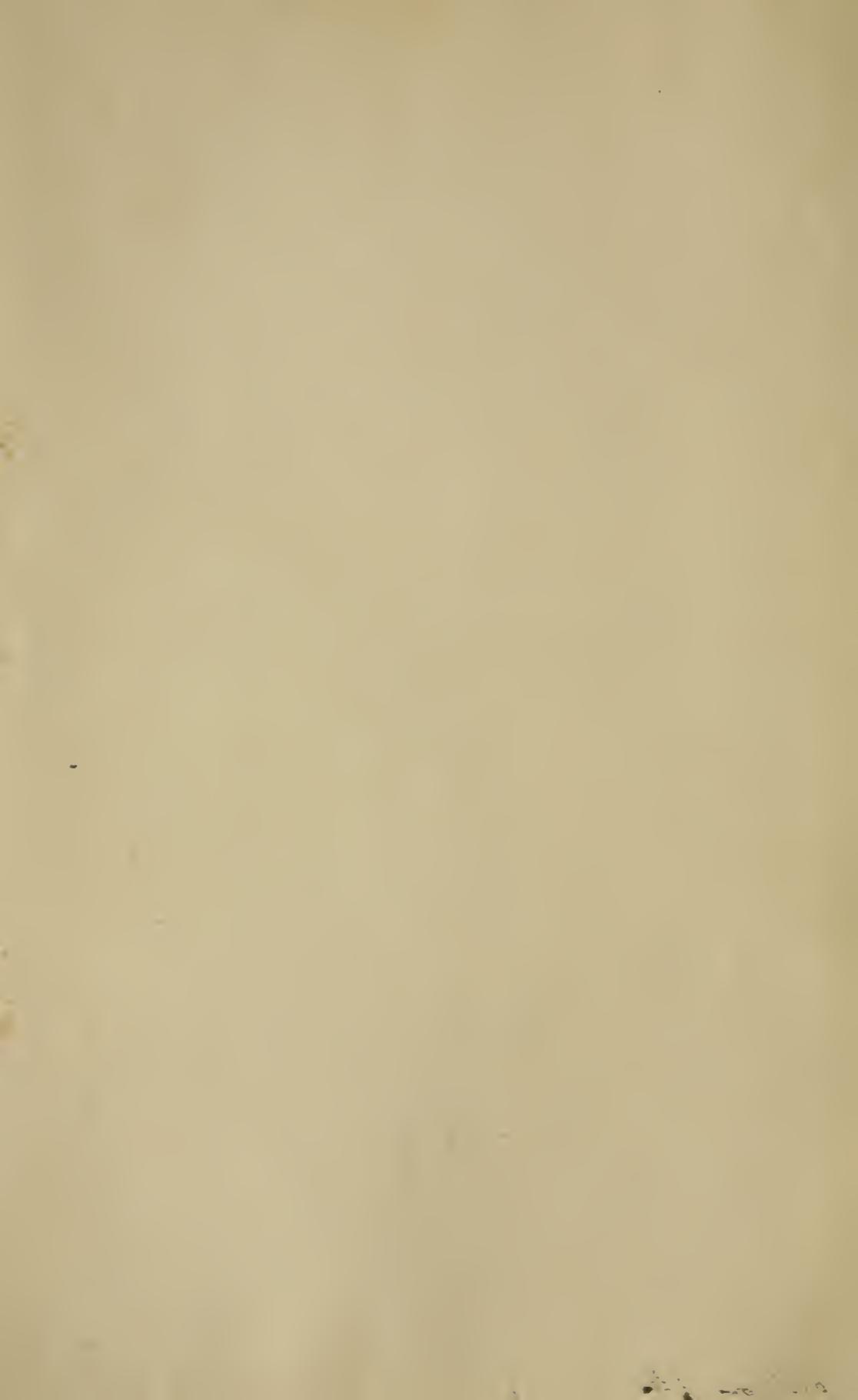


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A NATION'S CURSE.

A Sermon

PREACHED IN

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

UPON THE OCCASION OF THE TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL OF
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND TEMPERANCE SOCIETY,

BY THE

VEN. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.,

Canon of Westminster,

Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen,

And Rector of St. Margaret's.

(SPECIALLY REVISED BY THE PREACHER.)

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A NATION'S CURSE.

