

A manly habit / by Professor Kirk.

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A MANLY HABIT.

BY REV. PROFESSOR KIRK.

(Reprinted from "Narcotism.")

"Is it not true," said a tender hearted friend to us the other day, "that tobacco puts away the pangs of hunger, and so enables the starving poor to endure their privations much more easily than they otherwise would?" "And," said a kind hearted spirit, "does it not warm the poor cabman on his box, when without a smoke he would be very miserable indeed?" "And again," said a third benevolent advocate of "comforts" for the needy, "how could a sailor get on without his plug of tobacco? Only think how cruel it would be to deny such men their last scrap of indulgence? Then the soldiers in time of war—did you not read in the correspondence of the *Times* and *Daily News* during the late campaigns on the Continent what a godsend tobacco was to poor shivering wretches in the winter bivouac when a supply of it reached the camp? Aye, and was not your heart touched when the brave correspondents in their strongest colours pictured themselves as finding consolation in the 'fragrant weed,' when all else was depressing their used-up energies?"

It does *seem* dreadful indifference to the necessities of our fellow-creatures to try to be proof against these and kindred appeals on behalf of the multitudes who smoke! "Go into the hospitals for the wounded and dying, and only see for yourselves how the poor fellows have their pangs assuaged by the pipe, and then say whether you can join in the hue and cry of the anti-smokers, who would sweep all this comfort away?" It is perhaps wicked—very wicked of us; but like other wicked people we cannot, without great effort, help some very queer thoughts coming up in the face of these appeals on behalf of men who are so dependent on tobacco! Here is one such thought—*women* don't smoke. If you have seen them in some parts where they do, you will have noticed that it is only the toughest of their kind after all who take to the pipe. The true representative of the gentler sex never does so. It is only the woman who comes nearest being like a man who shows the slightest tendency in this direction. The fact provokes most "wicked" questions on our part ere we listen to these appeals. Is it really the case that women are made of better stuff than men? It would seem so. At least

it would seem that some women are made into hardier beings than are some men. They, at all events, endure privations and hardships in silence which would make the men who smoke ineffably wretched without their pipe, and such women would scorn to have their trials lessened by the stupefying influences of a narcotic. It does certainly appear as if these women were made of superior, and these men of inferior material.

The subject is a serious one when it opens itself up in its reality. We know families in which the man smokes. But he has as much as he requires of the best food his wife can secure. She has to go with less than half what she needs, and the children have to do the same. The man smokes, and our compassion is appealed to on his behalf, but no tobacco is suggested for the wife and the children! It does look as if the women were understood to be made of better stuff than the men, and hence the smaller trials of the latter must be narcotized, but the women must manage to do without such "helps." We fear that this incredible inferiority on the part of a growing class of men as compared with the great majority of women will become only too credible if we pursue the inquiry further. We see, for example, a young mechanic taking an evening walk with his sweetheart. He is smoking tobacco! She never requires such a thing. Nobody dreams that she does. The charm of his presence is more than enough to warm her from head to heel, even if the night is a wintry one, and her clothing is thinner than his. But, oh! poor creature, *he* would be miserable if he could not smoke that pipe! The charms of her presence must have the addition of the narcotic, or he would be in a deplorable state in both body and mind! This is just the man who in a few years will be at the head of a family with that young woman as his wife and mother of his family. That is the very man who will smoke his costly tobacco when his wife and children will go with less than half they should eat and wear. Is that man not an inferior being when compared with that woman? Is it not beyond dispute that he is immensely "the weaker vessel" of the two? We must pity him, certainly. But let the grounds of our pity be clear. We must be allowed to start with this fact--that he is an inferior being compared with his wife. He is, by his new and artificial constitution, less brave and capable of uncomplaining endurance and less self-denying than she is. He is altogether so weak a being that we are to deplore his sad condition--and let him have narcotic helps which she despises! If he is upheld by his tobacco, while she endures far more severe hardships than he does, and scorns such aid, he demonstrates that he is a being inferior to her. If we must pity him, and plead for his smoking, it must be on this ground to begin with. His wife is able, in the strength of her soul, to rise above her privations and hardships while her poor cowardly husband is commiserated and his soul stupefied with tobacco!



