

Sir Benjamin Brodie, Bart., F.R.S., on tobacco.

Contributors

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SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE, Bart., F.R.S., ON TOBACCO.

(From the "Lancet.")

The empyreumatic oil of tobacco is produced by distillation of that herb at a temperature above that of boiling water. One or two drops of this oil (according to the size of the animal) placed on the tongue *will kill a cat in the course of a few minutes*. A certain quantity of the oil must be always circulating in the blood of an habitual smoker, and we cannot suppose that the effects of it on the system can be merely negative.

The effects of this habit are, indeed, various, the difference depending on difference of constitution, and difference in the mode of life otherwise. But, from the best observations which I have been able to make on the subject, I am led to believe that *there are very few who do not suffer harm from it, to a greater or less extent*. The earliest symptoms are manifested in the derangement of the nervous system. A large proportion of habitual smokers are rendered lazy and listless, indisposed to bodily, and incapable of much mental exertion. Others suffer from depression of spirits, amounting to hypochondriasis, which smoking relieves for a time, though it aggravates the evil afterwards. Occasionally there is a general nervous excitability, which, though very much less in degree,

partakes of the nature of the *delirium tremens* of drunkards. I have known many individuals to suffer from severe nervous pains, sometimes in one, sometimes in another part of the body. Almost the worse case of neuralgia that ever came under my observation was that of a gentleman who consulted the late Dr. Bright and myself. The pains were universal, and never absent; but during night they were especially intense, so as almost wholly to prevent sleep. Neither the patient himself nor his medical attendant had any doubt that the disease was to be attributed to his former habit of smoking, on the discontinuance of which he slowly and gradually recovered. An eminent surgeon, who has a great experience in ophthalmic diseases, believes that, in some instances, he has been able to trace blindness from *amaurosis* to excess in tobacco smoking; the connection of the two being pretty well established in one case by the fact that, on the practice being left off, the sight of the patient was gradually restored.

But the ill effects of tobacco are not confined to the nervous system. In many instances there is a loss of healthy appetite for food, the imperfect state of the digestion being soon rendered manifest by the loss of flesh and the sallow countenance. It is difficult to say what other diseases may not follow the imperfect assimilation of food continued during a long period of time. So many causes are in operation in the human body which may tend, in a greater or less degree, to the production of organic changes in it, that it is only in some instances we can venture to pronounce as



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to the precise manner in which a disease that proves mortal has originated. From cases, however, which have fallen under my observation, and from a consideration of all the circumstances, I cannot entertain a doubt that, if we could obtain accurate statistics on the subject, we should find that *the value of life in inveterate smokers is considerably below the average*. Nor is this opinion in any degree contradicted by the fact that there are individuals who, in spite of the inhalation of tobacco smoke, live to be old, and without any material derangement of the health; analogous exceptions to the general rule being met with in the case of those who have indulged too freely in the use of spirituous and fermented liquors.

In the early part of the present century, tobacco smoking was almost wholly confined to what was commonly called the lower grade of society. It was only every now and then that any one who wished to be considered a gentleman was addicted to it. But since the war in ~~the~~ Spanish peninsula, and the consequent substitution of the cigar for the tobacco-pipe, the case has been entirely altered. The greatest smokers of the present time are to be found, not among those who live by their bodily labour, but among those who are more advantageously situated, who have better opportunities of education, and of whom we have a right to expect that they should constitute the most intelligent and thoughtful members of the community. Nor is the practice confined to grown-up men. Boys, even at the best schools, get the habit of smoking, because they think it manly and fashionable to do so, *not unfrequently*

because they have the example set them by their tutors, and partly because there is no friendly voice to warn them as to the special ill consequences to which it may give rise where the process of growth is not yet completed, and the organs are not yet fully developed.

The foregoing observations relate to the habit of smoking as it exists among us at the present time. But a still graver question remains to be considered. What will be the result if this habit be continued by future generations? It is but too true that the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children and their children's children. We may here take warning from the fate of the Red Indians of America. An intelligent American physician gives the following explanation of ~~the~~ gradual extinction of this remarkable people:—One generation of them become addicted to the use of the firewater. They have a degenerate and comparatively imbecile progeny, who indulge in the same vicious habit with their parents. *Their* progeny is still more degenerate; and after a very few generations the races cease altogether. We may also take warning from the history of another nation, who, some few centuries ago, while following the banners of Solyman the Magnificent, were the terror of Christendom, but who since then, having become more addicted to tobacco smoking than any of the European nations, are now the lazy and lethargic Turks, held in contempt by all civilised communities.

Anti-Narcotic League, 25, Market Street, Manchester.

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