

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

THE ABUSE OF STATISTICS.

WERE the law laid down by several speakers at the late Temperance Convention put in operation, that a thing which cannot be used without abuse ought to be prohibited, all arguments based upon statistics would be discontinued. The abuse of figures in controversy is more general than their legitimate use. This arises not from wilful perversion of such figures, but from this form of argument being adopted by persons who have never learnt by study or experience, the true relation between statistics and reasoning based thereupon. In the use of literary quotations there is often abuse, but detection and exposure usually follow. But in quoting statistics the original authorities are seldom even known, and when known they are most difficult to examine, except by experts. It is worse than trifling for persons not skilled in such studies to attempt the verification of statistical tables, and the true rank as an authority of any person whose judgment is relied upon, is rarely known outside those of his own profession. Several notable illustrations of the danger of quoting statistics in this loose way, was afforded by a paper read by the Rev. W. C. Bradshaw, before the C. E. T. Conference. He used the words "a celebrated statistician MULHALL." Now let us see how this illustrious workman uses his tools. In the late debates on "The Crimes Bill," Mr. Mulhall's figures on Evictions, were quoted to prove how large a number had taken place. Mr. Mulhall's figures have been quoted by the anti-rent press the world over, to excite anger against Irish landlords. In the House of Commons, the Hon. Mr. Balfour, caused a profound sensation by exposing the shameless falsity of this "celebrated statistician." He showed that the Official return of evictions was in two tables, one table gave the number of families evicted, and the other table the total number of persons in such families. Mr. Mulhall took the total number of persons, and said: "an Irish family averages 7," he, therefore, multiplied the total persons evicted by 7, and gave out that the result of this process showed the total number of evictions in Ireland! Thus 1 family of 3 persons was made to give 21 cases of eviction! When Mr. Balfour exposed this fraud, he demanded an explanation from Mr. Gladstone, who had used Mr. Mulhall's figures, and Mr. Gladstone and the whole Irish party sat dumbfounded, while the House rang with cheers, at this crushing exposure of the tactics of the anti-rentites. It is safe to say that a more "celebrated statistician" is not in existence than Mr. Bradshaw's authority, Mr. Mulhall, for he will go down to future ages as the illustrious genius who converted each single case of eviction into from 20 to 50, by his statistical skill!

Of course, Mr. Bradshaw is not in any way to blame; he however, will, we hope, have learnt a lesson, so that when he next quotes from any authority on statistics, he will take care to guard himself and his hearers from being deceived by "a celebrated statistician."

There is in the paper alluded to, another instance of lame logic. That lunacy has increased largely during this century is admitted. Now, it is also admitted, that drinking has decreased largely this century. How then is it, if drinking is the chief cause of lunacy, that while the cause has been largely diminishing, the effect has been largely increasing? Mr. Bradshaw tells us that in the last 40 years, the insane in the three Kingdoms, have nearly doubled in number, despite care and skill, and the advancement of scientific and medical knowledge." Mr. Bradshaw also tells us, that "while the population in the States increased in 10 years by 30 per cent., the insane increased 155 per cent." Yet in those 40 years in England, and those ten years in the States, Prohibition was spreading over large territories, and the people universally were becoming more sober! If Mr. Bradshaw's figures prove anything it is that lunacy advances at a very high rate of speed, when excessive and moderate drinking become less general. In plain words he shows that teetotalism has helped to fill the lunatic asylums. The connection between drink and lunacy in the very nature of things cannot be shown by figures. We have known more minds upset by revival meetings than by drink, and more still by the gloom of life deprived of innocent pleasures. Any physician can testify that the mind becomes diseased, when by solitude, or brooding over sorrow, or religious fanaticism, it is withdrawn from the healthful stimulus of social joys. The superintendent of the Toronto Lunatic Asylum said a few weeks ago, that those whose brains have a tendency to insanity are driven to drink to drown their sorrow, and, that it is far more true to say, that lunacy produces drinking habits than that drinking produces lunacy. We once heard a physician, a philanthropist of high fame, assert, that there is so much bitter sorrow, such grinding poverty, such cruel suffering in the world, that were it not for the temporary lull caused by the use of stimulants, there would be periodic waves of suicide and social outbreaks that would be incomparably more dangerous to social well being, than the terrible evils of drink. This assertion is not without Scriptural warrant. It is significant that the leaders of the Anarchists are, as they were in the last century, men of extremely temperate habits, some of them indeed total abstainers, it is also worthy of note that drink finds its most numerous victims in those classes that feel most heavily the weight of life's burthen, to which they add by efforts to forget.

Take again Mr. B's criminal statistics which he "mixes and muddles" in a perplexing disorder. We are first told that four-fifths of all crime is caused by drink, then that 80 per cent. which is four-fifths, of commitments are for drunkenness; so that what we are really asked to accept is this absurd statement—that drink causes 80 per cent. of all crime because 80 per cent., of all crime is the one crime of excess in drink! Thus according to Mr. Bradshaw drink is responsible only for drunkenness! It was not respectful to a Temperance Conference to present statistics

in so crude a form. When the Judges speak of drink as the cause of crime they refer to such crime as they have to deal with at assizes. But drunkenness is not tried by Judges at assizes, therefore Mr. Bradshaw's assertions that 80 per cent. of crime is drunkenness, and that drink only is responsible for 80 per cent. of crime, makes the testimony of Judges of none effect. We should like to see an official analysis of criminal returns showing how many murders, forgeries, burglaries, highway robberies, swindles, embezzlements, petty larcencies, assaults, perjuries, injuries to cattle, arsons, &c., were inspired by drink. Such a return would be valuable; but the statement that 80 per cent. of commitments are for drunkenness, and that drink is responsible only for 80 per cent. of crime, upsets the whole argument as to drink and crime, for it is a demonstration that not one single crime in the calendar except drunkenness, is caused by drink! But Mr. Bradshaw quotes figures that destroy each other. He says "80 per cent. of the commitments were for drunkenness and disorderly conduct." In the next sentence he says of "the total commitments to the gaols of Ontario at least 34 per cent. were for drunkenness and kindred crimes.

It is however an abuse of statistics to make drink responsible for crime because a certain percentage of criminals are fond of drink. Suppose we take another class, the industrious, honest mechanics, or the tradesmen, or lawyers, should we not find that fully as large a proportion of any of these classes habitually and as freely use intoxicants as the criminal class? If drink causes crime how comes it to pass that the vast mass of the people who lead honest lives, to use Mr. Bradshaw's phrase, "are addicted to drink?" In days just past every person was a drinker and the majority drank to excess. Pray, were criminals then the overwhelming majority, as they must have been if the use of drink freely necessarily produces crime? Is crime unknown where strong drink is not used? How comes it to pass that we have such a terrible amount of juvenile crime? Have the children in our Reformatories learnt or been driven to steal by strong drink? Is it not a fact that every man in our prisons is fond of meat, most of them greedily so? Has animal food then some relation to crime? To assert that crime is the child of drink is to make the Scripture false which declares that the evil heart of man is the fountain of all his wrong doing. As the result of an examination of the prisoners at the Elmira Reformatory, U.S., it was found that 79 per cent. of them were "absolutely devoid of moral sense." If the theory is correct that the vast mass of crime is caused by drink, the Ten Commandments ought to have been compressed into one "Thou shalt not drink," then the remainder would have been hardly needed. It is very strange theology to attribute the acts of our corrupt nature to a fluid! Drink is a concomitant of crime, the aider and abettor of some, but the real instigator of all crime is human passion in one