

him, require that he should give up this particular habit, and if for no other reason, we think it sufficient that it should be given up for this—that the tendency of all evil is to contaminate, and that no vice can exist alone, but if indulged will necessarily extend itself, and pollute whatever it comes in contact with, by this means producing innumerable poisonous fruits from one deleterious root. Thus the state of society is proportionately improved every time a vicious habit is wholly given up; and if this be true of vice in general, how eminently is it the case with that of intemperance; because there is no other, which, on the one hand is so countenanced by the customs of the world, and which, on the other, spreads its baneful influence to so fearful and deadly an extent.

Intemperance is the only vice in the dark catalogue of man's offences, against the will and the word of his Maker, which directly assails the citadel of human reason, and by destroying the power to choose betwixt good and evil, renders the being whose similitude was originally divine, no longer a moral agent, but a mere idiot in purpose, and animal in action. The man who is habitually intemperate, consequently makes a voluntary surrender of all control over his own conduct, and lives for the greater portion of his time deprived of that highest attribute of man—his rational faculties. It is, however, a fact deserving our most serious consideration, that in this state he is more alive than under ordinary circumstances, to the impulse of feeling, and of passion; so that while on the one hand he has less reason to instruct him how to act, on the other he has more restlessness and impetuosity to force him into action.

It has been calculated that of persons thus degraded, there are at the present time existing in Great Britain more than six hundred thousand, of whom sixty thousand die annually, the wretched victims of this appalling vice.

Such, then, is the peculiarity of intemperance, that while all other vices leave the mind untouched and the conscience at liberty to detect and warn of their commission, this alone subdues the reasoning powers, so that they have no capability of resistance; and while all other vices are such from their earliest commencement, this alone only begins to be a vice at that precise point when the clearness of the mind, and the activity of the conscience, begin to fail; and thus it progresses, according to the generally received opinion, by increasing in culpability in the exact proportion by which mental capability and moral power are diminished.

What an extraordinary measurement of guilt is this for an enlightened world to make! In all other cases a man's culpability is measured precisely by the ability he has to detect evil, and the power he possesses to withstand temptation. In this alone he is first encouraged by society, and this is while his natural powers remain unimpaired. No blame attaches to him then. He is a fit companion for wise and good men: but no sooner does his reason give way than he is first slightly censured by society, then shunned, then despised, and finally abhorred; just according to the progressive stages by which he has become less capable of understanding what is right, and controlling his own inclinations to what is wrong.

It is another striking feature in the character of intemperance as a vice, that it commences not only under the sanction of the law, but under that of what is called the best society; not only under the sanction of the world, but under that of religious professors, who believe themselves called out of darkness into light. It begins with the first welcome which kind and Christian friends assemble to give to a young immortal being, just ushered into a state of probation, by which it is to be fitted for eternity; and it extends through all the most social and cheering, as well as through many of the most lasting and sacred associations we form on earth; until at last, when the tie is broken, and the grave receives our lost and loved, the solemn scene

is closed, and the mourner's heart is soothed, by the commencement of intemperance.

I say the commencement, for who can tell at what draught, what portion of a draught, what drop, for it must really come to this—who can say, then, at what drop of the potent cup sobriety ceases, and intemperance begins? The intemperate man himself cannot tell, for it has justly been observed, that, "instead of feeling that he is taking too much, his only impression is, that he has not had enough." Who then shall warn him! Even if he were in a condition to listen to remonstrance, who should be his judge? If it be perfectly innocent, nay right, in the first instance to partake of this beverage, say to the extent of two thousand drops; if all sorts of persons, up to the highest scale of religiously scrupulosity, take this quantity, and more, and deem it right to take it, even to double or treble it as occasion may demand, it must be strong evidence that quantity, as regards a few thousand drops, can be of little consequence. Still there is, there must be a precise point at which mankind ought to stop, or why is the unanimous voice of society lifted up against the intemperate? But why, above all, are we told that no drunkard can enter the kingdom of Heaven?

Ask this question of a hundred persons, and they will in all probability each give you a different account of the measurement by which they ascertain at what point intemperance begins; because there are all the different habits and constitutions of mankind to be taken into account, as well as all the different degrees of potency in the intoxicating draught, according to its name and quality. Of twenty persons seated at the same table, and regaling themselves with the same wine, it is more than probable that the fatal drop at which intemperance begins, would not be in the same glass with any two amongst them. Who then shall decide this momentous question? for it is momentous, since eternal condemnation depends upon it. Let us reduce the number of persons, and see whether by this means the case will be made more clear. We will suppose, then, that three persons sit down to table to their wine, or whatever it may be, in what is called an innocent and social way. Out of this small number, it is possible that one may commit a deadly sin without taking more than the others. Yet to him it is sin, simply because the drop of transition between good and evil, from the peculiar constitution of bodily frame, occurs in his glass at an earlier stage than it does with the others. These three men, consequently, rise from that table according to the opinion of the world in a totally different moral state, for one has been guilty of a degrading vice, and the others are perfectly innocent. Yet all have done the same thing. Who then, I would ask again, is to decide in such a case. I repeat, it cannot be the guilty man himself, because that very line which constitutes the minute transition between a state of innocence and a state of sin, is the same at which he ceased to be able clearly to distinguish between one and the other.

It is impossible, then, that this question should ever be decided, unless every one who indulges in the use of such beverage would take the trouble to calculate the exact distance between the extremes of sobriety and intoxication, not only computed by every variety of liquid in which alcohol is contained, but by every variety of bodily sensation which he may be liable to experience. This calculation will bring him to one particular point, which may not improperly be called the point of transition, at which positive evil begins, and beyond which it is a positive sin to go.—Who, then, I ask again, shall fix this point? It must of necessity be left to the calculations of the man whose inclination in the hour of temptation is not to see it, whose desire is to step over it, and whose perceptions at that time are so clouded and obscured, that he could not ascertain it if he would.

Here, then, we see a marked difference betwixt intemperance and every other vice. Theft, for instance, is as