The Strife with Alcohol.

The period of the year has come when the statistics of drink are being presented to the public, and when the advocates of temperance are making themselves more loudly heard than usual. We have no desire to discuss the very puzzling statistics which are placed before us, which seem to prove some facts oddly at variance with common notions; for instance, that a luxurious use of intoxicating drinks is increasing in some circles in these islands, and that Englishmen are very much more drunken than Scottish or Irish folk.

Neither do we desire to figure among those wonderful economists who seem to think that all the world would be very rich if most of the world were a little more sober.

Finally, we are not anxious to take a place among the "unco' guid," or to gain credit with the rigidly righteous by denouncing vices the temptations to which are probably not those which specially beset our particular mode of life.

But there are no people in the world who see much more of the ruinous effects of drink than do those who practise in our specialty, and it is the duty of the alienist to bear evidence to the truth in this, as in any other matter where his special opportunities enable him to be of service to society, by pointing out what he knows to be grave social dangers.

We do not hold in the infallibility of asylum statistics, but there must, we believe, be some significance in the following figures. In the five county asylums for London in the year 1897 intemperance in drink was more often assigned as a cause of the insanity of those admitted than any other cause except "hereditary influences" and "previous attacks." Omitting "previous attacks," which, if legitimately classed as a cause, certainly form a factor not easily comparable with other ætiological items, we find drink standing second only to heredity, which it generally runs very close, while in one asylum the number of cases attributed to drink actually outstrips the number attributed to hereditary influence. Again, taking Table xxvi of the last 'Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy,' which shows by yearly averages the assigned cause of insanity in the patients admitted to all asylums, private and public, in England and Wales during the five years 1893–7 inclusive, we find intemperance in drink standing for the male sex absolutely at the

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head of the list, with a percentage of 21·4 for private male cases, and a percentage of 22·1 for pauper male cases; hereditary influences, which come next, only showing the respective percentages of 21·3 and 20·3. Among women the Commissioners' table shows a much smaller proportion of drink cases, but still not an inconsiderable one—8·6 per cent. for private, and 9·1 per cent. for pauper cases. It thus seems from these statistics, which are compiled from information supplied by members of our Association, that in the London district drink is answerable for almost one fifth of the cases of insanity which occur, and in the country generally for rather more than one fifth of the cases of insanity in the male sex. It is needless here to say that the sum of misery and degradation resulting from intemperance is not to be measured solely by such statistics, which we quote with reservation.

We are not blind to the many contributing elements which go to increase the force of the drink craving, to the wretched housing of the poor, to the absence of provision for rational amusement and recreation of the people, to the demoralisation which results from the disintegration of social life among the struggling masses in our great centres of population; to the dangers of a civilisation which is progressing too quickly for the health of the weaker members of society; but we hold that the state of affairs shown by the figures quoted above is one which calls for the earnest consideration of every humane man. And these figures are in general accordance with the experience of all of us.

The absurdities into which the wholesale advocates of a good cause have been sometimes led, "the intemperance of temperance enthusiasts," have tended to make sober-minded men somewhat shy of dealing with this subject; but these absurdities should not cause us to hesitate to do whatever lies in our power to rectify so great an evil. We can be useful chiefly by helping to educate public opinion on a subject on which we can speak with authority. Physicians have been mainly instrumental in the great reform which has taken place in the habits of the population in Sweden. Similarly in Russia, in America, and in France. An English newspaper has recently told us that the French are becoming as ridiculous about temperance as the English themselves. This means that the French have become alive to the increase of drinking which has unfortunately

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taken place of late years in France, and are not afraid of charges of absurdity or hypocrisy in combating the evil. The pages of our excellent contemporary, the *Annales Médico-psychologiques*, contain in nearly every issue some notice of "La Lutte contre l'Alcool" or of "Les Méfaits de l'Alcool." We can help to educate public opinion. Little is to be hoped from legislation, we fear, partly because legislation is not a very efficient way to alter the habits of a free people, and partly because our legislators will not seriously attend to anything that does not make for party gain. The "easy patrons of their kin" whom we select to rule over us tell us that they know no more about our wants than "the man in the street." The man in the street is their master in wisdom as well as in voting power. Let us go to the man in the street and persuade him. When he is convinced, whatever legislation can do will be easily accomplished, should legislation then be needed.

The Medical Graduates' College and Polyclinic, 22, Chenies Street, W.C.

Though this institution has no very direct connection with our special work, we consider that its objects and claims should be placed before our readers. It owes its origin and success to the great personal energy of Mr. Jonathan Hutchinson, who for long has been endeavouring to develop the advance of knowledge among those who have already taken their Degrees or have received the Licences to practise. It is quite certain that all of us need some stimulus to follow the advances which are being made so rapidly in our profession, and it is most important to have some central place where the latest knowledge can be obtained from the most advanced and skilled teachers.

London has almost too much medical material, but a great part runs to waste. The Polyclinic saves some of this.

There are two distinct sections of the College work—one consisting of courses of instruction and of lectures on subjects which are of importance to the qualified man and the advanced student, as well as special lectures given by representative men. The other main part of the work consists in what might be called open consultations. General practitioners who have difficult or rare cases can bring them to the Polyclinic, where daily

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