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BRITAIN'S CURSE AND ITS CURE,

IN THE

LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE:

A Sermon on Intemperance,

Preached 21st Dec., 1873.

BY THE

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS is simply a re-issue, with very slight alterations, of a Discourse preached and published a few years ago at Perth. It is printed now, as then, at the request of friends who heard it, in the hope that it may be some aid to that broad Temperance movement in which all well-wishers of their country must join, and with the prayer that it may be blessed to strengthen in some souls the inward grace of self-restraint.

It is one token of advance in the great practical question of dealing with Intemperance, that Abstainers seem more willing of late years to welcome the aid of those friends of Temperance who may not occupy exactly their own point of view. And it is another, that the Church is more ready to recognize the labours of these and all other helpers against this terrible enemy of souls. If such words as those here given to the public can in any degree express or foster the uniting of all forces in this important struggle, the Author's aims will be fully met.

J. L.

ABERDEEN, *January*, 1874.

SERMON.

GAL. v. 19, 23.—“ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these Drunkenness, revellings, and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is temperance.”

THE General Assembly of our Church has enjoined all her Ministers to preach a special Sermon on the subject of Intemperance on one of the Sabbaths of this month. In doing so, they say that “ They are deeply impressed with a sense of the alarming prevalence of the sin of drunkenness, and of the enormous evils which flow from it, as well as of the duty of employing all lawful scriptural means for the purpose of arresting so mighty an evil.” I quote this deliverance not because I am reluctant to take up this subject unless when so required, but because I welcome the aid of such authority in directing attention to so clamant an evil. Without further preface let me ask your attention to the subject of Intemperance, in the aspect most appropriate to this place. We are tempted, when speaking on this sad theme, sometimes to speak as citizens, sometimes as moralists, sometimes even as partizans with our special views of the evil, or our favourite specifics for its remedy. I desire to look at it now simply and solely in the light of the Divine Word.

What does the Bible say about Intemperance? The passage before us (to which, however, we shall not confine ourselves), states *the evil*, and reveals *its cure*. In stating the evil it describes its *source*, its *nature*, and its *effects*. And, as we must necessarily, on this occasion, speak of the evil at greater length than of the cure, we shall take up these four points:—

I. The Evil: Whence it is. Of “the works of the flesh.”

II. The Evil: What it is. “Drunkenness, revellings, and such like.”

III. The Evil: How it works. “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

IV. The Cure: “The fruit of the Spirit temperance.”

I. THE SOURCE OF THE EVIL.—“The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Drunkenness, revellings, and such like.” That is to say, intemperance is one of the manifestations of the depraved nature—an outcome of the sinful heart—a result of that corruption in man which Scripture calls “the flesh”—and we know too well that it is one of the most notorious, widespread, and largely ruinous of these results of corruption. On this great practical question, let us first of all have clear views as to where the evil lies, as to what is its real source. Call it a monster, a demon, a destroyer! What is the demon? Is it wine, ardent spirits, alcohol? Surely no man will calmly and deliberately say that it is so, when he means to state the source of the mischief. The Bible, at least, is quite explicit. The whole tenor of its

utterances is that there is drunkenness manifest in the world, not because there is drink in the world, but because there is a heart in man set in him to do evil. It is not, of course, to be denied that the kind and the quantity of the stimulants manufactured at the present day are a most prolific and lamentable occasion of excess; but the Bible must be altered and the fruits of the earth must be altered before it can be held consistently either with Scripture or with common sense that the manufacture of the article is the source of the evil. It is of great importance, that all who are in earnest in this matter should be wise and avoid fallacious statements—as if it were the mere existence of drink that were the evil—as if the prevention of its manufacture could be the cure.

To direct our invectives chiefly against drink—against its makers—against its use—against its presence in any community, is a mistake. It is to turn away attention from the real culprit—the evil heart of man. It is to shift the responsibility from those on whom it mainly lies—viz., all of us, ourselves—to some of our neighbours. And, worst of all, it is to blind ourselves to the real cure, which, after all, must lie mainly, not in the abolition or the restriction of a trade, but in the self-restraint of the ransomed soul—the power of grace to implant the blessed fruit of the Spirit—temperance, in place of the works of the flesh—excess.

