societies, drunkenness was deemed incurable. I am not come here to give a Temperance lecture; but I may say with truth that Total Abstinence Societies have effected more good than all the united efforts of all the benevolent societies of England, of a secular nature; it does away with the necessity of benevolent institutions. Delavan, the great American Temperance advocate, said "that if total abstinence from alcoholic fluids became general in England, we should have to search for objects of charity."

I now state some observations on the effects of alcohol on the human system, connected with these societies.

1. The first circumstance which arrested my attention after being some time in the Temperance Society, was by members saying that they had lost their rheumatism (or gout) since they had abstained from alcoholic drinks. I designated it at an early period of the society, alcoholism, not rheumatism, as abstaining from stimulants cured them. The improved state of health of many corroborated the truth of that passage in Shakespear, "Ask God for Temperance; that's the appliance only which your disease requires." If abstinence from all alcoholic and fermented liquids were prevalent, we should seek in vain for a gouty patient; proving the truth of the opinion of doctor Erasmus Darwin, who said "he never knew a case of gout but the patient was addicted to the use of vinous or fermented drinks." I believe, even in hereditary predisposition to the disease, it is probable that attacks might ultimately be prevented by continued abstinence.



2. I noticed in my new improved method of treating disease the tardiness of recovery in those patients who were in the habit of taking daily alcoholic beverages, compared with others who were Abstainers. This contrast was enforced upon my observation, and accordingly I formed my prognosis, that I could expect no particular amendment until the nerve-poison, alcohol, was eliminated from the system. In severe attacks of disease, patients using alcoholic stimulants regularly were in a more prepared state for disease, and certainly had less probability of recovery.

3. It is almost impossible to relieve patients labouring under chronic disease, whilst they are daily taking alcoholic fluids.

4. When a patient is in a sinking state from disease, and when a medical man has thought an alcoholic stimulant absolutely necessary to snatch the patient from death, in this case the great danger is, that such a stimulant will extinguish the small spark of life remaining, and that the patient will be destroyed. It was truly said of the Brunonian system, "that Dr. Brown had made no provision in his system for the recovery of exhaustion arising from the effects of taking alcoholic stimulants." Lord Bacon observes, "If the spirit is assailed by another heat stronger than its own, it is dissipated and destroyed."

5. It is not unusual to give wine or brandy at the apparent approach of death; such a practice is a mistaken kindness. In many instances patients are sent drunk into another world, having their minds beclouded and rendered incapable of leaving a dying testimony to their anxious and expectant friends and relatives. I have heard this commented upon as a very just and serious complaint against some medical men. "Let me go home sober," said an old lady, when urged on her death-bed to sustain her failing strength with brandy. "The medical friend of the late excellent Dr. John Pye Smith, on perceiving a rapid diminution of power, recommended some brandy to his water beverage. This proposal was conveyed to the eye of Dr. Smith in writing, on account of his great deafness. He turned to his wife, and emphatically said, 'Never my dear; I charge you, if such a remedy be proposed when I am incompetent to refuse, let me die rather than swallow the liquid.'"

6. I have had patients apparently in a dying state, who have recovered by giving them very frequently small quantities of light nutritious food, and by particular attention to natural stimulants, similar to those cases I have related in the sinking state of typhoid fever. Shakspeare says, "While the vital flame burns feebly, a little give at first; that kindled, add a little more; till by deliberate nourishment the flame, revived, with all its wonted vigour glows."

7. I have been led to observe the very great tenacity of life even in those patients suffering under incurable disease, when they have been total abstainers from alcoholic fluids; and the very speedy death of the very intemperate under similar circumstances.



8. The adage that "wine is the milk of old age" is very erroneous, as it regards our alcoholic wine; it possesses no analogy to milk. Milk contains all the constituents of food, and is the type of food. Dr. Erasmus Darwin used to say, "Milk is white blood." The oldest individuals I have known have lived chiefly on milk and farinaceous food. Such food alone is sufficient to preserve the body in a healthy, cheerful, and happy state. Alcoholic wine is not at all adapted to support or repair the decaying body in old age, but to exhaust the vital powers, produce disease and death.

