

Canada Temperance Advocate.

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The "Humanitarian" Duties of the Church.

Such is the title of an admirable editorial article in the March number of the *National Magazine*. It is the continuation of a series of papers by the Editor, under the general heading, "The Christianity Required by the Times." Most appropriate and convincing are these discursive essays; and we heartily wish they could be studied by all Christian ministers and by all church members. It is maintained by the author, that the times demand "more of the primitive, spiritual life of Christianity—a reformation of its sectarianism and its style of address, both in its public ministrations and in social life." The question suggested by the present paper, we deem to be of grave importance. The word "humanitarian" has become "specific," says the editor, "if not technical in the language of reformers." "We include in it all the great reforms of the age." Many sincere Christians have taken alarm, because the infidelity of the age has allied itself with many popular movements, and seems to take the lead in many reforms absolutely demanded by the times; and it is to be feared that not a few have looked with suspicion on valuable plans for social improvement, because irreligious, if not sceptical, persons have proposed or approved them. There is evidently something wrong here. Is it to be admitted that infidelity is more clear-sighted respecting human wrongs or human wants, than Christianity? We think not. But it is possible that those who only, or chiefly, regard man in relation to his material interests, may arrive at many sound conclusions respecting his rights, necessities, and duties. And it is obvious, that if the Christianity embodied in the church considers only the spiritual needs of mankind, and makes effort only for spiritual life, then there will be neglect of great and essential truths relating to physical health and social happiness. Is such neglect warranted by Christianity itself? No; but the possession of that divine boon is human, and therefore fallible; and so may separate what God has joined together. He who regards only the body, forfeits the inestimable gifts of grace, and however prosperous he may become, dies as the fool dieth; while they who inculcate only the lessons of spiritual religion, seem to forget that man has a body as well as a soul; and hence, in many instances, and for many ages, "humanitarian" duties were neglected, if not despised, by Christian men.

There is a class of Christians who receive, with peculiar emotions of delight, any profound and eloquent exposition of the all-sufficiency of the Gospel to elevate and purify mankind. They fancy that in such a proposition lies a disclaimer of those associations formed for the mitigation of public evils, or the social advancement of the working classes, or the progress upward of the lower orders. Perhaps the pulpit orator meant no such thing; but they have a notion that Christianity is a powerful antidote against human

vices, while they themselves cling to some darling propensity, or decline to yield their conscience to that standard of self-denial which may be established by certain voluntary associations. These stand aloof from any combination which demands practical exertion and self-sacrifice. Religion and the church, say they, are all-sufficient instruments of power to raise and purify mankind. Their ethics embrace faith and feeling; but all the while iniquity abounds; and millions are not, and cannot be, reached by the influence which they deem all-powerful to cleanse from sin and heal of moral disease. The gigantic evil of intemperance has grown up around us, in the midst of Christian teaching and education. It was attacked directly and specifically, and was treated as a "stupendous denial of the Christian religion;" and now we aver that the "Christianity required by the times" demands that the whole church (not this or that section of it) should identify itself with the movement for the suppression of drunkenness and the abolition of the liquor traffic. We admit, with the editor of the *National*, that "the Temperance reform originated with the church." Others, probably not under Christian influence, took hold of the movement, governed only by "humanitarian" views. But that was not a sufficient reason for the church withdrawing its sanction and approving activity. On the contrary, "now should the whole Christianity of the land rally to its standard, and force the public opinion through the crisis. *The religion of the country can do it,*" and ought to do it. Every Christian minister, and every member of a Christian church, should be known and recognized as an enemy of the liquor traffic; and in some definite way their power should be felt, as directed against an evil more ruinous than war, more destructive than pestilence. Great numbers practically concur in these views, but there are yet many who do not; and we are persuaded that the power of the church is not felt, because of the prevalence of defective opinions, and an over scrupulous fear of worldly contamination. What is worse, there exists much moderate drinking and social tippling. We know it to be so, and we denounce it as the secret cause of an unexpressed hostility to the temperance cause, or a cold and general approval of temperance effort, unaccompanied by any activity for the removal of the nation's greatest curse. And (we quote the *National*) "the whole history of Christendom is against the idea that the general inculcation of religious truth, without its specific application to public evils, is a sufficient mission for the church. But would it be safe, some may ask? Would it not bring it into violent conflicts with public sentiments and public men? Yes, until the latter learned that its integrity was inexorable; and then the conflict would purify the church and save the world. It is this positive reformatory spirit that the times demand in the church. Our position," says the *National*, "is a plain one, and admits of no evasion. It is, summarily, that Christianity presents a sufficient and intelligible test for all public questions that have important moral relations, and that it should apply it openly and uncompromisingly to them, wherever, by becoming the prevailing faith of a people, it becomes responsible for the public morals." In this sentiment we