

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

THE PROHIBITIONS MOST NEEDED.

EARL SHAFTSBURY as a social reformer was far ahead of his age. After the example he set as a landlord, after his forty years work among the outcast poor, after a deluge of press articles advocating social reforms for bettering the surroundings of the poor, there is to day, no healthy, active public sentiment or conviction in existence as the effect of the Earl's example, or as the fruit of the persistent advocacy of the press. Look at Montreal and its small-pox scourge! Look at any of our cities, towns or villages, and their sanitary conditions will be found revolting. In a speech in 1848 the late Earl declared that "*the condition of the dwellings of the people lay at the root of two-thirds of the disorders that afflicted the country.*" He held that "good drainage, good ventilation, good healthy houses, ample supply of good water, would have a very great influence on the moral habits of the people," as well as their physical health. He practised as he spoke. On his estate he built new cottages for the laborers. Each had a parlor, kitchen, and three separate bed rooms, each too, stood in its own garden of one quarter of an acre, for which he charged only one dollar per month. The Earl's example and teaching are to-day a generation in advance of the class who control municipal affairs—that is the average ratepayer and those selected for civil office.

There is an easier way to secure applause than the demand for such reforms as good drainage, plentiful water, decent houses in open spaces. Such common sense reforms afford no opportunities for screeching oratory by vendors of clap trap sensational figures, which would be ludicrous if they were not so false as to be a scandal to the user as they are a weakness to his cause. Some men seem to be as morbidly affected by the use of large figures as others are by alcohol. They lose all sense of the due proportion of truth, and become in their phrenzy indifferent to the obligations of honor. It is a topic worthy the investigation of some ethical philosopher to ascertain why large figures are so demoralizing. In the interests of morality a certain type of men whose identity as such is easy to discover, men for instance who use figures of speech as arguments, and regard boldness of assertion as the very crown of logic, these men ought to be prohibited using figures beyond say a thousand. When they get into the region of millions their brains whirl, their self control is lost, they are undone. As they reel to and fro with arithmetical intoxication they are a sad spectacle to gods and men!

That drink is the chief cause of crime, any fool may scream. But it needs wisdom, sound judgment, earnest moral courage, tender love of humanity to engage in the arduous work of such social reforms as would uproot the tree of which the drink curse is only one of the branches.

Let a test be made by one who takes the

shallow view that drink is itself a cause, uncaused. Let some agitator of prohibition live a few weeks in the narrow home of some labourer, residing in a back street, where human beings are herded like cattle, where water is scarce, where darkness and dirt prevail, where noises are incessant from children and neighbours, where the air outside is close, dead, tainted, and inside is foul and sickening. If the investigator did not come out of such an experience converted to our view, it would only be because such a home was congenial to his depraved tastes!

We need a law prohibiting any dwelling being so placed as to be without a certain amount of free air, or rooms of a less space, or houses being occupied unless passed on by an expert as healthy. We raise this cry of Prohibition—it is indeed a cry worthy of every Christian voice. In one of the passionate lyrics of Eliott, the Corn Law Rhymers, he exclaims,

"Outbid the house of Gin!"

Yes! indeed, let the homes of the people be attractive as the saloon. Let our cottages be made sweet and wholesome with free light and free air, with abundant water, with every convenience of cleanliness, comfort, restful quietude and decent privacy. Let the lot of every toiler, every wife, be brightened with social joys and amusements which supply stimulus, refreshment and tone to the jaded body and spirits. Then would the Saloon be outbid, then would it die a natural death, and not breed from its corpse worse evils than itself, as it does when death comes to it by blows from a policeman's baton! But to effect this, there would have to be Christianity infused into land-lordism. A man's money would have to be converted as well as his heart. There would have to be less talk and more practice. The rich Christian would have to bear the burdens of his poor brethren, and not please himself by building homes for them in order solely to grind wealth out of their poverty!

Earl Shaftsbury was right. Drunkenness with other vices would be checked if men and women had comfortable, healthy surroundings. The morbid drink crave which brings on drunken habits is created by depression of health, by the faintness and languor caused by a vicious atmosphere, by the misery of dirty, repulsive, irremediably repellent surroundings. No Scott Act will give a man or woman living in a foul atmosphere in a crowded street, the glow of health and cheerfulness, or the natural appetites they would have in pure air, a pleasant neighborhood, combined with the sense of freedom in an open space, full of light. But let any social reformer demand legislation to enforce these necessities of health and morality, and he would have overwhelming opposition—for a time. Those would be his bitterest foes who now applaud him to the echo when he is urging that men be compelled by the police not to drink a beverage which they would not crave for were sanitary reforms carried out. One needs not to be a mind reader to discover why some, why more persons than would be believed by those not in the secret, are so earnest in their support of surface legis-

lation. They know that a demand for the extirpation of the *root evil* of drinking and other scandals would lower the value of their properties. They would no longer get rack rents, but only a fair interest on investments, for the worse the house the higher percentage it pays on value, and the more degraded the occupant the less he asks from a landlord! We have had sermons and agitation in favor of prohibition of drink. Let us now have sermons and agitation against the chief causes of the evils of drink, viz., foul air, wretched dwellings, crowded streets, damp cellars, narrow yards and all the villianous abominations which make the surroundings of the poor so distressing, so miserable, so scandalous to modern civilization, and so disgraceful to us as a Christian people! The preacher who is booming his Church on the plea of its having ever been what he and it have lately found out to be popular, may thunder and scream against drink with impunity. He hits no person whose return blow he fears. It is a controversy which a rank coward could shine in better even than the bravest, for a brave man shuns the appearance of falsehood and exaggeration. But let such an agitator in a popular Church denounce landlords for building cottages so crowded, so deficient in health comforts, decencies or necessities as to be engenderers of sickness, vice, vicious appetites, the producing causes also of sullen tempers, quarrels, suicides and death. By a course so brave, so truly christian, he would quickly find himself in need of heroic courage to withstand the storm of anger his courageous Christ-like words would raise around his devoted head. There is, to us, no sight more destructive of respect to our fellow man than the spectacle of the citizen who is living in a large house, with every comfort for himself, his wife and children, with ample room space, large lawn, with daily social excitements in visiting, and entertaining and attending entertainments, passing judgment upon the wretched occupant of a cottage where poverty reigns, and dirt and repulsiveness give the home an aspect of being the dwelling of a forlorn social outcast. Yet, go to any prohibition meeting, and this sight is there, and the guilty landlord is there too, perhaps, often indeed is in the chair, groaning over an evil which his rapacity aggravates and perpetuates. Such a sight needs prohibition! But it would injure the cause seriously, for the prohibitionist agitator needs neither consistency nor courage. His platform is the very paradise of cowards, for insult, contumely, injury in reputation by slander, and, if possible, in business by a wholesale conspiracy to starve out, await any man bold enough to challenge the arguments or facts of a prohibition speaker. No exaggeration palls, nor falserness shock the victim of this excitement. He asks not for exactness of facts nor relevancy in argument. He simply wants his stimulus strong and hot, if spiced with cruel personalities—all the better. But the truly brave Christian worker, like Earl Shaftsbury, is not a popularity hunter. *He searches not for effects but causes.* He goes in and out of the wretched homes of the victims of drink, and there learns the truth, that