THE NATURE
OF
TEA AND COFFEE.

BY J. H. KELLOGG. M. D.

Good Health Magazine.
Pages 17-19.
January 1908.
The Nature of Tea and Coffee

Probably very few of the millions who daily make use of tea and coffee as a beverage are aware of the fact that these common drugs contain from three to six per cent of a deadly poison. The amount of tea and coffee imported annually into the United States alone is more than one billion pounds, or five hundred thousand tons, containing more than fifteen thousand tons of poison so deadly that twenty grains might produce fatal results if administered to a full grown man at a single dose,—amounting to more than ten billion deadly doses, or six times as much as would be required to kill every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth.

The question is asked, “Why then, are not those deadly effects more apparent, and more frequently manifested?” In reply it may be said first, that the poisonous effect of the use of tea and coffee are so widespread and so well nigh universal that this very fact serves to conceal the injury done. The bad effects which really follow from the use of tea and coffee are attributed to other causes, such as over-work, sedentary habits, climate, germs, and other influences which may indeed be incidentally involved, but are not primary in their influence.

Further, we will say that the poisonous effects resulting from the use of tea and coffee are very decidedly manifest to one who has given thought to this question, and has made careful observations in relation to it. The sallow complexion, common among women of the higher classes who have reached middle life, the almost universal nervousness among American women, and the increasing prevalence of nervous or sick-headaches, afford to the experienced physician ample evidence of the toxic or poisonous character of tea, coffee, and all allied beverages, cocoa and chocolate. The well-known effect of these drugs in producing wakefulness, banishing as if by magic the sensation of fatigue, affords sufficient evidence of their poisonous character. No one would doubt for a moment the poisonous nature of a drug capable of producing irresistible drowsiness in a person who is not weary.

The power of a drug to produce wakefulness in a person who is strongly inclined to sleep as a result of fatigue, equally evidence of its poisonous character.

Again, the fact that a person who is accustomed to the use of tea and coffee finds himself nervous and uncomfortable when the usual cup is dispensed with, is another proof of the poisonous character of these common beverages which is very frequently in evidence.

“I must have a cup of tea or coffee for my breakfast; I am good for nothing without it for the whole day,” is an expression which one often hears. The conclusion to be drawn from this experience is not that the coffee or tea is necessary or beneficial, but the very reverse. The evidence of its harmful and poisonous character is conclusive. No such results follow the incidental temporary withdrawal of ordinary food substances to which one has been accustomed. It is only artificial stimulants or narcotics the withdrawal of which is accompanied by such unpleasant effect.

Tea and coffee contain, in addition to caffeine, tannic acid and various volatile poisons. Roasted coffee also contains caffeine. Each of these poisons produces characteristic harmful effects. The volatile oils give rise to nervous excitability, and after a time provoke nervous disorders. Caffeine is a narcotic, which has been shown to diminish the activity of the peptic glands and to interfere with digestion.

Wolfe has shown that three grains of caffeine, an amount which might easily be furnished in a cup tea or coffee, greatly impairs the quality of the gastric juice, lessening its total acidity.

Robert showed that both tea and coffee interfered with the action of saliva upon the starch of the food, and may even wholly destroy its effect. Dr. Wood proved that the daily use of a decoction prepared from once of tea leaves produces deadly poison symptoms.

A German physiologist found the digestion to be reduce one-third by the use of tea. The tannic acid of tea not only interferes with the digestion of the starch, but also prevents the proper digestion of albumen.

The fact that coffee, or some similar substance, is very widely used, does not lessen the force of the argument against it. An intelligent observer residing in Brazil declares that almost the entire country is in a perpetual state of semi-intoxication from the free use of coffee. There are several civilized countries where a similar state of things exist.

Tea drunkards are reported to be common in England and Australia, especially among the poorer classes. The best way of ridding ones self of the tea and coffee habit is to adopt a dry dietary, making free use of fruits, especially fresh fruits, and after stewed fruits and fruit juices. Flesh foods and animal broths and extracts unquestionably excite the nerves, and create a desire for the soothing effect of a narcotic. Hence, a person who desires to free himself from the alcohol, the tobacco, or the tea or coffee habit, must first of all dispense with flesh foods of all sorts. Condiments must also be discarded, as these irritate and excite the nerves, creating a desire for the soothing effect of some narcotic drug.

The nervousness and irritability which follows the withdrawal of the accustomed drug may be wonderfully relieved by the prolonged warm bath at a temperature of 93°Fahr. to 96°Fahr. The duration of the bath may be indefinite: several hours if necessary. If there is palpitation of the heart, or rapid pulse with a feeling of distress through the chest, this may be relieved by the application of an ice-bag over the heart, by sponging the spine alternately with hot and cold water, or applying first hot and then cold compresses to the spine, alternating every minute.

Rubbing the whole surface of the body with the hands, dipping them frequently in cold water, is an excellent means of re-enforcing the heart. The wet-sheet pack will sometimes secure quiet, and even sleep, when other measures fail. The cold friction and cold towel rubbing should be applied two or three times a day for the purpose of toning up the nerve centers. An abundance of outdoor exercise, relief as far as possible from ordinary cares and worries, and a nutritious, easily digestible, and unstimulating diet, are other measures important.

Reprint 2007