

One hundred years ago

Anti-alcoholic serum

The Paris Academy of Medicine at its meeting of Dec. 26th listened to a very interesting paper communicated by MM. Broca, Sapelier, and Thiébaud on the discovery of a so-called anti-alcoholic serum which has already created a great deal of excitement in the daily papers and which looks rather like a trade advertisement. The three observers in question started from the principle that in alcoholic intoxication, as in morphia intoxication, there is a preliminary period which is characterised by gradual toleration of the drug and a feeling of desire for the poison. On the other hand, it is well known that certain organic poisons, more especially those produced by microbes, form in the organism antitoxins which represent the elements of resistance which the

organism offers to infection. These antitoxins injected into another organism place that organism in a state of being able to resist the corresponding poison. The observers therefore determined to make research on these principles into the action of alcohol. They produced tolerance to alcohol in the horse by giving it by the mouth and then found that the serum of this horse inserted into other animals which had been made tolerant and fond of alcohol produced in the animals in question such a distaste to alcohol that they preferred to give up both eating and drinking rather than continue to take alcohol. The injection of this serum in large doses has produced neither in animals nor man any unpleasant symptoms either local or general. M. Broca and his colleagues proposed to call this substance "antiethyline". Clinical experiments made

upon drunkards had given most interesting and somewhat inconceivable results. The drunkard treated with antiethyline lost all his taste for alcohol; he no longer cared for brandy, rum, or absinthe, but he preserved a liking for wine and his appetite and strength returned. Up to the present antiethyline seems powerless to make any improvement in the organic alterations produced by the action of alcohol. It is only right to say that this thirsting serum which does away with any hungering after brandy but preserves the taste for wine was received by the Academy with smiling incredulity.

REFERENCE

Lancet, 6 January 1900, 44.

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