II. THE NATURE OF THE EVIL.—“Drunkenness, revelings, and such like.” Let us be careful here again to get the Bible view of what the sin is. The thing which is here said to be of the “works of the flesh,” and whose effect is to cut off from “the kingdom of God,” is by no means only gross, brutal intoxication. It is a different

idea which is presented to the mind by the words "drinkings, revellings, and such like." It is the boisterous merrymaking—the bold carousal—the jocund company, of which the convivial cup or the "social glass," as it is called, forms the inspiration. It is that "work of the flesh" which is "manifest" when men repair to drink for purposes of excitement. "Be not drunk (flushed, filled) with wine wherein is excess." This is the Scripture statement of the sin—excess—excessive use. And all use is excessive which is for purposes of excitement. Here is the line which the Bible lays down between a possibly right and a certainly wrong use of stimulants. Those who indulge, have a wonderful ingenuity in showing that the hated name of drunkard does not apply to them. They contrive to drop the line between sobriety and insobriety somewhere below themselves and their practice. The Word of God has no such casuistry. The man who departs from truth is a liar, who steals is a thief, who exceeds in the use of drink must be classed among the drunken. And again, I repeat, let us not suppose that there is no excess but intoxication. "It is not merely," says one of the most powerful and plain-spoken of modern preachers,* "men who drink till they are drunk that are guilty of intemperance. There are many people who do what is perhaps worse than that. There are men who never lose self-command, and yet who drink habitually more than they ought. And there is competent medical testimony to the effect that this is physically more injurious than occasional intoxication; which inflicts most moral injury it may be hard to determine. Unhappily, drinking which does not end in positive intoxication is regarded as innocent. The men who

* R. W. Dale, of Birmingham, in "Week-Day Sermons."

are guilty of it would resent even an implied censure on their excesses. They think they live freely, but that they are blameless."

To return to the teaching of Scripture. It is very instructive to bring together some of its utterances about this sin, and to notice how, without any mention of "drunkard" or "drunkenness," *excess in the use of stimulants* is placed in the light of a strong condemnation. There is, first, a caution conveyed to us all, however wary and temperate our use of them, by the striking words in which they are described—"Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."* Then, there are hints given us that there is danger in connecting the use of them with scenes of festivity and mirth, in "drinking wine with a song," in having "the harp, and the viol, and the tabret, and the pipe, and wine in our feasts."† And if it be asked what danger? it is answered that such revels, like all luxurious living, unfit men for spiritual things. "They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands,"‡—they "drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."‡ Further, we are told that such excess tends to blind and destroy the moral reason;—"they have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way, the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgment."§ And once again, in words still more fearful, is it declared, that excess brings the soul into a state of animal distance from God, which is the virtual denial of all religion—

* Prov. xx. 1. † Isa. v. 12. ‡ Amos vi. 6. § Isa. xxviii. 7.

“Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.”* “In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine, he stretched out his hand with scorners.” “They have not cried unto Me with their heart when they howled upon their beds; they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against Me.”†

Let none of us say that these warnings and cautions are not for us. There is a wonderful and wise impartiality in the warnings of the Bible. The rich man is warned as to his wine, and the poor as to his strong drink—the people against the ready refuge of the toiler and the sorrowing—the prophet and the priest against the dangerous fancy of a needed stimulant—the saint against that which may ruin his piety and his peace—the sinner against that which will seal his bondage. Let us not, therefore, say the terrible words have no application to us. The persons who are readiest to repudiate for themselves the need of such words, are sometimes the very persons to whose soul the snare has come nearest, and if you have no liking and no habits that imply danger, so much the more seasonable is this utterance, for to retrace that “way to hell” is a task indeed.

Nor let any one say that it is needless to address Christians on a point of morality so obvious as this. The sin is gross, degrading, presumptuous. It is forbidden not in one precept of the decalogue, but so to speak in all, for the drunkard may break all the ten. But, mark again the breadth and wisdom of God’s Word. Noah was an eminent saint of God, and he was the first on record to fall under this sin. Lot was the one righteous man in guilty Sodom, and yet he fell once under this sin, and by it into worse. And the same faithful and impar-

* Hos. iv. 11. † Hos. vii. 5, 14.

tial volume which records of wicked Nabal that he was "very drunken," and of royal Benhadad that he "was drinking himself drunk in the pavilion," records the fall of these two eminent saints. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins."* Our Redeemer warns his own disciples that, in times of disturbance, of national or domestic trouble, indeed, at all times, they need to be on their guard, lest from fulness or emptiness, from overmuch of joy or of sorrow, they should fall into this sin, and so fall as they might never rise again. "Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."†

III. THE EFFECTS AND RESULTS OF EXCESS.—There are many ways in which this part of our subject might be illustrated. The columns of our newspapers are filled with a sickening frequency at all times with the records of the effects of drink. And there is never a festive season, such as that now approaching, but you may look certainly in your paper for the appalling death under crushing wheels, or by fatal fall, of some unhappy victim of drink, or the still sadder death of another at the hands of the frenzied man. The reports of our prisons and poorhouses are little but an elaborate record of the ravages of drink. But my present aim is to recall to you the too oft forgotten fact, that there is no book in the world so impressively eloquent on this subject as the Book of books itself.