9. There is a subject with which I have been much impressed, that is, the great and fearful responsibility in ordering or prescribing by medical men, alcohol as a medicine, particularly to delicate females. From my own observation, the effects have been most calamitous in producing confirmed drunkenness. The very slow, insidious, pleasing, and delusive manner in its attack is such, in the commencement, that the patient is totally unconscious of her state. On visiting a lady, I perceived she did not articulate her words distinctly, and on inquiry, she told me she had been taking brandy and water. I thought it right to inform her that, if any neighbour were to see her in the state she was in, it would be said that she was intoxicated. She directly said, "If I thought so, Mr. Higginbottom, I would never take a drop again as long as I live." Such an amiable character never expects to come on the list of drunkards. I have known some of the most truthful, beautiful, and excellent mothers and wives arrive at such a state of intemperance as to become a burden to their families and outcasts of society, in a lost state, from which there is no recovery. What compensation can a medical man make for being the cause of such a calamity?

I have been called to a lady dead drunk, when her husband has been under the greatest apprehension of her dying. On the following day the poor inebriate stoutly denied to me that she was ever intoxicated in her life, and that "she only took a little to do her good." I never knew a lady yet who acknowledged that she had taken too much.

The non-alcoholic treatment is equally successful in surgical as well as medical cases.

I have found that, by abandoning the alcoholic treatment, acute disease is much more readily cured, and chronic disease much more manageable.

I have never seen or known a patient injured by leaving off alcoholic fluids at once. I should as soon expect "killing a horse, by leaving off the whip or the spur."

I have not heard from my professional brethren or any of my patients that my non-alcoholic treatment of disease has occasioned a single death; my greatest trouble has been for many years in preventing patients from being destroyed by the use of alcohol—



I do not say the *abuse*; for I consider the *use* the *abuse*. In all cases it shortens life.

My new improved practice has been so satisfactory to me that I have not once desired to deviate from it. So strongly do I feel and am convinced of the truth of it, that I should consider myself criminal if in any case I again recommended alcohol either as food or as medicine. Although my professional brethren remain still in the opinion that alcohol is food and medicine, the time will come when they will be obliged to admit that I have discovered a great truth, and have made a great discovery that alcohol in every form may be dispensed with in medical and surgical practice, and is not required in a single disorder or disease.

What evidence can be clearer or more satisfactory? For my practice has been open to hourly inspection and observation for about thirty years, in the centre of a large populous town, surrounded by more than forty surgeons and physicians, most of them intelligent and discerning men. Some of them, I think, would have informed me of my insufficiency or mal-practice, had I been in error in the treatment of disease; but I have heard of no such remark from a single individual.

I am not aware that any other medical man has tested the plan of treating disease without the use of alcoholic fluids for so long a period, or seen on so extended a scale, its great practical importance as I have done; on these accounts I claim the discovery.

The least new discovery usually excites a doubt on the mind of any person to whom it is related; but when demonstrated, the simplicity of the fact arouses the attention of the observer, and he is surprised that it has been so long unobserved, and not been discovered or previously known. Several such discoveries have occurred to myself. By your permission I will briefly relate them, in order to substantiate my present claim or title to the discovery of the non-alcoholic treatment of disease.

The first is in pharmacy. On mentioning to a senior medical man that in my apprenticeship I was led to discover that I could prepare a pound of strong mercurial ointment in ten or twelve minutes without mixing any extraneous substance with it, which previously had taken me ten or twelve hours to prepare, he said, "It is impossible;" but on being informed, he directly admitted the fact. This simple discovery was new in pharmacy, although the ointment had been in use for many centuries, having been used by the ancient Arabian physicians a thousand years ago. This ready method of preparing the ointment occurred to me in the good old days of apprenticeships, when an apprentice acquired an early habit of industry; he had to make most of the preparations used in practice, and was well worked with the pestle and mortar. Unfortunately those good days have departed, and I am sorry to say the tobacco-pipe and the cigar have taken the place of the pestle and mortar.