"Behold, I set before you a blessing and a curse."—DEUT. XI. 26.

IT is with deliberate purpose that I mean the sermon this evening to be almost exclusively a plain statement of plain facts. I wish it to be an appeal, not to the imagination, not to the emotions, but to the reason, to the sense of duty, to the conscience of Christians in a Christian land. If I say one word that is not true, I am guilty; if I consciously exaggerate a single argument, I am morally responsible; if I do so from ignorance, or from mistaken evidence, I hail any possible refutation of what I urge as a service to the sacred cause of truth. But, if the facts be facts, indisputable and for the most part even undisputed, and then if they do not speak to you for themselves, I know nothing else that can or will. If they do not carry with them their own fire; if they do not plead with you, clear as a voice from Sinai, in their barest and briefest reality, and spur you to seek redress—

"If not the face of men,
The sufferance of our souls, the times, abuse,
If these be motives weak—break off betimes,
And every man home to his idle bed."

Those who plead for Temperance reform are daily charged with exaggeration. Exaggeration is never right, never wise, even when moral indignation renders it excusable. But before you repeat that hackneyed and irrelevant charge, remember that there never was prophet or reformer yet, since time began, against whom the same charge has not been made. We have no need to exaggerate; our cause is

overwhelmingly strong in its moral appeal to unvarnished realities, and we have nothing to do but to set forth things as they are, till not only the serious and the earnest, but even the comfortable, even the callous, yes, even the careless and the selfish—unless they are content to forego altogether the name of patriot, and the name of Christian—shall be compelled to note them for very shame.

1. Begin, then, with the fact that the direct expenditure of the nation for intoxicating drinks is reckoned at £136,000,000 a year, and the indirect, which we are forced to pay from the results of drunkenness, at £100,000,000 more. Maintain, if you will, that alcohol is a harmless luxury; you still cannot deny that for the vast majority it is not a necessity. Whole races of men, the votaries of whole religions, do without it, and gain by its absence. From 20,000 prisoners in England it is cut off from the day of their imprisonment, and they are not the worse, but the stronger and the healthier from its withdrawal. There are some five million Total Abstainers in England, and the impartial statistics of insurance prove conclusively that longevity is increased by abstention from strong drink. The most magnificent feats of strength and endurance of which mankind has ever heard have been achieved without it. At the very best, then, it is a luxury. If it were not so, three Chancellors of the Exchequer would not have congratulated the nation on the diminution of revenue drawn from the sale of it; nor would a speech from the throne have expressed satisfaction at this loss of income. Being, then, at the best a luxury, even if no harm came from it, I ask you seriously, whether we can, in these days, bear the exhaustion which arises from this terrible drain on our national resources? We live in anxious times. The pressure of life, the intensity of competition, both in the nation itself and with other nations, is very severe. Of late two daily newspapers have been filled with correspondence which proves the state of middle-class society. One has given expression to the sorrows and struggles of thousand of clerks in our cities, and has told the dismal story of their hopeless and grinding poverty. The other has revealed with what

agonies of misgiving thousands of parents contemplate the difficulty of starting their sons in the crowded race in life. Can there be the shadow of a doubt that the nation would be better prepared for the vast growth of its population, and that the conditions of average life would be less burdensome, if we abandoned a needless, and therefore a wasteful, expenditure? Would not the position of England be more secure if that vast river of wasted gold were diverted into more fruitful channels?—if the $81\frac{1}{2}$ millions of bushels of grain (as much as is produced in all Scotland) which are now mashed into deleterious drink, were turned into useful food? If the 69 thousands of acres of good land now devoted to hops were used for cereals? If England were relieved from the burden of supporting the mass of misery, crime, pauperism, and madness which drunkenness entails? Even in this respect, as Sir Matthew Hale said two centuries ago, "*perimus licitis*," we are perishing by permitted things. A Chinese tradition tells us that when, 4,000 years ago, their Emperor forbade the use of intoxicants, heaven rained gold for three days. Looking at the matter on grounds simply economical—considering only the fact that the working classes drink, in grossly-adulterated beers and maddening spirits, as much as they pay in rent—considering that there is hardly a pauper in England who has not wasted on intoxicants enough to have secured him long ago a freehold house and a good annuity—I say that if the curse of drink were thoroughly expelled it would rain gold in England not for three but for many days.

