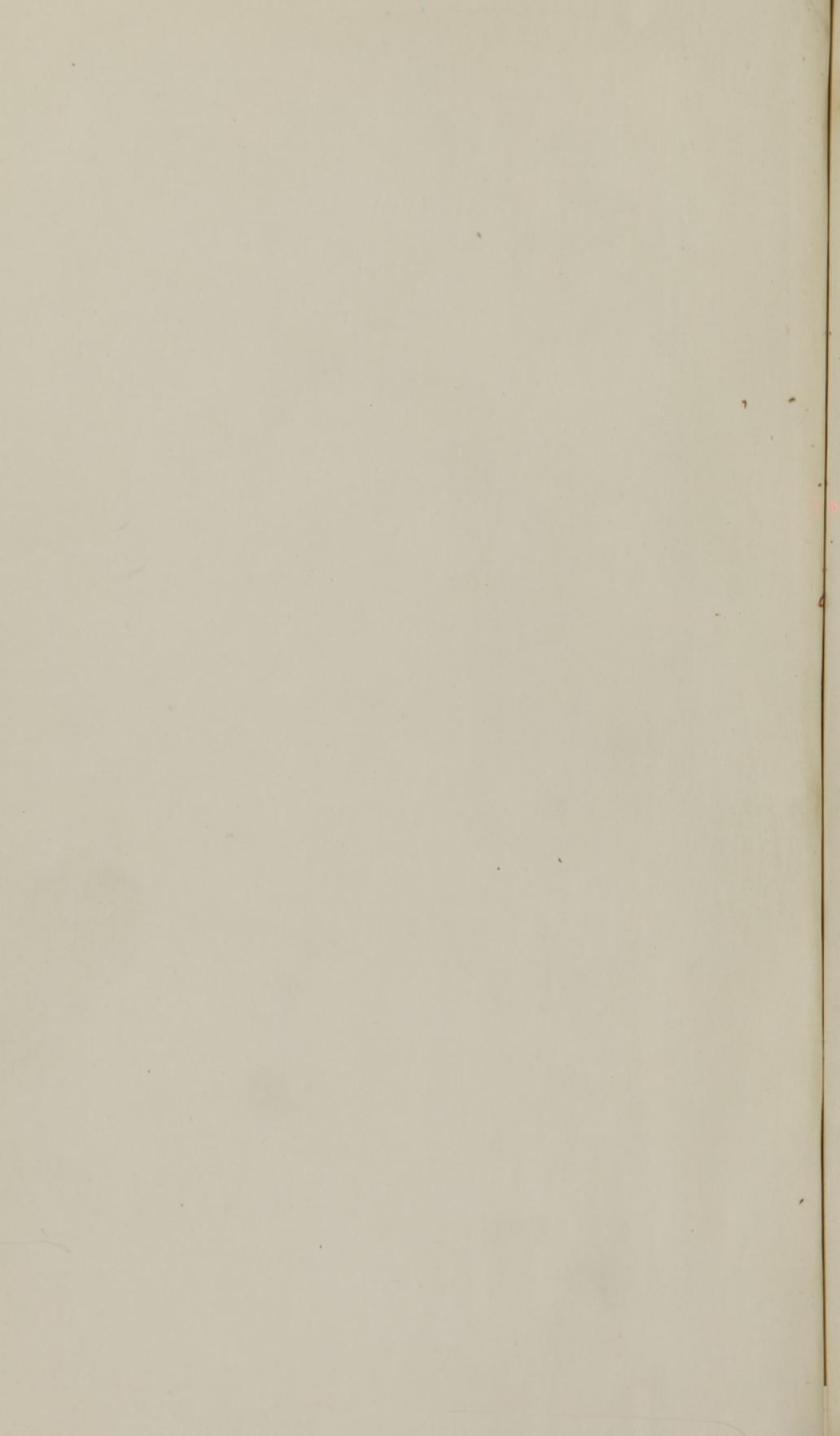


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1841

ON AN ASYLUM
FOR VICTIMS OF
INTEMPERANCE

1841



Henry, Alexander

AN ADDRESS

TO THE

CITIZENS OF PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

ESTABLISHING AN ASYLUM

FOR THE CURE OF

VICTIMS OF INTEMPERANCE.

