

Hérédité et Alcoolisme. Étude Psychologique et Clinique sur les Dégénérés, Buveurs et les Familles d'Ivrognes. Par le Docteur M. LEGRAIN. Avec une préface de M. le Docteur MAGNAN. Paris : Octave Doin, Éditeur. 1889. pp. 424.

It will be interesting to note some of the conclusions arrived at in 1875 by a conference of members from various temperance societies in the United States, and which the author, in an early chapter of the present treatise, enumerates as follows:—

1. That intemperance is a disease.
2. That it is curable according to the same principles as other diseases.
3. That it has for its principal cause a constitutional susceptibility to the action of alcoholic drinks.
4. That this constitutional tendency may be hereditary or acquired.

To the first only of these M. Legrain draws attention, and sets himself the task to prove it in the following pages. He divides drunkards into two great classes—“*les buveurs inconscients*” and “*les buveurs conscients*,” remarking that the former, though rare, do exist; that some are the victims of ignorance, whilst others are the victims of an imperfect social condition. The second, much the larger class, he arranges into three groups:—(1.) Those in whom the moral sense is feebly developed or completely obliterated; these come into the category of “*fous moraux*.” (2.) Those in whom the moral sense exists, but the will is defective. It is a transition stage towards the next group. (3.) Dipsomaniacs, or “*les buveurs impulsifs*,” in whom “the will alone is completely annihilated by the fit, under the predominant influence of an impulse, the character of which is the most absolute irresistibility.” The second chapter concludes with the final analysis that “the great majority of drunkards are predisposed.”

In the following chapter on the genealogy of alcoholic cases and their hereditary antecedents, a very instructive table gives a classification of cases, recorded throughout the book, in which alcoholic excess in the antecedents acted as the almost exclusive cause. Another gives an elaborate tabulation of cases where alcoholism and some form of neurosis co-existed in the antecedents, on either paternal or maternal side or on both, or where alcoholism occurred on one side and a neurosis on the other. “Heredity,” remarks the author, “predisposes not only to excess in drink, but also to precocious excess,” and he recites several very interesting cases. In another chapter he discusses the physiological action of the various forms of

alcohol (ethyl, methyl, butyl, propyl, amyl), and absinthe, and the individual predisposition; the reaction of alcohol and epilepsy, one on the other, and the special influence which absinthe has in causing explosions of epileptic fits.

The fifth chapter is the longest, occupying 203 pp., and by far the most important. Its subject is the *rôle* which heredity plays in alcoholic delirium. The amount of resistance offered by individuals to the action of alcohol absorbed from day to day, rather than at any given time, enables M. Legrain to classify drinkers for the sake of description under five heads:—1. Those who drink to excess in a regular manner all their lives, and in whom, though they show signs of health deficient in tone, cerebral alcoholism never makes its appearance. “Their well constituted brain is proof against delirium, and the only intellectual troubles imputable to alcohol which one observes amongst them consist, apart from drunkenness, in what are common to all people.” 2. Also a very resisting class in which delirium, at length, but after a very great number of years of excess, breaks out. “The delirium seems to make its appearance only with reluctance,” and when age is advanced, but muscular trembling may have been present for some years. 3. Cases of simple heredity. They are simply the predisposed who “do not yet present the mental state.” “They are, for example, the sons of drunkards, the heirs of an elementary insanity, as melancholia, mania.” They are attacked with delirium at a much earlier age than the preceding class. 4. Here we have cases where “heredity is much more powerful, and in which alcoholic delirium will be completely modified.” “Henceforth the alcoholic factor will have much less importance in the clinical table. It will have the same value as, or a value even less than, the hereditary factor. The more intense the predisposition, the more lively will it be felt.” 5. The most degenerated class—“those whose resistance against the action of alcohol is very considerably lessened. In the clinical table all, or nearly all, result from predisposition. Alcohol only plays the *rôle* of an additional factor.” The author then proceeds to give in three comprehensive articles, into which the remainder of the chapter is divided, the history of the period of incubation, the period of attack, and the period of regression.

The three concluding chapters are taken up with a study of alcoholism in relation to the convulsive states—alcoholic and absinthic epilepsy; a form of alcoholism special to hereditary subjects—*dipsomania*; and a medico-legal sketch. Finally

the author sets forth some thirty-five conclusions, but space will only permit us to give extracts from a few here:—

That alcoholism and pathological heredity react one on the other.

The knowledge of the hereditary antecedents of alcoholics is of the first importance. It furnishes the reason for alcoholic habits, as also it explains the different varieties of conduct of those affected.

Heredity predisposes to precocious excess.

The predisposed get intoxicated more easily than others.

Maniacal and melancholic alcoholism are the two principal hereditary forms. The other forms described—comatose, apoplectic, convulsive—are found amongst hereditary subjects, but they find their cause more particularly in the nature of the alcohol absorbed.

The varieties of form which alcoholic delirium of the predisposed assumes are infinite. They depend on the nature of the predisposition, its intensity, and also the amount of excess committed in a given time.

Those least predisposed become delirious slowly.

Drunkards beget epileptics as also they beget drunkards.

No one can read M. Legrain's book and not be struck with the important and very active rôle which heredity plays in the great majority of cases of alcoholic excess. The arguments in favour of his conclusions are well sustained, and the cases recorded are numerous, interesting, and to the point. It is a work which well merited the prize awarded to it by the Société Médico-Psychologique in 1888, and will no doubt be read by all with the greatest interest.

Étude Médico-Légale sur L'Alcoolisme. Des Conditions de la Responsabilité au point de vue Pénal chez les Alcoolisés.
Par le Docteur VICTOR VÉTAULT. Paris: J. B. Baillière et Fils. 1887.

The author, in his introduction, draws special attention to the increasing abuse of alcohol since the beginning of the present century, and also to the fact that writers on the subject have, during the same period, become specially alive to its deleterious effects on the intellectual faculties. That the abuse of fermented liquor is becoming of more frequent occurrence every day, and that the number of intellectual troubles due to it is on the increase, are, he tells us, facts