

THE WEEK.

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TEMPERANCE AND PROHIBITION.

THE recent discussion of Prohibition, under the auspices of the local Church of England Temperance Society, was conducted with such moderation on both sides that it will probably do less harm to the cause of Temperance than might have been feared. To those who have not considered the subject very deeply, this statement may seem paradoxical; but it is made quite soberly and seriously. It is by no means the case that so called Temperance meetings are always favourable to the cause of Temperance, even if we give to that word the elastic meaning of total abstinence, which was claimed for it by a speaker on the Prohibition side. On the contrary, some most devoted friends of the cause have been driven from co-operating with any of the societies by the violence and unreasonableness of many of its extreme advocates.

The Church of England Temperance Society has probably suffered most from this reason. Its dual basis and the reasonable nature of its original programme drew to it many, some of them total abstainers, some who were not, who could not join any of the previously existing societies. A few years ago it seemed likely that a vast majority of the English clergy and a great proportion of the educated laity would be active members of the Church of England Temperance Society. We are informed that the adherents of the society have diminished in number, and that its proceedings have lost the enthusiasm which was manifestly present in them some years ago. There can be no doubt that this is the case among ourselves, here in Canada. Many persons now refuse to take any active part in the work, although they may nominally remain members of it.

And the reason is very simple. There are persons so constituted that a stimulant taken in moderation is a positive benefit to them physically and morally. There are persons to whom it is virtually a necessity. These persons are not convinced that they are doing wrong by using God's creatures in moderation for their own health and comfort, and therefore they cannot feel that they are bound to give up using them. Now, it is not pleasant for people of this class to attend a meeting, perhaps to speak on a platform, when some of the speakers make it their business to sneer at moderate drinkers as "poor creatures," sometimes to hint that they are rather worse than drunkards, inasmuch as they use alcohol when they could deny themselves, whereas the drunkard cannot help drinking.

But we have now got a step still further on. The extreme teetotalers are no longer contented to insist upon total abstinence as a moral duty; they are resolved upon enforcing it upon all their fellow citizens under pains and penalties. No one shall be allowed to drink any stimulant; and, to make sure of this, no stimulant shall be allowed to be sold. It may seem hardly credible to the advocates of Prohibition, but it is nevertheless quite certain that there are many men, ardent friends of Temperance, not in the least inclined to excess or indifferent to excess in others, who are opposed to Prohibition, as an infringement of the liberty of the subject, as a means of bringing law into contempt, as ineffectual for its purpose, and as productive of greater evils than any which it is able to remove. There are men, honest and sincere, who hold these opinions, and

who greatly object to being considered on the devil's side, and favourers of immorality, because they refuse to abandon their convictions.

Indeed it needs a good deal of courage to be a Prohibitionist, if one wishes to be thoroughly consistent. For no one can be a Prohibitionist unless he believes that the use of alcoholic liquors as a beverage is positively wrong. One of the speakers on the Prohibition side denied that he thought the use of stimulants wrong in itself. All that we can say to this is that he ought to think so, or he has no right to prevent people from using them. How can we consistently say to a neighbour: "I believe that you may quite innocently use a stimulant; but I will pass a law, if I can, to prevent you doing so?"

The argument derived from S. Paul's resolve about eating meat is excellent as a law of liberty for the individual, but it has no application whatever to prohibitory legislation. S. Paul's argument, in that case, ought to have run in some such form as this: "If I see my brother's conscience wounded by anything that anybody else is doing, I will try to get a law passed which shall prevent everybody from doing the thing which wounds him."

To speak of the evils of drunkenness is quite beside the question. We all grant them, lament them, want to put an end to them in every legitimate manner; but we object to abridge the lawful freedom of society at large because individuals abuse their liberty. The Scriptures are very strong in their denunciations of drunkenness; but they also condemn gluttony, and many physicians are of opinion that the evils produced by gluttony, whether physical or moral, are even greater than those produced by drunkenness, although they are less conspicuous and tangible. Indeed, it is said that persons who have given up the use of stimulants eat a great deal more; and it is generally agreed that most men eat too much.

One aspect of the question was not touched at the recent debate—the positive uses of wine, apart from its relation to health. Yet the Scriptures speak of wine making "glad the heart of man," and it is quite certain that this result was not produced by the unfermented juice of the grape. Is all conviviality a sin? Is the exhilaration produced by a moderate use of stimulants a thing wrong in itself? Shall we say that men may sit round a table laden with the richest food, and eat abundantly, but they may not drink any thing stronger than tea or coffee? Doubtless there are constitutions which can derive something like stimulus from a heavy dinner; but those who possess them might have a little compassion upon their weaker brethren who do not possess these Herculean powers of digestion and assimilation.

We are very glad that Mr. Goldwin Smith, in his admirable speech, as convincing as it was moderate and thoughtful, did not shrink from bringing forward the example and the teaching of Christ. We can quite understand the motives of reverence which deter many controversialists from using this argument. They do not care to provoke replies which, in their view, savour of blasphemy. But it is necessary that the truth should be told, and the truth is that the first miracle of our Lord was the making of water into wine, and almost His last act on earth the institution of a Sacrament in which wine is a necessary part.

In an ecclesiastical assembly held not long ago, it was gravely debated whether a manufacturer of any stimulant should be admitted to church membership. The good sense of the meeting rejected the proposal to exclude such persons. But the simple argument from the example of Christ was not brought forward. No one stood up, and said: "We cannot possibly do this, because Jesus Christ manufactured wine;" and yet that is the truth, and any one who can read his Greek Testament knows perfectly well that the wine used at the marriage of Cana must have been fermented.

One thing, indeed, may be urged with perfect truth as against the use of the liquors which are most common among ourselves. It may be said quite truly that the wines used in the East and in the days of our Lord were weaker than our liquors, and were generally drunk diluted with water. This is quite true; but unfortunately the argument could not be used by a Prohibitionist, because he almost compels people to drink whiskey by preventing them from getting beer. A few weeks hence some of the citizens of Toronto will be seeking refreshment amid the lakes of Muskoka, and there they will find the Scott Act in (very imperfect) operation. In some places, however, they will not get beer, which they would prefer, and