

THE CANADA Temperance Advocate.

TEMPERANCE IS THE MODERATE USE OF THINGS BENEFICIAL, AND ABSTINENCE FROM THINGS HURTFUL.

No. XI.

MONTREAL, MARCH, 1836.

VOL. I.

Selected Articles.

REVIEW OF BISHOP HOPKINS' OBJECTIONS TO TEMPERANCE SOCIETIES.

From the Philadelphia Episcopal Recorder.

(Concluded from last number.)

The Bishop's second objection is "that the temperance society" (in its proposed reformation of man) "begins with the conduct, while Christ begins with the heart." "Here then again we may see that the manner in which this new society opposes vice, and seeks to establish virtue, is not only without Christ, but is rather in hostility to his word, and therefore we think that Christians who understand this, cannot consistently engage in it." If we understand this objection, its principle is, that Christians, being bound according to the plan of the gospel to urge upon all men the conversion of the heart, cannot consistently attempt to make the reformation merely in the outward conduct of men.— This objection would apply with equal force to the preacher and to the parent, prohibiting in each relation, any attempt to reform the conduct, or restrain the sins merely, of those severally committed to them. Does the Bishop act upon this principle? In regard to the temperance society, the objection is particularly inappropriate. When it is considered that whatever removes the external vices of men, removes just so many of the obstacles which prevent the conversion of their hearts; and that no vice is in its influence and operation, a more universal and dreadful obstacle to the purifying of the heart than intemperance, it will be seen that so far from the temperance society being "in hostility to the word of Christ," it is a most valuable and effectual instrument of preparing its way to the hearts of men. And this it is found to be the fact. The Christian, in promoting the plans of the temperance society, is doing more than he can do in almost any other method to promote the cause of the gospel, and to prepare for the renovation of the hearts of men in holiness, under its power. But if this were not the case, is the Christian indeed forbidden to seek or to promote any other improvement of men, because he is required

to see the renewal of their hearts? Will the Bishop lay down the principle, that if a man is unconverted and sinful, it matters not whether he is intemperate or sober? Laps he himself direct no effort in the instruction of men, to any inferior point than the conversion of their hearts? We confess ourselves astonished at such an objection as this. God forbid that we should ever teach men, that the reformation of their outward conduct was all that is required of them. But we cannot be indifferent to their external character, & consider it a matter of no importance. Our own experience allows clearly that the Gospel can prevail, only as these dreadful vices of men are removed; and it is the Christian's duty to labour for their removal. If he can be the instrument of changing the hearts of men, he may well be thankful. If he cannot do this, let him thankfully do what he can towards accomplishing this most important end. When Cecil says of John Thornton, "his only question was 'may the miseries of man in any measure be removed or alleviated?'"—he gives an account of the real feeling of a Christian's heart in direct application to the present subject. Newton's remark of himself may be also well applied to the objection we are now considering. "I see in this world two heaps of human happiness and misery; now if I take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point, and feel that I have done something." With such a spirit we are disposed to unite and to encourage others to unite in the promotion of the temperance society, even considered under the lowest aspect of the advantages flowing from it to mankind.

The Bishop's third objection is, "that if the temperance society should succeed to the extent of its anticipation, it would be a triumph to infidelity." This strange position he thus illustrates:—

"God has sent his gospel to bring men to repentance and to virtue. It has been in the world eighteen hundred years, and yet there is not a single sin which does not continue to infest humanity. But the temperance society promises, by the contrivance of a written pledge given by men to each other, that the worst of all vices—nay,

the parent of all crime, shall be totally banished in one generation. Now if this boast could be made good by the success anticipated, it would demonstrate what the infidel has always been asserting, namely that christianity is not of God; for the application of this human pledge of abstinence would be found of absolute efficacy in rooting out what is called the worst of all the vices in one generation; whereas the motives presented by religion have not done it in eighteen centuries."

We are at a loss to perceive the force of this objection. Of the speedy reformation of the world promised by the temperance society, we have no knowledge. To that sanguine prospect, it is hardly necessary to direct attention. But is it unwarrantable for Christians to attempt the moral reformation of men now, because the church of eighteen centuries, has not entirely effected the object? The church of Christ has set up the gospel and circulated the scriptures throughout the world. Because Christians have not done this heretofore, is it wrong for any to undertake to do it now? This seems to be the argument; that because others professing to act upon Christian principles, have been deficient in Christian duty, it is improper in us now to attempt to excel them. Who is to blame that the gospel has not fully eradicated sin in eighteen centuries? If the men who have professed it, why is it sinful for their successors to go beyond them? That the church has been lamentably deficient in duty and is still so, in regard to the great object of the temperance society, none will more readily allow than we. But the duty of others to stand still and see the world ruined by vice, because the church has chosen heretofore to do it, is a consequence we shall hardly be led to draw from this admission. If infidelity is ever to triumph it will not be under the reign of virtue and temperance, but under the dominion and propagation of that spirit, which by opposing efforts against sin, is actually covering the sin itself.

In conclusion, we repeat our sorrow that Bishop Hopkins should have felt willing to give the influence of his station and character, in opposition to the prosperous