

TEMPERANCE COLUMN.

MORAL SUASION.

People who have been interested in temperance work for more than half a century have often enough heard moral suasion spoken of with contempt, if never with commendation. One can call to mind language something like the following indulged in fifty years ago: 'Moral suasion! What do people care for that? What is the good of it? What is the use to talk and talk and make appeals to conscience? The thing to do is to bring to bear the strong arm of the law and make short work of it. You may argue forever and have nothing to show for it, but when the law takes the case in hand something is effected right away.

Accordingly, those who were living in the first half of the century might have supposed that long before the close of the last half every dramshop would have been swept from the land. The law was going to do everything. It was not going to stick about ceremony and conscientious scruples, but bear down irresistibly against whatever opposed it. It would crush out everything. Drinking, drink selling, the manufacture of drink, whoever justified it or had anything to do with it; it was not going to be argued down, but put down. How many ardent, enthusiastic and withal conscientious people really expected such a consummation years ago.

Now, what is moral suasion that it should be contemptuously sent to the rear as if it availed nothing and could do nothing? What but an appeal to the conscience on the grounds of right reason, that this or that should be done first of all as a matter of right and duty? If the conscience is persuaded in the case, then there is moral conviction or that sort of evidence amounting to obligation which, as nothing else in the world, irresistibly carries with it the whole man. If the conscience is not persuaded, then whatever the law resorted to, it finds in the man or the community so much inertia or more likely so much positive antagonism to contend with, that moral conviction, which comes of moral suasion, stands for so much motive power. It is in itself so much motive power for the man, and if for the sake of the community a law were to be added partaking of the nature of force, moral conviction as touching the justice and expediency of the law must become the real motive power which sustains it. The truth is, in a subject so largely ethical as that of temperance, moral suasion and moral conviction must play a very leading part. They become the law for individual conduct, that is, the law in the conscience, and when it comes to the statute or law external, they must at every moment go before it and stand behind it. To put force before persuasion and constraint in dealing with this question is to forget that man is an intellectual and moral being and treat him as if he were one of the lower animals, such inert, unthinking

How is it that people must become, if at all, total abstainers? Through moral suasion, surely. It is through one's own conscience that total abstinence becomes his duty in the case, and it is through the consciences of others that it must be made to appear their duty also. If this is out of the question then there is no place for force of any kind, so long as there is no drinking to excess with its attendant evils. There is, indeed, abundant room for counsel and advice, but total abstinence may no more be forced on one against his conscience than temperate drinking may be forced on another regardless of his.

How is it that drink and drinking must be largely banished from the community? By moral suasion, surely. In some cases without law for the most part, and if in others through the aid of law, then by bringing to bear such a degree of moral pressure as to make the law effective. We say in machinery that there must be so many pounds of pressure to a square inch to produce a given result. What, then, if there was no pressure at all on every other square inch, or if the pressure was in the opposite direction? But this is precisely the state of the case in some communities where the law would make drink an outlaw. In respect to every other man there is nothing of that moral pressure which comes of moral persuasion and moral conviction, and which makes the law effective, while in some communities every other man may be conscientiously against the law. So long as that is so the law must be a failure.

It has been the great mistake of the Third Party that it has undertaken to do by political methods what must largely be effected, if at all, through moral methods. Again and again it has got ahead of the public conscience in dealing with the drink question; not that part of the public is unscrupulous and devoid of conscience, but that other part which is trying to bring to bear an intelligent, yes, and enlightened Christian conscience. Now that is a sort of thing that must not be precipitately run ahead of, or be made little of or light of. It is that sort of thing, too, that cannot be bullied or dragooned and forced to do this or that by violent arbitrary methods. If it has not had time enough to think the matter over it proposes to take time. It says to itself: "This is a great question, is this drink question. It covers a long period of time. It has a great many sides to it. It touches manifold interests and tastes, and those to a large extent not consciously unlawful or selfish. It is of all other things a moral question in which consciences largely and inevitably differ and in which one's duty for himself is by no means the measure of duty for another man." In a word, it is chiefly a moral problem so complex and so difficult that there can be no permanent solution of it so far as banishing drink from any community is conceived until the conscience of the community is generally agreed on the subject.

When that will be, as touching some communities, it needs at least a prophet to foretell.—*Temperance.*

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