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A meeting of Citizens of Philadelphia was held November, 1840, to take into consideration the utility of establishing an "*Asylum for the cure of Inebriates.*" Alexander Henry was appointed Chairman, and Dr. W. Darrach, Secretary. After a free interchange of sentiment, it was unanimously agreed: That the subject be laid before our citizens generally, in the form of an address; when Dr. W. Darrach, Isaac Collins, Townsend Sharpless, Dr. John Bell and Isaiah Hacker were appointed a Committee. At a subsequent meeting, said Committee reported, by their Chairman, the following address, which, on motion, was directed to be published and circulated in pamphlet form, under the direction of the Committee.

A N A D D R E S S

TO THE CITIZENS OF PHILADELPHIA IN BEHALF OF THE
VICTIMS OF INTEMPERANCE.

FELLOW CITIZENS:—

We address you in behalf of the victims of intemperance. We ask your compassionate and efficient efforts for their recovery. They are afflicted with a physical evil—*a disease of the stomach and of the nervous system*. Had it been asked, what shall be done for the sick,—for the lame,—the deaf and dumb,—the blind,—the insane,—for those lost to virtue,—and for those even who are condemned by the laws? You would have pointed, and with satisfaction, to your hospitals, your asylums and many kindred institutions. These all are the fruits of christian compassion, and they sustain the good name of our city. We ask the exercise of this compassion towards the Victims of Intemperance. Erect for them, also, a respectable Asylum—a hiding place from their enemy—call it, if you please *the Retreat*.

The victim himself, in his sober moments, asks for a place of seclusion, safe from temptations and indulgence; and he importunes to be saved from himself.

Oh sir, said one such to his friend, I've no more confidence in myself; thirst for ardent spirits is my strong enemy. Place me in some country retreat far out of the reach of my idol. Another of these unfortunates was before a magistrate for a public offence, and being asked the motive of his conduct, he replied: "that I might be imprisoned and thereby separated from intoxicating drink." How many of these persons are in the bosom of our families, surrounded by all its endearments and comforts, and yet who destroy the peace of those once happy homes. There, for example, is the only son of a widow, a widow by intemperance. At her lap he often knelt in childhood and learned the prayer which many mothers teach their children. She felt he was her hope and consolation; and to self-denial upon self-denial she cheerfully submitted, in order to train him up to manhood. Her object was accomplished. He became to her and to his sisters an honour; their support and their pride.—But, alas! he became, also, intemperate.—And sorrow came upon that family, more than when the husband and father had fallen into the drunkard's grave. What shall be done for such a family! The evil is not only moral but it is likewise physical. Look at yet another picture. There is a wife! Her house and children once shewed care, economy and comfort; and her husband went forth to his occupation daily with hope and returned with pleasure. But now that home is neglected

and disordered. For a while there was only a faint and silent suspicion. But, her frequent indispositions, her changed countenance and deportment, and the concealed vials about her dwelling, made it no longer a secret. Her children and husband may still be near her; but her affection for them is not so strong as for that which will deaden a craving appetite and the gnawings of a diseased stomach. Is there no remedy? Again.—There is a husband! His industry and worth gained him extensive credit among his fellow tradesmen. He enlarged his business too much beyond his capital and his festal table was too often spread. The well meant offer of an occasional glass of wine from his sideboard was too often made. Bankruptcy ensued, and then wine became his flatterer, then his master, his tyrant and his death. All that is left, is a cheerless remembrance of a lovely family blighted in its early bloom. Examples need not be multiplied. The circle of domestic life, the very heart of society, contains many victims of intemperance—every where and in varied forms: the farmer, mechanic and merchant,—the man of science, the minister, physician and lawyer,—the statesman, military men and office holders disturb, by intemperance, the peace of home and there implant a gnawing grief, and in some instances bring down upon themselves the extreme penalties of the law. And why? Do these inebriates know the cause? Do their distressed relatives and friends

know it? We answer this important question. *The common evil is a stomach diseased by alcohol.*

The stomach, by its sensation, motion and peculiar solvent, performs a most important office in digestion, and, also, exerts a controlling influence over the heart, lungs and brain, and through these over all the other organs of the body. It is the great centre of organic life, so that in one sense, the health of the stomach is the health of the human body and its disease is that of the whole system: yet into this important organ of the human body is inconsiderately or wilfully poured, in place of water, cordials, beer, wine and brandy, which cuts short, by one half, the life time of thousands of unprepared immortal beings. Numerous indeed are the graves of the drunkards!

