

NOT HEREDITARY.

Drunkard's Children May be Degenerates but the Craving for Drink is Not Transmitted.

London Lancet.
It is now 18 months since the Society for the study of Inebriety appointed a special committee to study the relation of heredity to inebriety. The committee was composed of five physicians two surgeons, a professor of bacteriology, an army surgeon, and five general medical practitioners. Eighteen months have been spent in the investigation. The report of this committee has just been published and it is signed by nine of the fourteen members, some of whom have made comments, while one has sent in an independent report. The reference to the committee was in these terms; to investigate the conditions under which the tendency of drunkenness is capable of transmission to offspring. It does not appear to be contended that inebriety is in itself hereditary, but that a capacity or tendency to it is heritable.

The report declares that the inebriety of an individual depends upon three conditions—the first being an inborn capacity for enjoying the sensations which alcohol produces, and the second and the third being acquired—personal experiences of the pleasures of alcohol and the increased delight which continued indulgence confers in the case of the inebriate. That one drunken generation often succeeds another suggest a hereditary taint. The committee adds that there is no evidence that acquired characters of any kind are heritable. This appears to have been a much debated question.

Popular opinion has taken for granted characteristics of an individual's parents are likely to be inherited and of course, temperance reformers, well-meaning, but often ignorant and misguided, have not been slow to urge upon the public that each man's drinking is pretty sure to produce for him a generation of children who will become drunkards. If this be not true the temperance reformer (who is generally in favor of entire abstinence rather than of temperance) must bear a heavy responsibility for the large amount of mental torture which he has inflicted on the moderate drinking citizen.

The last words of science, however, as declared by teachers of physiology, biology and botany, is a very definite assertion that no instance of the hereditary transmission of an acquired characteristic has ever been demonstrated either in the animal or the vegetable kingdom. If this be a fact a man can only transmit to his son the hereditary taint with which he was born, and if a man having no inborn tendency to excess yet acquires drunken habits his progeny are in no more danger than are those of his neighbor, leaving out of consideration the effect of environment of youth. It is not denied that drunken parents who become thus mentally and physically weak are liable to have children who are degenerate—weak in body and feeble in mind; such persons, in fact, as under unpropitious circumstances tend to become paupers, criminals, epileptics and drunkards. The point which is denied in that the drunkard's children has the specialized tendency to become inebriate rather than vicious in some other direction.

It seems probable that the question of environment is of more importance after all than that of heredity, and a man of strong will is just as likely to exercise it in the gratification of his desires as in the contrary direction. If a man of powerful will finds that alcohol gives him pleasure he will take good care to repeat the experience. The habitual drinker is one to whom alcohol brings enjoyment, either as positive pleasure or as cessation of pain, whereas the voluntary abstainer is one, who, from constitutional peculiarity, finds little pleasure in alcohol exhilaration. Alcohol weeds out from every race the individuals who most enjoy and indulge in it. The races of southern Europe who have had the longest experience of alcoholic drinks are now more temperate than the British, the Scandinavians and the Russians.

The committee is of the opinion that the continued use of alcohol tends to render a race less amenable to inebriety than it would otherwise have been, this result being brought about by the elimination of the drunken unfit and the survival of those with a weak tendency to alcoholism.

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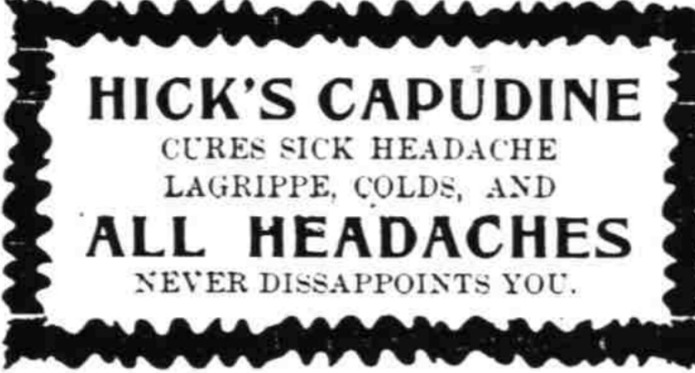
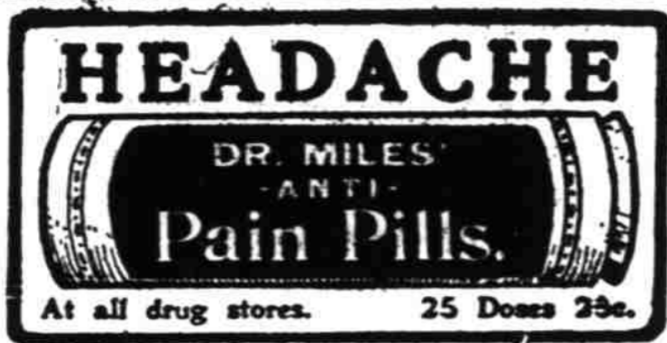
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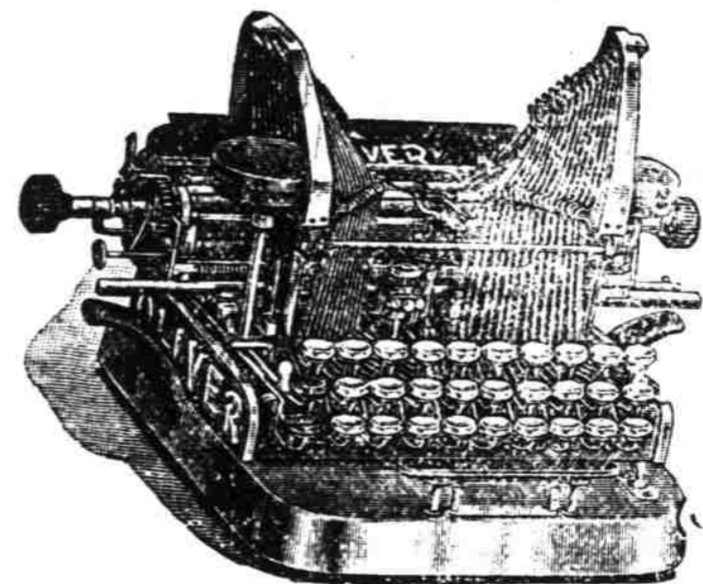
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