

WHAT IS TEMPERANCE?

BY THE REV. A. E. L. NOWERS.
(From the Living World.)

DEFINITIONS are doubtless apt to be tedious reading, but the shifting tendencies of language make their reinvigoration a necessity from time to time. Without this, the deceptive misuse of a word which has become equivalent to an unchecked, and careless acquiescence allows the verbal fallacy to become a potent instrument of injustice. The concept becomes, in fact, one not of words, but of things.

This is pre-eminently the case with the word before us. Successive stages of misapprehension have brought it to the pass of becoming a symbol of social theory, enforced by uncharitable aspersions, and directed by an organized hypocrisy to the purpose of invidious legalised oppression.

This fraudulent appropriation, in the interest of a churchly and lay-sided morality mongering, is in turn exploited by cynical politicians, of the name of a cardinal virtue, tends to call forth a reaction which everyone to whom the social welfare of his country is dear must needs deplore. If the name of temperance is not to be made to stink in the nostrils of reasonable people, if "the average sensual man" is not to be goaded back into hard drinking in a temper of reprisal against proscribed bigotry, it is time that the proper sense of the term were recalled.

The outbreak of licentiousness which disgraced our country, or at least the Court and capital, at the time of the Restoration is a case strictly in point. It is quite true that this was a record of the profligacy which not much more really, if less conspicuously, tainted the same classes in the middle Tudor and early Stuart periods. It is also true that only Puritanism comprised a grave and noble as well as a manly and chivalrous one which could combine sobriety or even austerity of demeanour with the moderate enjoyment of lawful indulgences, which could rebuke vice without reviling pleasure. The important fact that the Puritanism held up to well deserved and imperishable contempt in the pages of "Hudibras" and "Woodstock," brought to pass the evil as well as the good of the Restoration, making it indispensable for the gentleman and man of spirit to approve himself a rake, a profane swearer, and a pottle-deep carouser. It is only kindness to those who run the risk of following in some measure this evil precedent to their taking in vain the name of temperance.

For an instance of the absurdity into which it is difficult even for careful writers to keep from falling, we may quote a few lines from *The Times* of the 7th inst. An article dealing with the latest evidence for bringing about by legislation that which can be thoroughly and effectually accomplished only by the reform of the individual, occurs the following remark:

"The Gaiety system was originally regarded with absolute disfavor by the extreme temperance party."

Since 1887, as the writer goes on to say "the sterility of the fanatical and intolerant policy of the extreme temperance party has been fully demonstrated." As temperance is precisely the virtue which shuns the falsehood of extremes, "the extreme temperance party" is indeed an example of "hot ice and wondrous strange snow." We are reminded of the saying that "a moderately sound egg, or a moderately virtuous woman."

A slight survey of the history of the word may be the readiest way of indicating the impudently shallow nature of the claims which it is used to cover. Temperance, then, in its proper and original fulness of import, denotes nothing less

than the all-round self-control of the man who respects himself. "Sound-mindedness"—that is the worthy conception, the adequate sense, derived by continuous traction from the great race which first taught Europe to think. In the early days of nations which have built up for themselves a great literature and a high place in civilization, we are wont to find a stage at which the accepted wisdom of the community shapes itself in short pithy aphorisms. To this rule Greece was no exception. Amongst the prominent characters about at the dawn of definite Greek history are the Seven Sages, each with his characteristic adage; and among these none is more famous than that of "Nought too much." Our homely maxim "Too much of a good thing is good for nothing," gives the sense rather more explicitly, and it is just what the votary of misnamed "temperance" denies. Drunkenness, he tells us truly enough, is a hideous evil; therefore you must have no strong drink at all. If we are so, there is no "temperance" in the matter. Yet may we well call it "temperance" to refrain from murder or slander. The very essence of temperance lies in this, that it is a voluntary keeping clear of abuse in indulgence and excess in abstinence. There is no such thing as abuse, and, therefore, no room for temperance, except in such things as have a lawful use.

