

of grace as it ought to be? Both pastor and people make too little preparation for it, and in consequence, there is upon the one side cold, unintelligent and ineffective reading, and upon the other side, listless and unprofitable hearing. But the public reading of the Scriptures ought not to satisfy us. We must "read" them for ourselves. There should be daily, systematic reading. It should further be attentive reading. We are to "mark" and to "learn." We must exercise thought and skill in our reading; study intelligently; compare Scripture with Scripture; ponder wisely; and apply faithfully to ourselves its warnings and teachings. Thus we rise step by step to that personal appropriation by which the Divine Words are "inwardly digested," made our very own by meditation, prayer, and experience. And just as the physical food is by digestion assimilated and used to the upbuilding and sustenance of the body; so Scripture becomes an aliment, its truths are assimilated by a process of spiritual digestion, so that we grow thereby unto salvation. The Bread of the Truth and the Bread of the Love of Christ are freely and plentifully offered to us; let us take, eat, and live.

The Sunday School.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

2nd SUNDAY IN ADVENT, DEC. 7, 1884.

BIBLE LESSON.

Drunkenness.—Prov. 23: 29-35.

In the brief but impressive lesson of this week, the wise man utters his warning against a vice which is abroad among us, and concerning which an old divine wrote more than two hundred years ago, in words that are true to-day, "There is no sin which doth more deface God's image than drunkenness. It disguiseth a person, and doth even unman him. It gives him the throat of a fish, the stomach of a swine, and the head of an ass. Drunkenness is the shame of nature, the extinguisher of reason, the shipwreck of chastity, and the murderer of conscience."

I. A TERRIBLE EVIL.—The wise man here hints at the fearful effects of strong drink upon its victims. Look for a moment at the rough outlines of the drunkard's terrible picture as presented by him.

1. *He is the victim of sensual indulgence.* He is one of those "that tarry long at the wine; that go to seek mixed wine." He seeks pleasure out of it. He pursues it as a source of enjoyment. He cannot tear himself away from it. He has "mixed" and flavored it; that it may become more delicious to his taste, more exciting to his brain. The drunkard is a slave to his cup. This is not what he intended. He never meant to put himself thus in the power of appetite. He did not intend to sink into this condition, but sank into it beyond recovery ere he was aware of the danger. No man can indulge in the habitual use of intoxicating drink without being exposed to this danger. Its moderate use is, at the best, a perilous experiment. The chances are all on the side of increase. By continued indulgence the unnatural appetite daily grows stronger and more imperious. This morbid craving is not satisfied till the due degree of exhilaration is reached. To stop short of it is only pain, disappointment, aggravation. But while the forces which impel onward have been growing stronger the power of resistance has been declining. What men call the moderate use of alcohol dulls the mind, deadens the sensibilities, lessens the controlling power of the conscience and the will, and renders the whole condition weak and insecure. Not every moderate drinker becomes a drunkard; but he who decides to attempt "moderate" use of intoxicating drink determines to try and stand in a slippery path, where multitudes have fallen. He resolves to abandon the safe and solid rock, and encounter the storms and whirlpools of a treacherous sea, whose shores are strewn with wrecks. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

2. *He has "woe" and "sorrow."* The condition of the drunkard is unspeakably wretched. There is no woe worse than his. His is the woe—

(a) *Of ill-health.* Strong drink poisons the blood, saps the constitution, and generates disease. The effect of alcohol upon the human organism has, within a few years, been examined with a scientific accuracy and thoroughness before unknown. Certain eminent French physicians and chemists, after conducting a long series of experiments, extending through years, sum up the result of their investigation in seven formal statements: (1) Alcohol is not food. (2) It exerts a special influence over the nervous system, a small dose acting as an excitant, a larger as a stupifant. (3) It is neither changed nor destroyed in the human organism. (4) It accumulates by a sort of elective affinity in the brain and liver. (5) It is eliminated from the human organism, unchanged in nature and undiminished in quantity, the channels of escape being the lungs, the skin, and the kidneys. (6) Alcohol has a direct and serious tendency to produce disease by the development of the functional disturbances and organic changes in the brain, the liver, and the kidneys. (7) Spirituous liquors derive from alcohol their common properties and their special effect.

The ravages of strong drink upon the health of its victims are illustrated in the case of every drunkard, and are matters of common observation to all who give any attention to the subject. In that other note of warning uttered by the wise man, and quoted above, he brings out the mocking and deceptive character of this vice. We have seen how this aspect is illustrated in the growth of the habit. It finds further illustration in the idea, entertained professedly by many, that great curative and strengthening properties are found in strong drinks. This is a deception, and he who tries the experiment will find it a mockery. We speak of the ordinary use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, not of that small portion used as medicine. Says Dr. Arnot on this point: "A vague but influential notion is abroad that there is a good deal of nourishment in ale and spirits. The evidence of science is distinct and decisive on the other side; but it is not potential on the mind and conduct of the community. Ardent spirits contain no nourishment at all. If they contribute at any time to the quantity of force exerted by man, it corresponds not to the grain which you give to your horse, but to the whipping. A master who had hired you only for a day, and desires to make the most of his bargain, may possibly find it to his interest to bring more out of your bones and sinews by such a stimulus: but you certainly have no interest in lashing an additional effort out of yourself to-day, and lying in lethargy to-morrow. The ardent spirits put nothing in: whatever therefore they take out is taken from your body. The inevitable consequence is permanent feebleness and shortened days. As to malt liquors the case is different, but the difference is small. When you go down among infinitesimals, the calculation is difficult. Our strong drink is eminently a mocker. It successfully deceives the people as to the quantity and kind of nourishment it contains. Liebig has a pleasant notion about balancing on the point of a penknife, like a pinch of snuff, all the nourishment that the most capacious German swallows with his beer in a day; and it is chemistry that he is giving us, not poetry or wit. He is submitting the results of scientific analysis. But people don't believe the chemists,—at least not with that kind of belief which compels a man to thwart his own appetite. We believe them when they detect by their analysis a few grains of arsenic in an exhumed body, and on the faith of their evidence we hang a man for murder; but we do not believe them when they tell us how little sustenance and how much poison is in our beer. Why? Because we like our beer. It takes a great deal of evidence to convince us when our appetite is on the other side."

