

Temperance Column.

"FOR DOCTRINE'S SAKE."

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In my travels it is only natural that I should meet with many different sorts of people, and become acquainted with various orders of mind. It is surprising how manifold are the objections made to Temperance work, even by those who agree with us in denouncing the sin of Intemperance. To use the language of Mr. Cobden, in speaking of another matter, these objectors say in effect: "Don't show me that you can at all diminish the evil; I will show you that the evil still remains behind, and, therefore, I will not allow you to touch it." Anything more unreasonable than this argument it would be hard to discover, unless it be the objections raised by those who—rather than admit a fallacy in their own mode of reasoning—deny that there is any good at all in Temperance work. It is with these latter objectors that I propose to deal in the present paper. They are of two classes.

1. There are those—good Churchmen for the most part—who, from a strong sense of the value of the baptismal vow, object to the imposition of a pledge, even in the case of the drunkard. It seems to me that "for doctrine's sake"—and I am not quarrelling with the doctrine, but only with this application of it—they are disposed to leave Intemperance alone as a thoroughly hopeless evil, and to suffer the poor drunkard to go on his miserable road to ruin, disease and death. But is there any reasonableness in such a line of action? Granted that the baptismal vow is binding, and a moral pledge of the utmost value, is it not ascertained beyond all dispute that there are men and women in the world (not alone the drunkards) who are unmindful of it? And is it not even possible that, by selecting one portion of this vow—i. e., the renunciation of the vow—and seeking to enforce it in a special manner, we may help to strengthen an individual's sense of obligation with regard to other portions of his baptismal vow, or, in other words, make him a better Christian than he was before? Nay, more, may we not confidently assert that this has been the case over and over again with those who have taken a Temperance pledge? I venture, then, to implore objectors of this kind to reconsider the question in the light of common sense and of practical experience. It is true beyond dispute that every baptized person is under an obligation to God and the Church to the full extent—and beyond it—of anything that a Temperance pledge can impose. But is it not true, also, that persons who have forgotten their baptismal obligations have been recalled from paths of sin by means of promises to man or vows to God which do not cover the whole ground that the vow of Baptism

does; and that, having regained in this manner some sense of holy obligation and Christian duty, they have thenceforward lived more in accordance with their Christian profession? Shall we venture, then, to withhold from the weak a prop which is not needed by the strong, or refuse, "for doctrine's sake," to perceive that there are exceptions to every rule? Happily, though the evil of Intemperance is so great as to be called our national sin, baptized Christians living intemperate lives are the exceptions, and not the rule; and, being so, they may fairly ask at our hands exceptional treatment. But then we shall be met with the rejoinder that (while conceding this point) an objector may fairly protest against the taking of a Temperance pledge by persons who are not intemperate, and who by so acting seem to cast a slur upon the efficacy of baptismal grace. The answer appears to be this: Such persons are entitled also to exceptional treatment; for they are voluntarily placing themselves under an exceptional rule of life, for the sake of their brethren. The practice of Total Abstinence involves to most people a change of personal habits and denial of the indulgence of the appetite, which (while very painful to those who have been intemperate) is not altogether free from disagreeable incidents to the temperate. But they have adopted this course for the purpose of demonstrating to the drunkard the practicability of Total Abstinence, and of proving that—so far from injuring the health, or shortening life—this way of living is positively conducive to good health and length of days. They are doing this philanthropically and religiously. Must we, then, "for doctrine's sake," condemn them? Should we not rather, for Christ's sake, approve of them? Is not the Master higher than the ministry? Is not the Ordainer above the ordinance? Are not those who serve Christ in the persons of His weakest members obeying in spirit (even if not in the letter) His precepts? The Baptismal obligation teaches us, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." Are we not showing how fully we recognize the value of this doctrine, by practising it; "glorifying God in our bodies" (by means of a voluntary Total Abstinence), "and in our spirits" (abstaining for the sake of others) "which are His?"

2. There is another class of objectors who, for doctrine's sake, oppose or disparage Temperance work. They are men who, out of a mistaken view (as I venture to think) of what is implied by the doctrines of grace, deny that there is any value, and say that there is even danger in the ordinary methods employed for the rescue of the drunkard. To put their view in plain words, it amounts to this, "do not waste your time in trying to get intemperate people to sign the pledge, but bring them to the Cross." But is there not an obvious fallacy involved in this line of thought? Are not objectors of this type really implying either that Temperance and Religion are opposed to one another, and cannot be associated together; or else that Temperance can in no case precede Religion without risk? And it would be easy to prove to demonstration that neither of these two positions is tenable. The drunkard has been reformed and converted to God at one and the same time; and also, in many cases, the signing of the pledge has been the first step in a godly life. What, then, does the objection mean? It means that, putting on one side all the facts of the case, it must be wrong, wrong for doctrine's sake, to let a man have any part in effecting his own salvation. And it comes to this, that, rather than suggest to a man that he can, by becoming a Total Abstainer, draw a little nearer to the Cross we should teach him to undervalue anything in the shape of a means of grace; until, by Divine power, operating independently of the man's own will, he is somehow or other saved! Then he may make use, but not before, of the helps and encouragements to Temperance which a Temperance Society provides. It appears to me that the arguments of such objectors only require to be thus boldly stated to carry with them their own refutation. For may we not fairly believe that He, who said to the man with a withered hand, "Stretch forth thine hand," and (in the very act of his stretching it forth) worked a miracle, and restored the hand whole as the other, would in these latter days approve and sanction the practical line of action adopted by Temperance workers, more than the theories of those who, for doctrine's sake, would let the drunkard die rather than encourage him to make an effort towards his own recovery from the paralysis of intemperance?

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