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“ I NEVER TAKE ANY THING TO HURT MYSELF.”

A Prize Essay. By the Rev. R. Pedcn, Amherstburgh.

Acts xvi. 28—“ Do thyself no harm.”

Heb. 13, 16—“ To do good forget not.”

Such is the language of many in excusing themselves from entire abstinence from intoxicating drinks—they never take any thing to hurt themselves. It may be that this little tract may fall into the hands of some who use this apology, and to such we would affectionately submit a few considerations.

First,—Are you sure that in using intoxicating drinks, as you now do, that you never take any thing to hurt yourself? It is not necessary to suppose that you use them either very frequently, or what may be called immoderately; but even using them, as you may do, only occasionally and in small quantities, it would still be hazardous for you to affirm that you have never taken any thing to hurt yourself. The fact that the temperance reformation has disclosed the pernicious and delusory nature of these drinks is so well known and so generally admitted, grounded, as its testimony is, on the most careful induction of facts, and confirmed by the experience of millions of teetotalers, that you may at least see occasion to review the judgment which you have expressed. In the Report of a Select Committee of the House of Commons, to inquire into the evils of intemperance, it was stated that the highest medical authorities, examined in great numbers before the Committee, are uniform in their testimony, “ that ardent spirits are absolute poisons to the human constitution—that in no case whatever are they necessary, or even useful, to persons in health—that they are always, in every case, and to the smallest extent, deleterious, pernicious, or destructive, according to the proportions in which they may be taken into the system. (Par. Rep. p. 4.) If this testimony be true, will you aver that even in the moderate way in which you now use them, you never take any thing to hurt yourself?

But we are well aware that some who make use of such language

may, after all, in the opinion of others acquainted with them, partake pretty freely of the intoxicating cup. There are not wanting cases of individuals who, in the very intemperate use of intoxicating drinks, may fancy the excuse at the head of this paper as applicable to their condition—a sad proof of the tendency of these drinks to delude the mind, to unfit it for calm and impartial enquiry, or for the reception of truth, however plainly and forcibly stated.

Second,—But though it were true that you took nothing to hurt yourself, have you a perfect safeguard that in still using them you will continue in your supposed *inocuous* course? Where is your guarantee, your ground of confidence that you will never follow the legitimate and natural current of intoxicating drinks, namely, from tasting to tipping, and from tipping to habitual and confirmed immoderation. It is not stated that you will do so, but where is your safeguard that you will not? Have not hundreds, as temperate and self-confident, and perhaps as seemingly moral and virtuous, fallen before the enemy? Can you not point to instances within your own circle of observation, however narrowed that circle may be? Scripture says, “the heart is deceitful above all things.” It says, moreover, “wine is a mocker.” How awfully dangerous, then, to be tampering with “a mocker,” a deceiver, when the heart is so apt to be deceived. You remember the case of Hazael when on an errand from Benhadad, the king, to the prophet Elisha, when the man of God, looking steadfastly on him till he was ashamed, told him of all the evil which he would bring on the children of Israel. Hazael, shocked at the mere mention of such atrocities, indignantly exclaimed, “What! is thy servant a *dog*, that he should do this great thing?” How many thousands of poor drunkards are there now, who, had they been told what they would become, would have treated the warning as Hazael did the prophecy. Be entreated to see the ground on which you are now standing. Is your footing secure? Have you a complete guarantee that you will never, in your present course, become intemperate?

Third,—Although you were proof against habitual intemperance, who or what will secure you against the possibility of your falling into some peculiar circumstances of temptation, whereby you may be overcome, and you may take something to hurt yourself. Remember that you may hurt yourself in various ways as well as by injuring your body. You may injure your reputation, your means of subsistence, your prospects in life, your morals, or your Christian character, if you are a *professor* of religion. There is an elevating tendency in the church, at the present day, that regards with growing suspicion the use of alcoholic drinks. Even although there was no chance of your ever becoming a drunkard, may you not under some peculiar

temptation inflict a wound on your character that may take years of watchfulness to cicatrize? May you not, at some unguarded moment, be so overcome as to leave a blot on your life, which tears of bitterness may vainly attempt to obliterate?