(b) *Of poverty.* Drunkenness indisposes and unfits a man for work. Its victims frequently become paupers themselves, and drag their families down to the same level. The pauperism of the land has its chief source in this vice. In our country, where a vast breadth of fertile soil invites the toiler and promises food for uncounted millions, abject poverty ought to be unknown, save in the case of those misfortunes which fall alike upon "the evil and the good, the just and the unjust." Yet who does not know that an appalling amount of abject poverty exists, especially in our large cities. This poverty exists in various localities in proportion to the number of places where liquor is sold.

(c) *Of social disgrace.* This is not the result of the drunkard's poverty, save as that is in turn the result of his beastly habit. There are hosts of very poor people that command and retain the esteem and respect of their neighbors, but who can respect the drunkard? Not his neighbors, not even his wife and children.

They soon come to shun and loathe him. Drunkards are the object of social scorn. They are incapable of industrious work, they are injurious to the common good. In many instances they prostitute great abilities and misuse great opportunities. They often trample upon the tenderest affections of the human heart, turn home into a hell, and reduce manhood to the level of the brute.

(d) *Of bitter remorse.* In his sober moments this creeps in and bites and stings him into indescribable anguish. He awakes from his sottish slumber, and is seized by sad thoughts of his own degradation. And no "woe," no "sorrow," is more terrible than that occasioned by quiet reflection upon a moral ruin which seems to be complete, and against which there seems to be no power of will to struggle.

(e) *Of awful apprehension.* If the drunkard's conscience is not entirely seared, there are hours when the end of all his indulgence stares him in the face. Drunkenness not only ruins the body, it kills the soul. "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God." The consequences of the drunkard's course takes hold on eternity.

3. *He has "babblings" and "contentions."* The drunkard becomes offensively garrulous. "When wine is in, wit is out." When strong drink excites the brain, the tongue—which James describes as "setting fire to the course of nature," and being itself "set on fire of hell"—is allowed to give full utterance to all the filthy, incoherent, and quarrelsome expressions that spring from the drunkard's diseased mind. So he gets "wounds without cause," save his own foolish babbling. What quarrels, fightings, even murders are constantly gowing out of the drunkard's "contentions." Strong drink inflames the passions, and, at the same time, removes the restraint of conscience and will,—it first maddens and then unchains the tiger. From many a gallows-tree, where the condemned murderer of his fellow-man stood on the brink of eternity, has the whole sad wreck of life been summed up in the brief words of awful warning, "Rum did it."

4. *He becomes an easy victim of the tempter.* "Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." The idea suggested is, that a man under the influence of strong drink is easily tempted. For the crime of adultery and blasphemy he is ready. His judgment is clouded, his conscience is silenced, his sense of propriety is gone, his passions are inflamed, and the breath of temptation will bear him away into any sin.

5. *He becomes stupidly reckless and utterly debauched.* "Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth on the top of a mast." Exhausted by excitement, and blinded by the fumes of his disordered stomach and intoxicated brain, the drunkard falls asleep anywhere. It may be on the railroad track, or near the fire, or on the edge of the precipice, but he cares not. "They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." Struggling into consciousness, the drunkard is unable to account for the injuries that have been inflicted on his person. He seeks relief in the very cup which has been his ruin. Truly, a wretched creature is the drunkard. There is little help for him outside the grace of Almighty God; that grace, however, is mighty to save.

II. A SOLEMN WARNING.—"Look thou not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." The picture which the wise man has presented of the misery and ruin of the drunkard gives unspeakable force to his words of warning. Nothing that can be said further would increase that force. Look on the picture and heed the warning. No more insidious and powerful temptation dogs the steps of the young in our land than the temptation to tamper with strong drink. There is no safety for them but in total abstinence. He who never drinks the first glass is certain never to become a drunkard. Keep out of the way of the temptation in as far as you can. "Look not on the wine" lest thou desire, lest thou touch the accursed thing. "Those that would be kept from any sin must keep themselves from all the occasions and beginnings of it, and be afraid of coming within the reach of its allurements lest they be overcome by them."

THE COLLECT:—**The Right Use of the Scriptures.**
(a) In the Collect we pray "Grant . . . inwardly digest them." Here the use of the Scriptures is brought before us in stages; from the first and lowest to the last and highest use. [Illustr. (Person) (1) collecting materials for dinner, (2) cooking, (3) eating, and (4) "digesting" them.] Notice them in order. We pray—
(1) That we may "read" them. Should do this often and regularly (Josh. i. 8; Ps. cxix. 147, 148; Acts xvii. 11.) If we do not read what God has said

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