Let us test the point by comparison with other matters in which temperance has scope—noting, however, by the way, that in restricting the use of the word to the sensual gratification generally—not merely to the use of strong drink—we are already narrowing its proper import. We see this, for instance, when we read what is meant by temperate and intemperate language. It is not wonderful in itself, that the word should have soon tended to a special application in respect of bodily excess, which these afford the most obvious and glaring test of self-control. But how recent, comparatively, is the virtual restriction of "temperance" to a reference to strong drink, as founding a document as the Church Catechism may wish to claim. There it is given as part of the duty to one's neighbor "To keep my body in temperance, sobriety, and chastity." Obviously, the specific sense required for "temperance" here refers to eating and not drinking. Its opposite is not drunkenness, but gluttony.

It is a grave question whether gluttony and epicurism are not actually as great a physical and, perhaps, moral evil as intemperance itself, to which they largely conduce. But to return to our proposed parallel: If "temperance" in the drink sense means complete abstinence from alcohol, we may as well lay down that temperance in food means entire abstinence from everything which the classed and complex necessities for maintaining life and health—say brown bread and salt, or the nearest equivalent, with a handful of fruit or salad.

Even in the matter of drink our "temperance" friends hold an indefensible position. Tea and coffee are also narcotics; they are liable to be abused, and are abused; their abuse tends to promote alcoholism itself. At the present official attitude, that one very great cause of the rapidly increasing insanity of Ireland is the excessive consumption of tea improperly prepared. But we have not heard of any outcry for the abstinence of tea.

Yet, again, will any man not wilfully blind deny that unchastity is as great a scourge amongst us as drunkenness? But would any man in his sober senses say that the only possible "temperance" in this respect was by such restrictions on the conjugal relation as Swift attributes to the Houghlinians?

We do not suppose that those in whose

behalf these parallels are instituted will find them altogether to their liking. But they can evade their force only by taking up the ground that all use of alcohol, much or little, is pernicious morally and physically. One section has the hardihood to do this while not ashamed to use for its propaganda the money and the influence of those whose practice avowedly is something very different. As against this it may suffice for the present to note the admission of another organ, that the use of alcohol is not intrinsically sinful. It is true that this admission has been pretty well nullified by the virtual assumption of the contrary, which continues to underlie the subtler issues of that journal. But whether the use of alcohol be expressly and formally, or only implicitly, disallowed, the distinction between abstinence and temperance remains just and necessary.

Our parallels have also this significance, that they put in high relief the distorted and disproportionate sense of social evils which is entertained by those who are so fast attaching to "temperance" a connotation at once odious and absurd. We have instances other sensual evils not less ripe or pernicious than drunkenness. And we may name two more maladies which affect the community, less noticeably. Avarice on the one hand, envy and class hatred on the other; these need no less to be grappled with than the declining vice of drunkenness. They are unfortunately too compatible with the most vehement advocacy and the strongest practice of temperance *à la* teetotalism. No doubt they are beyond the power of legislation to subdue; but so are the sensual vices, and when the power is acknowledged which can do alone can, remedy both classes of evil, it will be acknowledged also that there is no need to make abstinence masquerade as temperance.

The man who abstains altogether because he cannot or dares not trust himself to keep within due bounds has no right to the name of temperate at all. That belongs to those only who, having power over themselves, can use wine and its congeners, like the other good things of life, with common sense, following the Highest of Examples. We do not say necessarily who do use them. They may, in point of fact, abstain from regard for others, from supposed economy, or from voluntary asceticism. Those who do abstain from the purest and highest motives will be the least disposed to erect abstinence into a duty for others, or to confound it with temperance. Or again, for the man who from idiosyncrasy has no taste for alcohol, the question of temperance, at least this species of it, does not arise at all. But leave out of the reckoning cases like these, and we may fairly say, show me a man who needs to advertise or to flaunt his temperance, and will show you an intemperate man. Yet we are too familiar with the inscription, even if it be not expressly alleged that this sort is the only man who is really temperate.

