

Silas were in prison, but their songs of praise could not be stopped.

(b) Get good out of your imprisonments. They all have their lessons and opportunities. They seem severe teachers, but they are kindly at heart. Moses in forty years' banishment prepared and mastered himself for wide usefulness and conquest.

(c) Look around you in your imprisonment for chances of service, and as you serve you will forget your prison. Bunyan served the Christian world for all time when he wrote "Pilgrim's Progress" in Bedford jail.

(d) In your imprisonment think more of Jesus Christ than of prison walls. Thus Paul did, and his most cheerful messages that have blessed mankind were given from behind prison bars, like the music of a caged bird.

#### POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

We study Paul in this topic under limitations. We see this great soul expand to find God in his trouble, even as the eye dilates in the darkness to find the light. Notice how Paul carries himself through his imprisonments, and then learn how we should hold ourselves under similar circumstances. There are five distinct thoughts in the foregoing exposition. Why not appoint new members of the League, each to expand to a four-minute paper or talk, one of these paragraphs. Then let the President be prepared to make brief timely remarks as the meeting proceeds. It would be profitable to have a brief testimony service, keeping the topic-thought in view. Remember that religion is for the cloud as well as for the sunshine.

#### JUNE 11.—"A TEMPERANCE MEETING."

Ep. 18.

Temperance is not only total abstinence from strong drink as a beverage, but is the wise regulation of all activities by righteous legislation. In the interpretation of this subject we shall embrace the two verses preceding the one assigned for study, and thus not only include the consideration of the scope of temperance, but widen the scope of our inquiry to other kindred matters.

Paul was in the habit in his epistles thus to give a broad exposition of the subject of temperance, and we will make no mistake in following his example. His injunction in verse 15 is in regard to temperance in Christian conduct.

#### REGULATING THE OUTWARD LIFE.

"See that ye walk circumspectly not as fools, but as wise" (v. 15). The Christian needs not only spiritual fervor and enthusiasm, but also prudence—sanctified common-sense. It is possible to do a right thing in a wrong way, or in such a way as to cause more mischief than benefit. There is a severity of virtue that repels and arouses resentment, and there is a parade of Christian liberty that shocks the sensitive. The truth lies between two extremes, and Christian wisdom is seen in maintaining the truth and avoiding extremes. "I, wisdom dwell with prudence." Success in soul-winning is only given to skill, earnestness, sympathy, perseverance, tact. Men are saved, not by masses, but by careful study and well directed effort. It is said that such is the eccentric flight of the snipe when it rises from the earth that it completely puzzles the sportsman, and some who are capital shots at other birds are utterly baffled here. Eccentricity seems to be their special quality, and this can only be mastered by incessant practice with the gun. But the eccentricity of souls is

beyond this, and he had need be a very spiritual Nimrod—a mighty hunter before the Lord—who would capture them for Christ. "He that winneth souls is wise."

#### SEIZING PRESENT OPPORTUNITY.

1. Observing the value of time amid the prevalence of evil. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (ver. 16). Time is a section cut out of the great circle of eternity and defined for us the limit within which the work of life must be done. It is a precious gift bestowed by the beneficent hand of God—a gift involving grave responsibility; and we must render a strict account of the use we make of every swing of the pendulum. It is sold out to us in minute fragments. One single year is made up of 31,536,000 seconds. Every tick of the clock records the ever-lessening opportunities of life. Time is in perpetual motion. Like a strong, ever-flowing river it is bearing away everything into the boundless ocean of eternity. We never know the value of time till we know the value of the fragments into which it is broken up. To make the most of a single hour we must make the most of every minute of which it is composed. The most dangerous moments of a man's life are those when time hangs heavily on his hands. He who has nothing to do but kill time is in danger of being killed himself. It is a miracle of divine goodness if he is preserved from serious folly, or something worse; and such miracles rarely occur. The man who has learned the value of time can learn any lesson this world may have to teach him. Time is the opportunity for the exercise of Christian wisdom, and should be the more sedulously used "when the days are evil"—when evil is in power. Oh, for wisdom to number our days to grasp the meaning of present opportunity! Here come the moments that can never be had again; some few may yet be filled with wisdom and good. Let us apply our hearts—all our powers—unto wisdom.

