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Selected Articles.

A Complete View of the Principles and Objects of Temperance Societies.

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TEMPERANCE SOCIETIES lay as their foundation two great laws—Christian charity and self-preservation. They neither propose to employ a means of reformation superior to the Gospel, nor different from it, but merely to put into practical operation principles which the Gospel has taught. There is no account, it is true, of their establishment in the New Testament, more than of the establishment of Bible or Missionary Societies; but all the principles on which they are founded, and which they teach, are to be found there. Their object is to produce a great change on public opinion and practice; their instrument for effecting this is not coercion in any form, but simply the truth spoken in love. Knowing that prevention is better than cure, their desire is to cut off the sources of drunkenness, and these sources they conceive are found in the opinions and practices of the temperate. Believing the community to labour under gross deception respecting the properties of intoxicating liquors, they are anxious to elicit discussion, and to disseminate truth. It is their object also to awaken public attention to the incalculable and increasing evils of intemperance, under which our country groans, and to the imperative calls upon every man to employ the means with which God has furnished him for the destruction of a plague before which all that is noble and good in our land is fading away. Past years have furnished delightful evidence that union is strength; and this principle they are desirous of turning to good account, by directing against intemperance the concentrated influence both of the precept and example of temperate men. Temperance Societies are societies of the temperate—united, not on the ground of a common principle, but of a common practice—abstaining from the use of distilled spirits, and discountenancing the causes and practices of intemperance. A general view of the principles and objects of these societies I now lay before you.

The Gospel is emphatically the "law of liberty"—the liberty of doing what love makes delightful. It is most consistent with such liberty to make every sacrifice consistent with health and duty, rather than cast a stumbling-block in the way of a brother. The Christian has the highest warrant for the use of animal food; yet he cheerfully foregoes his right when the exercise of it would hurt the conscience of a brother, would excite prejudice against religion, or, by the power of example, would induce a brother to sin. "It is good," says the unerring oracle, "neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." The Christian is not forbidden the use of wine, as the Nazarite of old; he does not consider the use of

wine to be sinful; yet, when he finds that his use of wine throws a temptation in his brother's way, and affords an apology for excess—when he finds that temperate opinions and practices prevail to an alarming extent, and that so many stumble, and are offended, and made weak—then he suits his conduct to existing circumstances: his language is—"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; and I will not use, while the world stands, that whereby I make my brother to offend."

The apostle Paul would have commended his brother Timothy for acting on this good and wholesome rule of Christian charity, had not the infirm state of his health required the medicinal virtue of a small portion of wine. Paul, therefore, exhorts him, in the spirit of medical prescription, "to use no longer water," as his only drink, according to his former practice, but to use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities.

Though, therefore, a certain use of wine is allowed in Scripture, yet every man is not only at perfect liberty to refrain from its use when he pleases, but there are circumstances in which abstinence from it is highly commendable, and consistent with the noblest principles of Christianity. There is nothing wrong in abstinence from any particular kind of meat or of drink. While an all-bountiful God has furnished us with a rich variety of articles of food, he has laid us under no necessity of using each and all of the different kinds. Some of them we may choose, others refuse, as our taste or our reason dictates. There is no breach of a divine command, no disrespect shown to the good creatures of God, in making a choice among the different articles of meat or of drink. Every man is exercising such choice, freely, every day, for the sake of his health or his appetite; and no one counts it wrong. Should either blame, then, or ridicule be attached to him who abstains for the sake of his conscience? "Has any man a right to compel me to drink wine, or to quote, in justification of his tyrannical conduct, 'Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused?'" I have just as good a right not to drink as another has to drink; and Temperance Societies will deserve the praise of all good men if, in the midst of a host of compulsory customs and courtesies, they should be able to do no more than establish the right of refusing.

In establishing such a right, they will be doing no dishonour to Him who, though the Creator of the vine, commanded the Nazarites to abstain from all that it produces, and who highly commended the descendants of Rechab for evidencing, by abstinence from wine, their obedience to the wise injunction of Jonadab their father. No sincere Christian can consider abstinence from wine to be sinful, after having reflected on the language of Christ respecting John the Baptist: "Among them," said he, "that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John," and yet "John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine." To command to abstain is anti-Christian—

to abstain is an exercise of Christian liberty.

We require not to be told, then, of the allusions made in Scripture to the use of wine. We know them; but we know, too, that the usual beverage of the Jews was water, and that the Jews were deservedly considered a temperate people. No member of a Temperance Society asserts that it is sinful to drink wine—he has no desire to affix a stigma to its moderate use; all that he contends for is that what is perfectly lawful may, under peculiar circumstances, become inexpedient; in the midst of unbounded intemperance, he is anxious to draw, between his own practice and that of the multitude, a clearly defined line of separation; and being most desirous not only to shun all appearance of evil, but to mark, in the strongest manner, his abhorrence of intemperance in all its stages, he evidences by his practice his conviction that the state and taste of society have been grievously vitiated—he withdraws himself from all connection with those opinions and practices by which, in the present depraved state of society, the use of intoxicating liquor is made essential to health and social intercourse, and from which, as the most prolific of all sources, springs the overwhelming drunkenness of our day.

Such a course of conduct would be most justifiable and proper, even with respect to the wine usually spoken of in Scripture. It may be laid down as a general position that all vinous countries are temperate. France, with all its infidelity, sets a noble example of temperance. But, suppose that in such a country as France wine should be so horribly abused as to become the bane and curse of the country, then the truly Christian spirit would call for extraordinary means of reformation suited to extraordinary exigencies; and to avoid every apology for excess, as well as to stamp evil practices with the strongest reprobation, would abstain from that which caused stumbling and offence, and weakness. The mere circumstance of the article abused being a good creature of God would present no objection to such a course of conduct; for an article good in itself may be so prostituted as to render its use by an enlightened conscientious mind wholly inexpedient. The meat offered in sacrifice to idols was not changed in its nature by being presented to that which, as a mere creature of imagination, "is nothing in the world"—it did not cease from being a good creature of God; and yet the primitive Christians did not hesitate to abstain from it, on account of its having been prostituted to base purposes. It would be easy to find similar illustrations in a multitude of cases, where the wise and conscientious abstain from things indifferent, solely because they have been abused.

The state of society with us, however, is wholly different from what it is in vinous countries—from what it was in the temperate Judea. By the use of ardent spirits—a powerfully intoxicating stimulus—a false taste has been created, which loathes the light weak wines of the east, and which is gradually exalting the strength of all intoxicating liquors to that false standard which ardent spirits