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But is not all this the outcome of some wretched delusion? It is so. The man, from the very nature God has given him, has a fund of endurance which a woman, other things being equal, has in less degree than he. If he does not show this, then that is his shame. But if he chooses to call up his manhood when it is required to show itself, he will have vastly less need for tobacco than even his wife, and she has need of none. Neither of them has any need for the deceptive drug. They will both do better without it than they can possibly do with it. *Like its kindred spirit alcohol, it can do nothing but deceive by silencing for a time the call of the nervous system for real and substantial relief. In this way it deadens the pangs of hunger, but leaves the body unfed. It removes for the time the sense of fatigue when the frame is exhausted and calls out for rest. It benumbs the sense of cold, so as to make the smoker feel warmed at the very moment when the thermometer shows it has really lowered his temperature. How immensely low has a man sunk who confesses that he has become helplessly dependent on such a support!* You say that we ought to pity him, and let him have his solace? Would it not be better to deliver him from his miserable delusion, and rouse him to be once more a man? If he will not be roused, then at least let it be understood that we pity the poor thing weaker than the woman who is bravely independent of all his delusive consolations. It is more than high time that something like this became the general understanding. We are sinking as a nation because our men are becoming weaker than women. Our compassion is appealed to on behalf of the weak, but that now means the masculine instead of the feminine! Surely it would be worth a good deal of effort if such a state of matters could be reversed. He who pleads for tobacco for the smoker and liquor for the tippler has forgotten that it can never be the true way to raise men by pandering to their vices. Let them be summoned to show themselves men, and let the falseness of their refuges be exposed. If they must still be pitied, let it be on the clear understanding that they have only themselves to blame if they will not fall back on the bravery their Creator endowed them with when he made them men.

We close with the eloquent words of a writer on "The Physiological Position of Tobacco," in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* :—

"Even in our days, notwithstanding the vast consumption of tobacco, it is a habit of the minority only. The female sex, to their honour be it said, with very rare exceptions, abstain from this indulgence. If the claims of the apologists of tobacco are correct, why is it that an entire sex avoids it? The frailer body and more mobile mind of woman seem to stand in greater need of 'soothing' and 'refreshing' than the coarser frame of man.

"It is not necessary; for all men do not smoke, and the abstainers are not subject to any inconvenience or disadvantage, but the reverse.

“Homer sang his deathless song, Raphael painted his glorious Madonnas, Luther preached, Guttenberg printed, Columbus discovered a New World before tobacco was heard of. No rations of tobacco were served out to the heroes of Thermopylæ, no cigar strung up the nerves of Socrates. Empires rose and fell, men lived and loved and died during long ages, without tobacco. History was for the most part written before its appearance. ‘It is the solace, the aider, the familiar spirit of the thinker,’ cries the apologist; yet Plato the Divine thought without its aid. Augustine described the glories of God’s city, Dante sang his majestic melancholy song, Savonarolo reasoned and died, Alfred ruled well and wisely without it. Tyrtæus sang his patriotic song, Roger Bacon dived deep into nature’s secrets, the wise Stagirite sounded the depths of human wisdom, equally unaided by it. Harmodius and Aristogeiton twined the myrtle round their swords, and slew the tyrant of their fatherland, without its inspiration. In a word, kings ruled, poets sung, artists painted, patriots bled, martyrs suffered, thinkers reasoned, before it was known or dreamed of. Who of us can realise Moses with a ‘churchwarden’ in his mouth, or St. Paul smoking a prime Havannah?

“Think of ancient Greece, of her glory in arts and arms and song, of her poets, sculptors, architects, after whom the moderns toil in vain. We do but follow in their tracks with halting steps and slow, and yet they lived their lives, and thought their deathless thoughts, and gave immortal beauty to the silent stone, without tobacco.

“What shall we say, then, to this habit? It is in no case necessary or beneficial; it is a social nuisance; it is devoid of all æsthetic beauty; it is an unmanly leaning on a solace to care and labour neither sought nor needed by the weaker sex; it is an enormous and yearly increasing source of national improvidence. Above all it is the foe to youthful development, the bane of youthful blood and brain. The subject may seem to some too trivial for serious attention; but when we consider the extent of juvenile smoking, we see that the national life and stamina are seriously threatened by this ignoble habit. So a noble tree, heaven-aspiring, with wide-spreading branches, whose leaves are a refuge for the singers of God, may be attacked by some insignificant parasitical plant, which winds round and round it in serpent-folds, and sucks away its sap and vigour, till the green leaves are blasted and the singers flee away, till the glory is departed and Death and Ruin alone remain.”

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