A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Beer in Asylums

Dr Hearder, in the Twenty-third report of the Joint Counties' Asylum, Carmarthen, says: "It is now eight years since you ordered that the use of beer as an article of diet should be discontinued in your asylum. There was at that time only one county asylum in which the dietary did not include beer. At the present time malt liquor is included in the dietary in only a decided minority of asylums, and this number is growing smaller year by year. In this asylum the change has been decidedly and absolutely beneficial; it was not accompanied by any fraction or discontent amongst the patients. A few years previously, in 1876–7, the use of alcoholic stimulants, in the treatment of disease and as an addition to the diet of the feeble and aged, was gradually and almost completely discontinued. In this change also, there can be no doubt, we made a decided advance in rational treatment. We effected no saving in money, because more than an equal expense was incurred in providing substitutes for these alcoholic extras in the form of milk and eggs, our expenditure for eggs alone being considerably over £100 per annum. Our average annual expenditure for wine and spirits, for the 11 years ending 1876, was £90, while our average number of patients was 255. For the last 11 years, with an average population of 460, our wine and spirits bill has averaged only £12 per annum. Comparing then our mortality for these two periods, we find that during the first period of 11 years our average annual mortality was 9.7%; and during the last 11 years it has been less than 8.1%. I would not be understood to hold that this diminished mortality resulted entirely from our abstinence from alcohol, there were doubtless many other influences at work, but we may fairly claim that our patients have not suffered thereby. The disuse of alcoholic stimulants is being gradually carried out in asylums in general. In 1876 the average cost per head for 'wine, spirits and porter' was 6s. 6d; in 1886 we find it had been reduced year by year to a half of this amount."

Reference

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