Under the healthful influence of water, the stomach's natural stimulant, the alternate expenditure and accumulation of the nervous power are uniformly sustained, and the span of human life is fully made. But alcohol habitually used acts upon the stomach in such a manner as to impair natural thirst, and eventually natural hunger, and to produce a faintness and wretchedness which demands another kind of exhilaration. 'Therefore the inebriate drinks, and he will drink again and again, and gradually more and more frequently, and stronger and stronger draughts, if left to himself. The stomach itself has become diseased by the artificial stimulant. Specimens of the drunkard's stomach are exhibited in the Pathological Cabi-

net of Sir Charles Bell, of London, and are placed, by that experienced pathologist on the same shelf with specimens of stomachs poisoned by corrosive sublimate, arsenic, nitric acid and laudanum.

But it is not on the stomach only that alcoholic liquors act. Facts are accumulated to prove that alcohol eventually destroys the natural barriers to the admission of whatever is noxious, and entering the blood, comes in direct contact with the liver, lungs and brain, and circulates through their substance. The breath becomes alcoholic, the fluid of the cavities of the brain become alcoholic. Dr Kirk, of Greenock, Scotland, as quoted by Grindrod, examined the body of one who died of intoxication. "In the two cavities of the brain, says he, we found the usual quantity of limpid fluid. When we smelt it, the odour of whiskey was distinctly perceptible, and when we applied the candle to a portion in a spoon it actually burned blue. The lambent flame, characteristic of the poison, played on the surface of the spoon for a few seconds." This fact is confirmed by Ogston and Hare. Magendie has found alcohol in the blood. Percy has obtained it by distillation from the substance of the brain and liver. In view of even these already ascertained facts, it may be reasonably inferred, that alcohol reaches every part of the body, and there produces disease by direct contact; and, by its deteriorating influence on the lungs, destroys the vitality of the blood itself.

The above short medical statement is made to show that Intemperance is a physical evil—a disease having three stages; first, a disorder merely of the functions of the stomach; second, a diseased condition of the substance of the stomach itself; third, a diseased stomach with alcoholic blood and secretions. It is in the second stage of this alcoholic disease that the inebriate is commonly cut off: and if, by strength of constitution he survives it and reaches the subsequent one, he ultimately becomes insane. Grindrod shows, by satisfactory statements, that alcoholic stimulation is thrice more productive of madness and idiocy than the most prolific of all the other causes of mental disorders. In these latter stages, the inebriate, in many instances, is beset with false perceptions of frightful objects of enemies and of falling walls, which so torment him, in his morbid and delirious vigilance, by day and night, that he flies to a window, a cord, or other means and commits suicide: or, in some instances, he sinks into an insensible state.

In taking this physical view of Intemperance, it is not intended, in the least, to disturb the moral influence of that stigma which public sentiment has wisely put upon the drunkard.

The inebriate is immoral. He prostrates his reason, violates his conscience, and puts himself under the power of an acquired, an exclusive and a tyrannical appetite. His conduct is a debasing exhibition of unre-

strained animal propensities. You may see him “singing and dancing and hallooing; or he is flinging about his empty bottles and ready to quarrel with every one; or he has become heavy and lumpish and sleepy and crying out for a little more drink; or he is showing himself off as one wise in his own conceit when he can’t bring forth a right word; or he’s in a silly weeping or at playing the goat.” Persons thus comporting themselves, violate public station and trust, endanger the state, grieve the church and embitter and ruin home. The inebriate is physically degraded. His face has lost its intellectual expression. He cannot sustain the distinguishing rectitude of the human form; his limbs have the gait and step of premature decrepitude; he is downcast, totters, reels, and falls prostrate, and sometimes falls where even the brute insults him. Truly the moral and physical degradation of Intemperance is extreme, and richly merits the unqualified rebuke of a virtuous community. Yet we must not cast off, nor turn with unmitigated disgust from, the victim of Intemperance. He is a fellow being under disease; he needs a physician, and that physician requires for his patient such medical appliances as meet the necessity of the case, the most important and indispensable of which is a long separation from the cause of his disease, viz: alcoholic drink. An appropriate Retreat under medical supervision would meet this object.

The utility and necessity of such an institution have been recently exhibited by Dr. Samuel B. Woodward, of Worcester, Mass., and more recently in a pamphlet from the able pen of one of our own citizens. Their appeal rests chiefly on the fact which we have endeavoured to expose, viz: that intemperance, when established as a habit, is a physical evil, calling imperatively for a repetition of the stimulant upon which it depends: 2nd, that it is curable: 3rd, that many have been cured: 4th, that a large proportion of cases can be cured by one year's medical treatment, though some cases may require a longer time: 5th, that it is incurable whilst the practice of drinking is followed. In view of these facts, it is believed, that a large proportion of the intemperate in a well conducted institution would be radically cured, and would return again to society with their health re-established, their diseased appetite removed, and with principles of temperance well grounded and thoroughly understood, so that they would be afterwards safe and sober persons.