1. The Bible is very plain about the tendency of excess to impair the judgment, to blunt the feelings, to deaden all spiritual sympathy, and to unfit for all truly

* Ps. xix. 13. † Luke xxi. 34.

noble action. It was very significant that this charge was given of old to the Jewish High Priest: "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die. It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations."* Similar is the counsel given to a King: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."† A Christian man is both a king and a priest. Let him fear continually the lowering power of excess. Let him rejoice to aim in all positions at the superior strength and skill of sobriety. Whether it be that he drives an engine, or posts a ledger, or guides a ship, or wields a hammer, or weighs, or measures, or tills, or weaves, or builds, or works with the tools of the carpenter, sobriety is the Bible recipe for a clear head and a steady hand, and an unshrinking heart. When the Indian general saw disaster waiting on his country's arms, because, alas! his regiments were found, in an emergency, sodden with drink—"Call out Havelock's saints!" he exclaimed, "they are never drunk, and Havelock is always ready." So do we hear everywhere, and every day, of men who rise in social worth, in industrial value, according to their Christian temperance; and so do we remark, as the Bible shows us, that men deteriorate in mental edge, quickness, steadiness, and consequent worth to their fellows, by tampering with strong drink.

2. Again, if we speak of the miserable bodily and mental effects of intoxication, where shall we find a description more perfect than this—"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling?"

* Lev. x. 9. † Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.

who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. 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.”*

3. Who hath *woe* indeed? For these bodily and mental effects, so strikingly described, are the least part of it. What can be more appalling than the repeated and solemn announcement of God in His Word that His displeasure rests upon this sin, and that its harvests of misery are the result of that displeasure. Woe after woe is pronounced upon it in a startling variety of utterance. Upon those who seek drink often and at unseasonable times—“Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue all night till wine inflame them.”† Upon those who boast and exercise their capacity to indulge and their ability to endure—“Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.”‡ Upon those who abuse the rich and abundant supplies of nature to feed their lustful flame—“Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine.”§ And upon those most emphatically of all who not only

* Prov. xxiii. 29-35. † Isa. v. 11. ‡ v. 22. § Isa. xxviii. 1.

indulge themselves, but become the tempters of others—
 “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that
 puttest thy bottle to him and makest him drunken also,
 the cup of the Lord’s right hand shall be turned unto
 thee, and shameful spueing shall be on thy glory.”*
 These are no mincing words; and when such “woes” are
 pronounced against all excessive use of stimulants, and
 against all who encourage such excess, it is no wonder to
 find that an eternal woe is revealed as awaiting the
 victims of excess, for this Book is a revelation of God’s
 wrath as well as of His love. “Nor drunkards . . .
 shall inherit the kingdom of God.”† “They which do
 such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”
 They *ought* to have no place in the kingdom of God upon
 earth—the visible Church, for believers are charged, “if
 any man that is called a brother be a drunkard, with
 such a one no not to eat.” They *can* have no place in
 the real kingdom of God—the Church spiritual; for they
 have no “inheritance among them that are sanctified.”
 They *shall* have no place in that glorious city of the
 Church triumphant, into which “enters nothing that
 defileth.” And since their inheritance is not there, is not
 with those, we know where it must be. Their part in
 this text is with “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers,
 thieves, covetous, revilers, extortioners;” and where
 these shall have their inheritance in the world to come,
 we are plainly told—“These shall have their part in the
 lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the
 second death.”‡

IV. THE CURE FOR THIS EVIL.—“The fruit of the
 Spirit is temperance.” A glance at the text in its con-

* Hab. ii. 15, 16. † 1 Cor. vi. 10. ‡ Rev. xxi. 8.

nection will shew you with what exquisite point *the fruit of the Spirit* is here ranged over against *the works of the flesh* as the counterpart and cure of these deadly evils. Over against the sins enumerated in vv. 19-21 you have the graces of vv. 22, 23, each over each. Instead of lust in its various forms (v. 19) you have "love." Instead of "idolatry and witchcraft" you have "joy" (joy in God). Instead of "hatred" and its train (v. 20) you have "peace." Instead of "wrath" and its angry crew, you have "longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness." Instead of "heresies" you have "faith." Instead of "envyings and murders" you have "meekness." Instead of "drunkenness, revellings, and such like," you have "temperance." This goes at once to the root of things. The "Spirit" in place of the "flesh." The new, divine, and divinely planted spiritual nature, instead of the old and evil; and the "Fruit"—orderly, beautiful, essentially one—the outcome and upgrowth of "the Spirit," in place of the various baleful, conflicting "works of the flesh."

