

The Presbyterian Review.

Vol. XII.—No. 6.

TORONTO, AUGUST 15, 1895

\$1.50 per Annum

Temperance Thoughts.

With respect to the gigantic evils attending the liquor traffic with native races, Asiatic, African and Indian, says the *New York Observer*, all intelligent opinion is agreed. The civilized world long ago decided that the misery, degradation and ruin wrought by it was second only to that produced by the slave trade. It puts a blight upon all industry and endeavor, destroys legitimate trade by substituting a single demand for many, checks all civilizing processes, and kills off the natives with the rapidity of cholera or yellow fever.

Every competent colonial administrator regards it as the chief obstacle to orderly administration; native chiefs protest against it and not infrequently prohibit it; and international conferences, like those of Berlin and Brussels, have devised rigorous measures for its restriction or prohibition. Practical and experienced men of affairs, uninfluenced by high moral considerations, without prejudice against the liquor trade as ordinarily conducted, and moved solely by desire to extend and develop markets and to facilitate peaceful progress, have declared again and again that the first and essential preliminary to success in these directions is to prohibit the trade in spirits. Missionaries constantly cite the traffic in alcohol as the greatest enemy which confronts them in laboring for native races, the most serious obstacle to all religious and social improvement.

Yet despite this agreement of evidence and opinion, and the explicit prohibition of the further extension of the traffic by the Brussels treaty, intoxicating liquors are sold to day over African territory three times as large as that covered by the trade in 1890. No less than 20,000,000 gallons of cheap trade gin and rum are imported every year into the British colony of Lagos, on the West African coast, and the same quantity into the Niger protectorate adjoining it; while the export of the Hamburg merchants into the German colonies on the west coast is said to be still greater, and that of the French traders equally large.

Against this flood of alcohol the British Niger company has made a determined stand, prohibiting the traffic in the larger part of its territories. But, sandwiched between two liquor dealing colonies, levying duties on spirits so low that the coast negroes, who act as middlemen between the white traders and the natives, are able to carry on a profitable trade with the interior, its efforts at restriction count for little. The result is an enormous increase of drunkenness, and the rapid demoralization and ruin of the native races. Following the arrival of a trader whole towns often become drunken. The roads opened to facilitate general trade are strewn with empty bottles and cans, and although the natives bring larger quantities of produce to market, there is little demand for manufactured goods.

The only remedy for the evil is the growth of a public sentiment in Europe and America which will compel

the governments having colonies in Africa to restrict or prohibit the traffic, and in concerted action on the part of the local administrations. And it is on the trade side that pressure can be exerted most effectively. For nothing has been more clearly demonstrated than that the trade in spirits destroys all other trade. The native who buys liquor wants nothing else. As the rum traffic grows, the trade in general goods diminishes, the two being unalterably opposed to each other. It has been found that roads cut to promote general trade have been deprived of all value when used to advance the liquor traffic. The new markets opened have no trade but that in spirits, the slower growing, but in the end far more profitable traffic being sacrificed to the greed for quick returns. From a purely unsentimental point of view, the unwisdom of substituting one demand for the many certain to grow out of advancing civilization, should be apparent.

Every trade, therefore, desiring to extend itself in Africa; is interested in fighting the liquor traffic, and such a force, acting with an aroused Christian sentiment, should go far to wipe out the iniquity. Considered only on its trade side, there is not a doubt that if alcohol were kept out of Africa, the traffic developed in the native markets would in time yield a revenue to the nations many times greater than that now yielded by the liquor trade.

This, however, is the lowest consideration on which to base the prohibition of the traffic. There are more than 150,000,000 of people in Africa, and for the civilization and Christianization of this vast population the western world is responsible. The only justification the nations have for the occupation of Africa, the establishment of political and commercial protectorates, and crown colonies, is the ability to govern it better than it is now governed, and to advance its civilization.

It would seem high time, then, that the nations set themselves earnestly to their task, and that the liquor trader should be placed in the same category with the slave trader—outside the pale of humanity. For the man who sells his fellow to the dominion of an appetite always in the case of the Asiatic and the negro wholly merciless is hardly less cruel than he who sells him to a master bound by self interest to take some care of him.

More than two thousand years ago the results of alcohol on the body were compared to the bite of a serpent and the sting of an adder; and alcohol has not changed its nature since. At the present time alcoholic beverages are certainly the most injurious, deceptive and dangerous elements of death and destruction that exist, and the annals of criminal courts prove that it is an aggravated public nuisance generally. Yet the beverages are so fascinating, and the poison in them so insidious, that the whole human race has been deluded and cheated for thousands of years, and more injury has resulted from their use than has been occasioned by all the woe of war, famine and pestilence combined.