If these be correct principles, what shall be done for the Victims of Intemperance in the bosom of our own families, and if not of our own, of those of our friends? Who shall make the effort to restore these persons to their families? Who can estimate the joy which the successful operation of such an institution would produce! Let the trial be made: call a meeting

of all persons friendly to the project and willing to aid in the establishment of a Retreat for the cure of the Inebriate. It is believed that \$25,000 obtained by subscriptions and donations will be sufficient to establish such an institution, which will support itself by the income from the inmates. It may be found best to purchase a country seat in a retired situation near the city, and of easy access by rail road or turnpike; Fifty acres might be sufficient. When necessary, let additions be made to the buildings for commodious lodging rooms, dining room, library, &c. ; the library to be filled with well selected books, periodicals, newspapers, maps, atlases, globes, and other means for instruction and entertainment. There should be suitable means for healthful amusements, quoits, the gymnasium, &c. The grounds might be variously cultivated; here a flower garden, there a vegetable garden; in this part shady walks, and in that, mechanical shops well supplied with tools. There should be, in a word, every thing which would render the retreat inviting and tend to reconcile the inmates to the necessary restraint and privations, as well as to employ their respective talents. On the Sabbath there should be suitable religious exercises, and on every day a reference to the Divine Blessing upon the restoring means.

All the measures requisite for the entire success of this benevolent plan may be conducted so as to

soothe, purify and elevate the feelings, and to give stability to the future conduct of the afflicted persons themselves; and, at the same time, be in accordance with the affectionate intentions and tender solicitude of their dearest connexions and friends. Persons of the most sensitive nature would readily consent to a temporary separation for the sake of so great and permanent a good. The privation would not, after all, be as great as that absence from home, and separation from family and friends, in the case in which a voyage and foreign travel are enjoined on the invalid for the recovery of his health; whilst the probability of cure of the infirmities which induced the sufferer to take refuge in the Retreat is far greater than that, for example, of the consumptive patient, who visits a southern climate for the restoration of his health. In the former, the watchful guardianship of relatives and the kindness of friends can still be manifested in numerous and almost daily messages and little offerings of regard, and also, under proper regulations, in visits.

The Retreat should be under the management of a resident Physician, of zeal in the cause, of medical skill and enlarged benevolence, and who by a naturally amiable disposition, great self control and experience of human nature would be able to exercise a parental influence, and obtain the respect and love of those who place themselves under his care. He would study the temperament, constitution, dis-

position, and the stage of intemperance of each inmate. He would adopt and enforce the principle of total abstinence and prohibit all access to the intoxicating draught ; allowing only for beverage, tea, coffee, lemonade, water and milk. In case of sickness, he will be the physician ; or if desired, the accustomed physician of the inmate will be sent for. The nature and method of treatment of intemperance should be made known to each inmate by conversation and lectures ; and as the physical system becomes renovated he should be accustomed to exercise or labour.

Such treatment, will restore a large majority of the cases of intemperance in which there is no organic disease of the liver, brain, stomach and heart, and other organs essential to life.

In presenting the above brief and imperfect outline of a plan for a Retreat for the cure of the Inebriate, permit us to say, Fellow Citizens, that it is much needed.—Intemperance is a prominent evil of the Country. Its heart-rending effects are felt in thousands of families. The victims are among the youth of the land. Take them by the hand, say the friends of humanity ; hold these slaves of appetite by a moral power, by the strong persuasive influence of maternal-like gentleness and faithfulness. Place them in seclusion, out of the reach of temptation and away from indulgence. Show them the danger and inevitable ruin from Intemperance, and point their road back to honor, respectability and usefulness. Furnish

them with employment, amusement, and information ; and, with the blessing of a merciful Providence, they will be brought back within the range of moral principle and under the influence of reason. Keep them in the seclusion and under the guardianship of this Retreat until their alcoholic disease is removed—their alcoholic thirst gone—their alcoholic blood and secretion are used up and passed off, and until, finally, their vital organs have recovered their healthy condition : then and not till then will desire for alcoholic drink be eradicated and then they will be safe. Attempt such an Institution, success will follow, and with it the gratitude and repeated expressions of pleasure of those who have been restored to health, redeemed from debasement, and placed, once again, in the social rank on which they had shed perchance a lustre and a charm. Add such an Institution to the many which already grace this city and which give it a radiance brighter than that of spires and gilded domes.

ALEXANDER HENRY, *Chairman.*

WILLIAM DARRACH, *Secretary.*

Philadelphia, 1841.

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