

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.]

IV. I must now show on what Scriptural grounds our Temperance practice rests.

First of all on the law of liberty. We are "called unto liberty" (Gal. v. 13). If men and women are at liberty to take drink in moderation, we are equally at liberty to abstain from it altogether. We are both within our Christian rights. Our position with regard to strong drink is the same as was the position of the Christian at Rome on the subject of eating idol meats. "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him" (Rom. xiv. 3).

In the second place, we plead our Abstinence on the score of self-preservation. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee" (Matt. v. 29, 30). A thing may be useful and precious and dear, but the moment it becomes a stumbling-block and a source of danger, it should be sacrificed. Here is a plain law, indeed, and one perhaps more applicable to strong drink than to any other lawful thing known to us. Neither are we to wait until the stumbling-block assumes large proportions. The very first symptom of danger should be the signal for the stroke. Those of us who believe that the danger is great before it is visible, can still plead this law of self-preservation as our warrant for Abstinence.

In the third place, we ground our Temperance action on the present distress. We believe that the need is greater among ourselves for Temperance endeavours than existed in the early days of the Church.

The wine of early days was not the distilled spirits of our own days. Neither were the wines fortified. The temptations were fewer. Drinking habits were not so intertwined with the national life. The race was a more abstaining one than is ours. And altogether we live in peculiarly different days. That the distress in homes and hearts is keen I need not prove. Now, as times may arise when it shall be better for men and women not to marry on account of "the present distress" (1 Cor. vii. 26), as St. Paul puts it, so, we say, that the terrible distress to be found at our very doors to-day through strong drink is sufficient reason for denying ourselves even lawful drinks.

In the fourth place, we abstain for the greater glory of God. "Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). We believe ourselves bound to glorify

God in the best way we can, and many of us are firmly persuaded that, by our Total Abstinence, we can glorify God better than by even moderate drinking. And we not only think so, but we have proved it.

In the next place we put forth our Abstinence on the score of charity. "It is good," St. Paul says, "neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. xiv. 21). Here is something bordering upon a very command. "It is good." We have found it so. Example is infinitely better than precept. To lead the way is always better than to show it. Standing in the midst of a world where weak men are ever stumbling through strong drink, we feel our heart-strings pulled day by day with sympathy and longing; and, believing honestly that our own personal Abstinence will avail much, we have not hesitated to yield up even lawful beverages for the good of men's souls. And both we and they have been blessed exceedingly in body and in soul.

Our ground, then, is not the ground of precept, but of principle; not of absolute command, but of blessed privilege. Without denouncing strong drink as a positively evil thing, we yet renounce it, for the present distress, for the glory of God, and for the good of those souls for whom Christ died.



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