2. Having the good sense to recognize the divine will—"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (ver. 17). We must read and interpret the signs of the times in the light of God's purpose. A close and deep study of the divine mind will reveal to us the significance of the passing opportunity, and aid us in making the wisest use of it. Our biggest schemes are doomed to failure if they are not in accordance with the will of God. The noblest tasks are reserved for those who have the keenest spiritual insight and are most in harmony with the divine purpose. The will of God is not mere resignation, a passive attitude toward passing events. It is an active principle that should replumb every act, the standard by which we measure every circumstance. The will of God is our highest well-being for both worlds.

#### THE FOLLY AND WASTE OF TEMPERANCE.

"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess" (Ver. 18). The Asian Christians were a social, light-hearted people, fond of convivial feasts. Wine was their danger; and even in the celebration of the Lord's Supper they ran into excess, and degraded the holy ordinance. There were doubtless drunkards among them; and the warning of the text was specially needed. Intemperance is not only a folly and a waste, it is a degradation and a sin. It is the excessive indulgence of a craving that at bottom may be in itself good if wisely regulated—a craving for an intense life. One finds this in the words of the prophet, "The greatness of our nature, even in its most deplorable errors. Just as impurity proceeds at the bottom from an abuse of

the craving for love, so drunkenness betrays a certain demand for ardor and enthusiasm, which in itself is natural and even noble. Man loves to feel himself alive; he would fain live twice his life at once, and he would rather draw excitement from horrible things than have no excitement at all." When the physicians told Theotimus that except he abstained from drunkenness and licentiousness he would lose his eyes, his heart was so wedded to his sins that he answered: "Then, farewell sweet life!" Intemperance these days is not only a danger to the individual, but is a menace to the welfare of the nation. The liquor traffic like a huge destroying beast, is seizing the body politic, and it will only be by constant vigilance and determination that the monster will be kept at bay. Down with him!

#### CONTROL OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT.

"But be filled with the spirit" (ver. 18). The excitement of drunkenness must be supplanted by a holier and more elevating stimulus; the cup that intoxicates exchanged for the new wine of the Spirit. The general adoption of the principle will be the grandest triumph of temperance. The cure of drunkenness will not be accomplished simply by the removal of temptation, unless a relish for higher things is created and springs of holier pleasure are opened in the hearts of men. A lower impulse is conquered and expelled by the introduction of a higher. Anachoris, the philosopher, being asked by what means a man might best guard against the vice of drunkenness, answered, "By bearing constantly in his view the loathsomeness of the behavior of such as are intoxicated." Upon this principle was founded the custom of the Lacedaemonians of exposing their drunken slaves to their children, who, by that means, conceived an early aversion to a vice which makes men appear so monstrous and irrational. There is no excess in drinking copious draughts of the spirit. Christian wisdom opens the soul to the ever-flowing tide of his influence, and strives to be animated and filled with his all-controlling power.

#### INTEMPERANCE, WHAT IT IS!

1. It is an ungrateful use of God's bounty.
2. It divests the man of his native dignity and sinks him below the beasts.
3. Is injurious to the body as well as mind.
4. Wastes a man's conscience as well as his substance.
5. Intemperance generates other vices—impure feelings, angry passions, profane language, insolent manners, obstinacy of heart, and contempt of reproof.
6. Has most lamentable effects on family life and happiness.
7. The Scriptures abound in solemn warnings against it.
8. This sin must be renounced, or the end of it will be death.

#### POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

Give a broad interpretation of the subject of temperance, to include total abstinence and moderation in all things. In connection with the exposition of the topic, have three members each give a three-minute paper on these subjects: The effect of strong drink on—1. The individual. 2. The home. 3. The nation. You might interest four other members of the League by giving each one of the four headings of the foregoing exposition for development. Yet a fourth may be incorporated by giving him the point, "Intemperance, what it is!" and ask him to add to this.