2. We have assumed hitherto that intoxicating drinks are nothing in the world but a harmless luxury; but every man knows that they are not. The voice of science has laid it down unconditionally that all the young, and all who are in perfect health, do not need them, and are better without them. Many of the highest scientific authorities tell us further that even the moderate use of them is the cause of many painful disorders and thousands of premature deaths. In the middle classes the use of two wines—claret and sherry—is nearly universal; and even in the last few days the rival vendors of these wines have been telling the world that each

of them consists of strange concoctions which are the causes of gout and all sorts of gastric disorders. Further we know, by the universal experience of the world, that wherever drinking is nationally common, drunkenness becomes nationally ruinous. And for this reason. Alcohol is one of a number of lethal drugs which have the fatal property of creating for themselves a crave which in multitudes becomes an appetite; an appetite which strengthens into a vice; a vice which ends in disease; a disease which constitutes a crushing and degrading slavery. To myriads of human beings it creates a needless, an artificial, a physical temptation, which first draws, then drags, then drives as with a scourge of fire.

“ In their helpless misery blind,
A deeper prison and heavier chains they find,
And stronger tyrants.”

Aristotle said of human nature, generally, that “We are prone rather to excess than to moderation”; but this natural propensity, this fatal bias, this original sin, is infinitely strengthened when it works, not only as a moral impulse, but as a physical law. No drunkard, since time began, ever *meant* to be a drunkard. To be a drunkard means nothing less than awful shipwreck of mind and body; the curse of life; the agony of conscience; the obliteration of nobleness and hope. Why, then, are there 600,000 drunkards in England? Why is it that through drink we have seen “the stars of heaven fall, and the cedars of Lebanon laid low”?* The flood was scarcely dried before Noah, discovering drink, introduced into his own family, and among mankind, a curse and an infamy,

“ Which since hath overwhelmed and drowned
Far greater numbers on dry ground
Of wretched mankind, one by one,
Than e'er before the flood had done.”†

They who will make a young tiger their plaything must not be surprised if there be some to whom it will show, at last, a wild trick of its ancestors. In every nation where there

* Father Mathew.

† Samuel Butler: *Hudibras*.

is free temptation to drink there will be many drunkards, and for this reason, that drink induces a taste which is "neither hunger, nor thirst, nor pleasure, nor reasonable want, but a morbid impulse, an indefinable desire."

"Like the insane root,
It takes the reason prisoner."

3. Then, next, what does the prevalence of drunkenness involve? It means that to thousands life becomes a long disease. Solomon told us that truth 3,000 years ago. "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contention? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. At last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." *Delirium tremens*—that inconceivably awful and agonising illness—is but one of God's executioners upon excess. The fact that a nation is addicted to drink and drunkenness means that the health of myriads will be ruined; it means that myriads of children, with diseased bodies, fatuous minds, and depraved impulses, will be, in the awful language of an old preacher, "not born into the world, but damned into the world,"* as idiots, or cripples, or predestined drunkards; a curse to nations, a curse to their neighbours, and to themselves, a curse to the very ideal of humanity which they drag down and degrade, poisoning its very life-blood, and barring its progress to the goal of better days. O! Nations may enjoy their revelries; but the river of enjoyment flows into a sea of misery, and disease is only indulgence taken at a later stage.

4. Nor is it only the bodies of men that suffer, it is their souls. Powerless for his deliverance, the conscience of the drunkard is not powerless for his torture. Robert Burns, Charles Lamb, and Hartley Coleridge have uttered the cry of men who have thus been swept over the cataract. The Spartans, when they wished to turn their children from the shame of Intemperance, showed them the physical degradation of drunken Helots; but the physical results are nothing to the *moral* devastation, the abject servitude, the spiritual

* R. South.

catastrophe of the man who has given himself over to the bondage of drink. When he recovers from the degradation of the animal, it is to feel the anguish of a lost soul. That is the reason why, year by year, drink not only crowds the workhouses with paupers, and the jail with felons, and the asylum with lunatics, and the hospitals with disease; but also swells more than any other cause—swells week by week, and year by year—the list of those who through the awful gate of suicide rush, with rude insult, into the presence of their God. “The measure of alcohol consumed in a district,” said Baron Dowse, “is the measure of the degradation.” Whenever the drink tide rises highest, there, too, is the high-water mark of suicide, mortality and crime. Where-withal a man—or a nation—sinneth by the same shall he be punished.

