

Temperance Column.

THE BIBLE AND TEMPERANCE.

By the Rev. Charles Courtenay, Vicar of Emanuel Church, Liverpool, Author of "Temperance Home Truths," etc.—Continued

[A Paper read before the Quarterly Meeting of the Liverpool council of the C. E. T. S. and printed by request.]

We next turn our thoughts to that last sad scene when our Blessed Lord "tasted death for every man" (Heb. ii. 9). As He hung in His bitter agony on the awful cross, He was offered "vinegar mingled with gall" (Matt. xxvii, 34); or, as Mark puts it, "wine mingled with myrrh" (Mark xv, 23). It seems to have been offered in kindness, and to have been a drugged wine intended to blunt the senses, and thus diminish His mortal agony. Some have thought that it was this merciful action which is alluded to in Proverbs (Prov. xxxi, 6): "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish," and in the expression of the prophet Amos: "The wine of the condemned" (Amos ii, 8). However, we are told that "when He had tasted thereof He would not drink" (Matt. xxvii, 34). Our Lord would fain die with an unclouded mind, and so "He would not drink." Once again they offer Him a drink to assuage His terrible thirst. "I thirst!" He cried. "Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished" (John xix, 28-30). This vinegar seems to have been the posca of the Roman soldiers, a cheap wine, usually mixed with water.

There is one parabolic mention of wine by our Lord which I should like to refer you to for a moment, viz., that in which He refers to the necessity of putting new wine into new bottles. The new wine is evidently the new spirit and the new order of things which He had come to introduce, and which had been a subject of thought and enquiry to the scribes and Pharisees. Just as new wine, with its expansive vigour, should be put not into old bottles but into new, so should the new life be put into new forms. To retain the old traditions and ordinances, which are like worn-out wine-skins, would be foolish, inasmuch as they were not able to hold such a living thing as the new theocracy, and would most certainly break under the strain, to the detriment of the new truth. And then He adds: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth now; for he saith, The old is good," or "better" (Luke v, 39, R. V.)—by which Christ our Lord appears to describe the feelings, not of Himself, but of the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees, who could not easily disentangle themselves from the old forms, and fall in with the new order of things. To them the old was better, just as old wine to which the drinker is accustomed is better than the new,

which has but lately been introduced to him.

Two truths bearing on the subject of Temperance stand out clearly from this parable—

1. The first is that our Lord recognises the fermented wine as an ordinary wine of His time. This has been denied. But language ceases to be intelligible if this new wine, which so readily bursts the old skins, was a non-fermenting wine.

2. In the second place, our Lord recognises the fact, and recognises it without condemnation, that the ordinary custom of men was to drink such wine. He quotes their habits, and He quotes their words, He quotes their partialities, and He quotes their mishaps, and He uses them all as illustrative of Divine truth.

III. My next attempt will be to point out what seems to be the Apostolic teaching on the use of strong drink.

In singling out certain classes for inspired instruction, he is careful, among other things, to warn them against Intemperance. Intemperance must therefore have been a common sin amongst men.

A Bishop must be blameless—"not given to wine, no striker," (1 Tim. iii. 3). The translation from wine drinking in excess to a blow is short and easy. But non-alcoholic wine does not lead to blows. The Revised Version puts it differently—"no brawler," and in the margin, "not quarrelsome over wine."

A Deacon's equipment for his office runs somewhat on the same lines. A Deacon must not be "given to much wine" (1 Tim. iii, 8).

To the aged women he gives the same counsel; they, too, must "not be given to much wine" (Titus ii, 3).

Now I think we may fairly say, that there is nothing in these directions commanding Total Abstinence.

The injunction is in each case against excess, and seems the echo that other exhortation addressed to the Ephesians, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess" (Eph. v, 18), or as the Revised Version puts it, "wherein is riot."

I do not know but what those who would infer that the Apostolic warning against excess amounts to an Apostolic concession of the perfect lawfulness of wine in moderation, have law and right on their side.

There is one text which is frequently bandied to and from in controversial circles. I mean that addressed to Timothy by St. Paul, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. v, 23).

(To be continued.)

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