

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(26) Stimulants and Narcotics (pages 325-335)

Summary:

In this chapter Ellen White expands the definition of stimulants and narcotics to include tea, coffee, mustard, pepper, spices, pickles, anything that, in her terms, irritates the stomach.

Thoughts:

In this chapter Ellen White sees stimulants and narcotics at three different levels of harm. First and most harmful is alcohol and tobacco. Second is wine, beer and fermented cider. Third are the condiments and stimulating drinks; tea, coffee, mustard, pepper, spices, and pickles. She felt that by indulging in these condiments and stimulating drinks the system develops a craving for things that are even more stimulating, like wine, liquor and tobacco. She seems to see all of these acting on the system in a similar way, though to a different degree. She felt that all of these stimulants wear away the life forces and debilitate the system. And the condiments seem to function in her mind rather like “gateway drugs” to more serious stimulants. (325-327)

Evidence-based science at the moment does not confirm the sentiments regarding tea, coffee and condiments. In select cases coffee is even prescribed for certain ailments. So the principle of “all things being equal” is certainly applicable to White’s counsels on these matters and also the principle of individuality. What is harmful to one may be neutral or even helpful to another. Those who want to seriously follow White’s counsel will study themselves carefully and also be open to science. Where the use of some of these (coffee, tea, harsh spices) is indicated, moderation is nevertheless advisable. By the way, if there is medical reason to use coffee it might best be used black, as the addition of much cream and sugar would do more harm than good.

By way of perspective, spices in Ellen White’s day were used in high quantities to preserve foods, especially meats. This may have played a role in the strength of her opinions on this. That would also underline the importance of moderation in their use, if used at all.

Certainly her comments on alcohol and tobacco (327-331) are strongly supported by the evidence of both science and experience. She spends more time talking about cider than we would today (331-332). She denies that wine is ever sanctioned in the Bible or that Jesus produced alcoholic wine the marriage feast in Cana (332-333).

Toward the end of the chapter the focus turns to family dynamics. The key to the promotion of temperance is to reach the youth, this is best handled at an early age and in the home. (334) But temperance reform should not be limited to the home. Education is critical. (335) The core principle is that the right balance of the mental and moral powers depends to a large extent on the right condition of the physical system. By indulgence of perverted appetite people lose their power to resist temptation. (335)

The concluding paragraph has an interesting element. Ellen White includes tea, coffee and all alcohol drinks under the dictum of “touch not, taste not, handle not.” But she does not mention the condiments here. (335) Does this suggest that an absolute prohibition in the case of condiments is not realistic and that current practice of some use at most Adventist tables is not in violation of her strong statements in this chapter?

Quotable Quotes:

“Men seek the excitement of stimulants, because, for the time, the results are agreeable. But there is always a reaction. The use of unnatural stimulants always tends to excess, and it is an active agent in promoting physical degeneration and decay.” (325)

“Nature needs time to recuperate her exhausted energies. When her forces are goaded on by the use of stimulants, more will be accomplished for a time; but, as the system becomes debilitated by their constant use, it gradually becomes more difficult to rouse the energies to the desired point. The demand for stimulants becomes more difficult to control, until the will is overborne and there seems to be no power to deny the unnatural craving. Stronger and still stronger stimulants are called for, until exhausted nature can no longer respond.” (327)

“To what extent can one indulge the liquor habit and be safely trusted with the lives of human beings? He can be trusted only as he totally abstains. (331)

“Intoxication is just as really produced by wine, beer, and cider as by stronger drinks. The use of these drinks awakens the taste for those that are stronger, and thus the liquor habit is established. Moderate drinking is the school in which men are educated for the drunkard's career. Yet so insidious is the work of these milder stimulants that the highway to drunkenness is entered before the victim suspects his danger.” (332)

“Often intemperance begins in the home. By the use of rich, unhealthful food the digestive organs are weakened, and a desire is created for food that is still more stimulating. Thus the appetite is educated to crave continually something stronger.” (334)

“There would soon be little necessity for temperance crusades if in the youth who form and fashion society, right principles in regard to temperance could be implanted.” (334)

“It must be kept before the people that the right balance of the mental and moral powers depends in a great degree on the right condition of the physical system. All narcotics and unnatural stimulants that enfeeble and degrade the physical nature tend to lower the tone of the intellect and morals. Intemperance lies at the foundation of the moral depravity of the world. By the indulgence of perverted appetite, man loses his power to resist temptation.” (335)

“Those who attempt to leave off these stimulants will for a time feel a loss and will suffer without them. But by persistence they will overcome the craving and cease to feel the lack. Nature may require a little time to recover from the abuse she has suffered; but give her a chance, and she will again rally and perform her work nobly and well.” (335)

Tweets of Healing:

The continued use of nerve irritants wears away the life forces. (326)

The use of tobacco is inconvenient, expensive, uncleanly, defiling to the user, and offensive to others. (328)

The unhealthful practices of past generations affect the children and youth of today. (328)

No human being needs tobacco, but multitudes are perishing for lack of the means that by its use is worse than wasted. (330)

To what extent can one indulge the liquor habit and be safely trusted with the lives of other human beings? (331)

The wine that Christ made from water at the marriage feast of Cana was the pure juice of the grape. (333)

Often intemperance begins in the home. (334)

The right balance of the mental and moral powers depends in a great degree on the right condition of the physical system. (335)

In relation to tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcoholic drinks, the only safe course is to touch not, taste not, handle not. (335)