

TEMPERANCE COLUMN.

THE BURDEN OF INTEMPERANCE.

(A Sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, London).

By THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."—Galatians vi. 2.

(Continued.)

The example is the example of a strong man showing the feats which his strength enables him to perform, and it is of no value to the weak man who would be very often rejoiced if he could do as much, but whose very need is that he is too weak to follow the example that he recognizes and admires. We have tried setting before them all the blessings that come with that careful, temperate, moderate use of God's gifts which uses them in such a way as never to hurt the user of them, and all this does not help the poor weak creature who, indeed, would be glad if he could do it; and very often, if he could do it, would not need the example that is thus set before him. And many of us—how many, how very many—have tried prayer, and earnest prayer, not only for all the sinners, those whom we know and those whom we know not, but prayer for individual sinners who have come across our notice, prayer, earnest prayer, and daily prayer for men who, for some reason or other, we have had opportunity to know as ruined by this fearful vice; and prayer seems as if, somehow, it was in itself incomplete if it remained alone. Can a man go on praying without doing? Is it possible to pray, and pray earnestly and yet to do nothing yourself in fulfilment of your prayers? Is it possible that you should pray that all men—yourself included—should be delivered from temptation, and that you, meanwhile, should do nothing at all to deliver them from what is a temptation that they cannot face? Is it possible, when once you have seen the full meaning of those words, when you have put it to your conscience that what these men want above everything else is to be delivered from the temptation, that if only they could be kept out of its immediate presence, it would be possible that, relying on God's grace, they should walk straight in God's sight, when once you have realised that these men have no choice, if they are indeed to get free from the sin, but to keep altogether away from the temptation to the sin, can you pray, pray earnestly, that they shall be set free from that temptation, and do nothing yourself to set them free? And it is for this reason that many of us, in the endeavour to bear our share of the burden which is thus placed upon so many of our brethren, it is for this reason that we desire, not merely to preach, and not merely to set them an example, but to stand side by side with them in the battle, to bear what they have to bear, to do what they have to do. If they must abstain alto-

gether from that which tempts to intemperance, then we, too, in order to give them the strength of our sympathy, we will abstain altogether. If they want to be countenanced in that which they have to do, we, with all our strength, will give that countenance. If it is necessary for their souls' health that they should surrender a pleasure which is to them a great one, we too will surrender that same pleasure, we too, in order that we may bear their burdens, we too will give up what they are required to give up.

It is in this way that the battle has been fought with most success. There was a time when a man might fairly say, "All this is but an experiment; you do not know, you cannot say, what effect will be produced by some men abstaining in order to help others to abstain." It would have been quite reasonable to stand aside and say, "Before I do anything for which I have no direct command of God, I must be satisfied that what I do will really have the effect which I desire it to have"; but now we have the experience of trial, we know what the effect is, and we have the right to put before the whole body of Christian men and Christian women the results of our experience and the plain inferences that we draw therefrom. God forbid that we should endeavour to rule the consciences of others, or to ask any man to sacrifice his own judgment to our opinions; God forbid that we should ask a man simply to join with us because we ask him, when he in his own conscience does not feel that he is called upon to do so; and it is in no spirit of imperious command, it is in no spirit of desire to mark out the path which others ought to follow, that I would speak upon such a matter as this. But I speak as entreating you earnestly to think of the evil, and to think of the burden which is thus put upon a large number of baptized men and baptized women, and to ask you, to beg of you to lay it to your consciences, that if you cannot help it in one way, you will try to help it in some other. Seek for yourself, let every man seek for himself, that which he shall judge, by such experience and by such consideration as he can give to it, to be the most effectual manner of bearing his brother's burden and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

We say that we have tried, and we have found one method which, as far as we can see, has some hope of winning a real victory. We can say that there are those who certainly have been preserved from all this dreadful sin; and we put it before others, not bidding them simply follow what they are told, but asking them, if they can, to find some other way, if they can to find some better way, and they shall have our hearts, and our grateful hearts with them, if only they will take it to their own consciences that the precept is one of the great Christian precepts of the New Testament, and that he who refuses to listen to the call of the Apostle telling us that so we shall fulfill the law of Christ, he indeed

needs to be very sure that he is standing on safe ground, for it is not the voice of man that gives him the command, it is the voice of God Himself. We entreat all fairly to consider the application of the Apostolic command to that which is plain before the eyes of all that care to look; and we beg of all, whatever they may decide, still to bear in mind that one imperative command: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

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