One more point about temperance may be noted. It is strictly a self-regarding virtue. That, be it noted, is quite a different thing from selfishness. But it is a duty which a man owes to himself. This is a class not named in the document above referred to—perhaps on the ground that it is included in the duty to one's neighbor, a man being his own nearest neighbor. Of course, at any rate, to a man who recognizes Christian obligation, there is no duty which simply ends with self. It is strictly a sense which does not affect one's neighbor. But in the self-regarding duty, this is a secondary thing. It is, perhaps, the forgetfulness that there is such a class of duties, which has helped to lead some really excellent people to put on temperance a sense which does not really bear. Temperance is a natural duty, one that is, acknowledged by

natural conscience, however imperfect the actual fulfilment. Moved by Christian regard for those who have wished to benefit, they have done no temperance on themselves; and, once incumbent on themselves, and because it deals with the same sense of temperance, they have come to identify it therewith. Temperance, however, continues to be binding on the solitary inhabitant of an island living with a thousand miles away from any neighbor.

We trust that those remarks may be some service to any who may start at the offensive imputation put upon the habit of an unwholesome current use of the word "temperance." It is no more less unfair than that conveyed by the use of the words "intoxicating liquors." They are, as Lord Norton most justly served the other day, not such except the blockheads who intemperate themselves.

In substituting this non-sense for alcoholic, it must be acknowledged that "the law is a ass." For our own part we have never ceased to admire the accuracy of an excellent man whose reputation was our lot to make some years ago. He was pledged not to take intoxicating liquors. This was no restriction in choice of beverages. "I do not use anything so as to intoxicate me," was his justification.

We can make shift, perhaps, by using of teetotal and Prohibition the terms these are what is really meant. Temptation appropriate word found from the Greek which is not questionable, and which deserves wider currency, and would be pleasant to say, say with a volume, a change of style in the press above referred to, and be able to name it as the Neophylatist Record.

FALL FAIRS, 1894.

Richmond, Ont.	Aug. 22
Shelburne, Ont.	Aug. 23
Toronto, Ont.	Sept. 14
Quebec	Sept. 15
Montreal	Sept. 12
London, Ont.	Sept. 13
Windsor, Ont.	Sept. 14
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Wellesley, Ont.	Sept. 16
Whitby, Ont.	Sept. 17
Port Huron, Ont.	Sept. 18
Guelph	Sept. 19
Bellefleur, Ont.	Sept. 20
Bromfield, Ont.	Sept. 21
Ottawa, Ont.	Sept. 22
Peterborough, Ont.	Sept. 23
Goderich, Ont.	Sept. 24
Cayuga, Ont.	Sept. 25
Woodstock, Ont.	Sept. 26
Paisley, Ont.	Sept. 27
Prescott	Sept. 28
Charlottetown	Sept. 29
Pelton, Ont.	Sept. 30
Sollinger, Ont.	Sept. 31
Lindsay, Ont.	Sept. 32
Brantford, Ont.	Sept. 33
Stratford, Ont.	Sept. 34
Brampton, Ont.	Sept. 35
Hamilton, Ont.	Sept. 36
Carp, Ont.	Sept. 37
Arthur, Ont.	Sept. 38
Paris, Ont.	Sept. 39
Cookstown, Ont.	Sept. 40
Stayner, Ont.	Sept. 41
Almonte, Ont.	Sept. 42
Chatham, Ont.	Sept. 43
Warkenton, Ont.	Sept. 44
Pictou, Ont.	Sept. 45
Markham, Ont.	Sept. 46
Elora, Ont.	Sept. 47
Orangeville, Ont.	Sept. 48
Smithville, Ont.	Sept. 49
Otterville, Ont.	Sept. 50
Ridgeway, Ont.	Sept. 51
Tilburg, Ont.	Sept. 52
Orangeville, Ont.	Sept. 53
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