The second discovery which was new to surgery was the proper external application of the nitrate of silver in inflammation, &c. At an early period of my late brother-in-law, Dr. Marshall Hall, being in London, I wrote to him that I had applied externally the nitrate of silver in two cases of inflammation—one of erythema, and the other of erysipelas; and that it had quite subdued and removed the inflammation in four days. Dr. Hall read my communication to the Westminster Medical Society; the members of the society did not think it possible, considering the nitrate of silver as a destructive agent. Our oldest and most respectable physician in Nottingham, the late Dr. Storer, who was extremely accurate in observing facts, and cautious in admitting them, said—"I could expect no success from the practice, militating so directly against the views generally entertained, and would give no ear to it without ocular demonstration of its utility." On seeing two cases he was satisfied with the result. I have found the failure of the application of nitrate of silver to be owing to the imperfect and improper mode of its use, probably arising in part from the slight and erroneous directions given by the manuals and *vade mecums* of the present day, which only give a few lines of erroneous directions, sufficient to bring the remedy into contempt, instead of referring to those directions for its use which cost me ten years' observation and labour. I know no application equal to it in subduing external inflammation and the cure of wounds; and I never knew of any bad effects arising from the use of it.

The next discovery is one of development in natural history. From the experiments of Dr. W. F. Edwards, of Paris, it was considered as a fact that the tadpole of the frog, in the absence of light, could not be brought to the full development of a frog. Contrary to the received opinion, I made experiments in three Nottingham rock-cellars, each of different degrees of temperature, in which no solar light ever entered; and proved fully that the development of the tadpole into the frog depended on temperature, and not on the absence of light.

All discoveries in science or philosophy fall into utter insignificance, compared with the discovery that all disorders and diseases can be safely and successfully treated without the use of alcohol, and also that alcohol is not an aliment. The discovery is of a world-wide importance, and the blessings and benefits arising from it are incalculable. The simplicity of the remedy to be employed for obtaining it is admirable. Only abstain from alcohol, and the work is accomplished. No effort is required in those individuals who have never tasted alcohol, as it is not a natural but an acquired appetite. In those persons who have been habituated to the use of it, total abstinence for several weeks is generally sufficient to take away the desire.

There are some very lamentable cases of individuals who are confirmed drunkards, and have injured their brain; their mental



powers have become affected, and they have lost all self-control. These cases call loudly for legalised national institutions or retreats, where the poor sufferers may be placed and taken care of, as they cannot be considered lunatics, and, consequently, not subjects for common lunatic asylums.

By universal abstinence from alcohol as food and as medicine, thousands and tens of thousands of lives of the people will be preserved and prevented from falling into a premature grave. The foul stain of drunkenness will be wiped away from our land, and domestic peace, wealth, comfort, and happiness will be diffused into innumerable families who are now utter strangers to them. It would be like a second curse removed from the world, which man has created himself.

What I have written in this paper, I leave as a last testament to my junior brethren. I am now in the seventy-fifth year of my age, and have nearly finished my day's work, having been devoted to our profession as a general practitioner for more than half a century. I have been much attached to medical and surgical practice, and have diligently attended to it more from a sense of duty than from any pecuniary emolument. I believe there is not a medical man here who would commence the profession as an avocation to become rich in money, as they well know there is not a more laborious calling, or one that is so inefficiently remunerated. It is a high and noble profession; antiquity has long designated us as "the hands of God." If I had to commence life again, I would begin and end as a general practitioner, as I consider that I should have a more extended range of practice, and also should be placed in a more enterprising position to discover new facts.

No person can form any idea, except from experience, of the superiority of the practice of medicine and surgery, when alcohol is banished from it. It is the complete emancipation from the slavery of alcohol; and the practitioner has a freedom in practice which he never before experienced. He will find an improved method of treating disease, by the exchange of alcohol for natural stimulants; a proper use of water, pure air, exercise, and nutritious food; the employment of genuine medicines; and a variety of stimulants will occur to him in practice, of a non-intoxicating quality, adapted to various cases he may have to attend.



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