

Canada Temperance Advocate.

Devoted to Temperance, Agriculture, and Education.

No. 3.

MONTREAL, JULY, 1841.

Vol. VII.

THE MILITARY CULPRIT;

OR, THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF INTOXICATION.

THE following details are extracted from the memoirs of an officer who served in India with great distinction, (the late Lieut. Shipp, of H. M. 87th foot,) having won his commission from the ranks by his conduct in the field. He says as to one of the soldiers, "I shall not mention the name of —, lest my narrative should by possibility meet the eye of some dear relative who still lingers on earth, and droops under the recollection of the sad scene. Through the whole course of his drills and military exercises, I ever found the young man attentive, obedient, and willing to learn; and he promised to be an ornament to his profession. He glided through the commencement of his career with the smile of joy on his youthful countenance. These were halcyon days, which were not long to last; the poisonous cup of inebriety seduced him from the path of duty, and he drank deeply of its baneful contents. This indulgence in intemperance led him from one error to another; on account of which he, from time to time, incurred serious admonitions; until, at length, for the commission of a more aggravated offence, he fell under the displeasure of his superior officer, and was deservedly punished. Irritated by the infliction of a supposed wrong, inflamed with liquor, and smarting under the disgrace, the unhappy youth, in a fatal moment, yielded to the instigations of revenge; and, in the phrenzy of intoxication, made an attempt on the life of the officer, (a quarter-master in the same troop,) by whom, as he supposed, he had been injured. This dreadful attempt was as wanton and unprovoked as it was unjustifiable. The chastisement which the young man had received, was such as he would himself, in his sober moments, have admitted he had justly deserved. He fired at him; the shot did not take effect as intended, but the crime was that of mutiny; and punishable, by military law, by the heavy penalty of death.

"The culprit was immediately dragged to the guard-room, and then confined in irons. Imagine the feelings of the unhappy wretch when he awoke from his intoxicated slumbers, and the first objects that met his eyes were the fetters by which he was secured! I was sergeant of the guard at the time, and had the melancholy task of informing the offender of the dreadful crime for which he was fettered and imprisoned. On being made acquainted with the enormity of his attempt, his nature seemed to recoil, his youthful countenance showed a deathlike paleness, he closed his eyes, clasped his hands, and exclaimed, "Good God, what have I done?" He seemed as unconscious of every intention of committing the crime he was charged with, as the child still unborn; but yet he stood unequivocally arraigned for the crime of mutiny and attempt to murder. The culprit was, a short time afterwards, summoned before a general court-martial, on trial for his life, without having a single iota to offer in his defence, except the plea of drunkenness, which could but have aggravated his offence, and made it if possible, worse and blacker. He stood before the court-martial a sad monument of what the use of liquor may bring the most docile and humane creature to.

"This melancholy instance will, I trust, show the absolute necessity of guarding, more particularly in a hot climate like that of India, (or when in an excited state of mind or heated state of body,) against the use of spirituous liquors. If a passion for drink is once allowed to gain dominion, it is seldom or never eradicated. Cup will follow cup, and crime succeed crime, till the envenomed draught brings its sad votary to some sudden and calamitous end. Could I but impress this fact upon the minds of young soldiers, and save every one from that degrading vice, I should think myself amply rewarded.

"The criminal was, of course, found guilty. He was ordered for public execution—to be shot. On the fatal morning, the chaplain was early with his charge. He washed and dressed himself, and tied a piece of black crape round his arm. He took some pains in the adjustment of his clothes and hair, and then went to prayer, in which every one of the guard joined him, although in a separate room. I do not think I ever witnessed more real commiseration in my life than was displayed on this occasion. When the first trumpet sounded for the execution parade, the notes seemed to linger on the morning breeze, and a deathlike stillness to predominate over the atmosphere, which chilled the blood of all assembled. Not a voice was heard; all was hush and quiet, save the workings of the fond bosoms of his pitying comrades. These plainly bespoke the horror they felt in the contemplation of the approaching scene. The prisoner affectionately took his leave of all the guard, warning them by his sad fate to beware of that accursed liquor, which had sealed his doom. He seemed composed and calm, and said he would meet the offended laws of his country, as the just reward of his crimes. The soldiers turned out with evident reluctance, each head rested upon a sorrowing bosom; but they at last reached the place of the sad catastrophe.

"The regiments, both of which were European, then formed three sides of a square, of which the firing party, with the coffin, formed the other. Scarcely was this accomplished, when we heard the dismal sounds of the muffled drum, and the doleful notes of the band playing the 'Dead March in Saul.' The procession then moved on:—Provost Sergeant in front, on horseback, followed by two files of soldiers. Then the chaplain in his sombre robes, with the prisoner, both in deep meditation and earnest prayer. After them followed the firing party,—one sergeant, one corporal, and twelve privates—the twelve next men for general duty in the whole regiment. From the spot where the guard room was situated, to the place of execution, was a good quarter of a mile; and the reader may be assured that he took his own time, which was slow, but firm and steady. He entered on the right flank of the square, and passed along the front of the line to the left; the soldiers resting upon their arms reversed, that is, muzzle down, and with their hands upon the bottom of their butt. The sobbing of many of the men could be distinctly heard, and some could not even look on him as he paced along the front of the weeping lines. Some of his comrades, who had been more intimately acquainted with the prisoner than the other