Fourth,—Suppose it were true that you may use liquors as you now do without injury, and you had a perfect confidence that you never will hurt yourself, let it still be inquired, may you not hurt another, if not yourself? You are so linked with your fellow-creatures as to make it inconsistent with your condition as a man, and much more as a Christian, to say as Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” It is impossible to say what may be the result of your present course upon others, however moderate you may deem it. If you very seldom taste, it is probable that, as you have no particular inclination for intoxicating drinks, you would not go and drink by yourself: this would betray a strong desire for the intoxicating cup. When you do take a little, it is usually because you are in circumstances that lead you to partake; you are treated by a friend, or you treat him; or you are making some bargain, or transacting some business, or otherwise led into company. Now, although you may think that you take nothing to hurt *yourself*, may you not hurt your *friend*? May you not countenance *him* in the use of the cup?—may you not beget or awaken a depraved appetite in him? And though you were possessed of moral courage and strength of principle always merely to taste and to leave off before you have sustained any injury, as you may suppose, yet your countenance and example may tell most injuriously on your acquaintance or companion.

Are you a parent? Though you do not hurt yourself, may you not hurt one of your dear children? Oh! how many have been ruined in time and eternity by the intoxicating cup, which, when children, they began to sip beneath the parental roof.

Are you a husband? May you not injure your wife? Or a wife? may you not injure your husband? Are you a master? May you not hurt your servants? Are you a man of wealth, and hospitable? May not your hospitality prove a curse? Are you a minister of Jesus Christ, a magistrate, or a physician? May not your example in this respect be awfully ruinous to some? From the highest official stations, down to the obscurest private conditions, there is an influence concomitant with the use of intoxicating drinks, moderate though the use may be, that may tell with fearful injury on others, although those whose example was an abettor of the evil, may partially escape themselves. The fact of the sociality connected with drinking should lead you to consider the influence not merely on yourself, but also on others.

Fifth,—If it were true that you do not hurt yourself, you are hurting the temperance reformation. The temperance movement is now one of generally acknowledged excellence. It stands conspicuous in the march of moral advancement and philanthropic exertion. It is very probable that you consider yourself a friend of temperance, and rejoice in the good it has accomplished; but by drinking, though little and seldom, you are not only standing aloof from the movement, but you are directly sanctioning the use of these pernicious drinks, and discountenancing temperance societies. So far as your influence goes, you are undoing what has been done, and preventing an increase of benefit from being accomplished.

Sixth,—But still further. Suppose it were true that intoxicating drinks do not hurt you, do they do you any good? This is a very relevant inquiry. You cannot affirm that they do, and no man that uses them as a beverage can affirm so, unless he is under delusion. Why, then, expose yourself to temptation? why tamper with that which is so dangerous and delusive? why run the risk of the possibility of enduring all the evils of intemperance, by the use of that which does you no real good? Why expose others to the fearful evil, by continuing in a course that may seriously affect others, when all you can say in favour of the beverage, is the mere negative plea, that you do not hurt yourself; and that, too, a statement which, there is reason to believe, is utterly fallacious.

Seventh,—Even although it were true, that by using intoxicating drinks as you now do, you can do so without injury to yourself or others; and suppose you could continue so, it is not enough merely to do no harm, it is your duty to do good. Our duty to ourselves and others is not the mere negative one of doing no injury, but the positive one of doing good. The word of God declares, “to do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Let the judgment decide impartially, let conscience speak faithfully, and we doubt not but that you will be led to the conclusion, that entire abstinence from all intoxicating drinks, will be not only not to your detriment, but to your advantage.

Abandon, then, a course which, however moderate, is injurious, though you may not think so; a course which may possibly prove the outer edge of a vortex of dissipation and misery—a course that may draw others, perhaps near and dear to you, into the fatal snare, though you should escape. And, then, be assured you will have greater confidence than you can have now, that in this respect at least, you do yourself no harm; and you will have the still happier consciousness, that, by co-operating in the temperance movement, you may do yourself and others very material and permanent good.