But to keep to the one point, "*temperance*" is the Spirit's cure for all excess, and all the evil works of excess—*temperance* in the sense of inward, spiritual, spirit-given self-restraint. I hope no one will run away with the idea that in preaching temperance in this sense, in the Bible sense, I am preaching to all and sundry "the moderate use of drink." This is a common way of misunderstanding and misrepresenting those who try to state and stand by the Scriptural position on this momentous practical question. The Word of God has laid down no rules as to when self-restraint or temperance shall mean the use in moderation, or the non-use and prohibition of the thing to which it refers. What the Bible does is to give principles, and what the Spirit of God does is to implant

these in the soul as principles of action. Now, the principle in relation to this subject clearly is, self-restraint—see it in the Word of God for yourselves—the spiritual grace of temperance in the heart. How that grace will act in relation to the use of drink depends on the case and the circumstances. I may be such a man, so constituted, so disposed by temperament—and no blame to me—that the only way in which I can act out Christian temperance as to strong drink may be never to touch it at all, and woe to the brother who by his liberty or his strength betrays me, the weaker one, to perdition! Or, I may come to see that for me, in the exercise of my duty towards myself and those over whom I exert influence, there is no way of enforcing Christian temperance but by total abstinence, and in that case, who shall interfere with my Christian liberty to avow and practise abstinence? Or, yet again, such may be the exceptional state of our countrymen and of our time, that it may become needful for us who seek to diffuse this grace of temperance to aim at some *such public measure as partial or total prohibition of the sale of intoxicants*. All these expedients—personal abstinence—social combinations, of which abstinence is the motto—movements for the restriction or suppression of the drink traffic—all these are legitimate modes of carrying out the principle of temperance, and helping the inward spiritual virtue of self-restraint. I must never be told, therefore, when I state the Bible principle of temperance, that I am recommending the use of drink in any measure, however moderate. That principle may happen in your case or mine, precisely to exclude the use of drink.

We may be such men—this Britain of ours may be a country so placed that the only temperance for us is to

abstain from and prohibit the use of drink. I do not say that we are; but it may at least be said that some strong public measure of restriction is needful. It must strike every one who will look at the facts that we are in a most lamentable state as a nation in regard to the use of intoxicants. Try to conceive to yourselves that one hundred and thirteen millions of money are expended annually by Great Britain on these products; that is to say, a bill for drink of nearly four pounds a-year must be placed to the annual account of every man, woman, and child in the country. Or consider that there is a place for the sale of drink to every fifty-five families in Scotland; that there is one for every one hundred and eighty-two persons in the gross population of the United Kingdom. Such facts shew that it is incumbent upon us to look at this problem—one of the most pressing national questions that lie before us for solution. It is our duty in the Church to ripen opinion upon it. We ought to form and lead public opinion on moral as well as on strictly religious subjects. The conviction is coming home to all, and, certainly, not least to the artizan and working classes, that drinking is a great curse to the country. And the time is probably not far distant when the people will ask and obtain power to restrict or prohibit the supply of the article which occasions the mischief. The people, therefore,—the working population very specially—have a deep interest in this question, and it is their part to think wisely and thoroughly on the subject, lest, when the time for public action comes, we should suffer—as in unripe action we are sure to do—through violent oscillations of the public mind from one extreme to the other.

This is not the time nor place to enter fully into such

details, but I have a growing conviction that all our hitherto applied public methods for restraining the traffic are mere playing with the subject—mere trifling with a sore and crying wrong. One of our statesmen has put the case in half-a-dozen words when he says, “That the profits of that trade over the whole are realized to a vast extent at the cost of popular degradation, vice, and misery. The question with which law-makers have to deal is, Whether the legislature would not be justified in placing the welfare of the people above the gains of a trade and acting accordingly.”* I do not hesitate to say they would, and that it would be a right and a good thing if every public house in the land (*i.e.* every place which is opened for drinking only), were to be closed by act of Parliament to-morrow and never re-opened.

But apart from all this,—the Bible is explicit. Christians! clear yourselves. See that you be not partakers of other men’s sins. Hate even the garments spotted by the flesh. Let us see well that by no luxurious use we are swelling that exorbitant British bill for drink—that we are not abetting the great excess which is ruining our land—that we are not guilty as to this thing of our neighbour’s blood. “The fruit of the Spirit is TEMPERANCE—against such there is no law; and they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

* Mr. Ruskin puts it with his own peculiar force when he says, “The encouragement of drunkenness for the sake of the profit on the sale of drink is certainly one of the most criminal modes of assassination for money hitherto adopted by the bravos of any age or country.”