5. Nor is this all. The curse does not stay with him who caused it. It spreads in concentric circles of ruin. The drunkard almost invariably drags down his wife and family into the lurid whirlpool of his own retribution. Go to some public house on Saturday night, between ten and twelve, when the miserable working man is pouring into the till of the publican, and the purse of the gin-distiller, the money which should clothe and feed his wife and little ones; see when the gin-palaces in our most pauperised districts are cleared at night, a scene which, for vileness, cannot be paralleled in any region of the world. Then follow the drunken man or drunken woman into the lair, which they call their home. Home? it is a Dantean hell of brutality and squalor, of which the very air reeks with abomination! “In former times the wife was usually the victim of her husband’s brutishness; now she becomes in innumerable cases the partner in his sin. In either case, be she victim or associate, no creature on earth so demands our pity.” While threats and blows resound in that curse-laden air, the children—the ragged, miserable, half starved, degraded children—the children who will grow up hereafter to recruit the ranks of the felon and the harlot huddle together in mute terror. “They do not cry: such children seldom do shed tears. Nature could never furnish a fountain to meet

such demands." Often they make their escape into cellar or chimney, or hide themselves under the rotten heap of rags or straw, and do not venture to creep out, half suffocated, till the drink maddened fiend whom they call "father" is away, or till he has slept off for a time the vitriol madness. And in most of our large towns there are whole streets, and alleys, and districts of such drunkards' homes—infamous streets which hide hundreds of blighted families, the disgrace of our civilisation and the disgrace of our Christianity. The only things which flourish there are the public houses, which confronting the minimum of virtue with the maximum of temptation, drain from the wretched neighbourhood its last life; and, like the fungus on the decaying tree, feed on the ruin which is their boon. We have heard much in these few days of "Horrible London," and of the bitter cry of its abject. What makes these slums so horrible? I answer, with the certainty and the confidence of one who knows, Drink! And what is the remedy? I tell you that every remedy you attempt will be a miserable failure; I tell the nation, with the conviction founded on experience, that there will be *no* remedy, till you save these outcasts from the temptations of drink. Leave the drink, and you might build palaces for them in vain. Leave the drink, and before a year was over your palaces would still reek with dirt and squalor, with infamy and crime. Of the trade in general, which ministers to this temptation, I will say nothing; but at least in such vile streets as these, whence, day and night, this bitter cry of abject cities rings in the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth, I should have thought that any man who believes in God, that any man who calls himself a Christian, would have been, not ashamed only, but *afraid* to swell those geysers of curse and ruin. In such districts, at any rate, I know not how they can be blind to the evils which spring from what they sell; or how they can fail to hear the stern words ringing in their ears—

"Fye, sirrah,

The evil that thou causest to be done,
That is thy means to live!"

They who will not see this must be left to their own con-

science, in that hour when she speaks, and we can be deaf no longer to her voice; but I ask every man concerned in such evils, which is best? which will they think best when, a few years hence, they face the hour of death and the day of judgment? to forego such tainted gains, or to go on contributing—inevitably contributing—to the wholesale manufacture of “Infancy that knows no innocence; of youth, without modesty or shame; of maturity that is mature in nothing but guilt and suffering; of blasted old age which is a scandal on the name we bear”?

6. But the tempted, the victims of drink—I ask you, do these men, these women, do these children, do these wretched districts, or do they not, deserve our pity and demand our efforts at reform? Is it, or is it not—surely the question is plain and pressing—our duty to content ourselves with clever epigrams and plausible sophisms, and to be infinitely tender to vested interests in the causes of human ruin—or, with stern effort and inflexible perseverance, to reduce an evil so colossal, to redeem men, our brothers, from a misery so deep as this?

7. Yet even now I have not come to the worst, or anything like the worst. For the abuse of drink, besides being, by unanimous testimony, a main cause of pauperism, disease, and madness, is also, by irresistible evidence, the main cause of crime; the all but exclusive cause of crimes of violence. I might quote the emphatic, the oft-repeated, the uncompromising testimony of almost every judge upon the bench. They have done their best to interpose between us and our degradation the purity of their ermine. They have said, for instance, that Saturday means “pay-day, drink-day and crime-day;” and that many a man “enters the door of a public house respectable and respected, and leaves it a felon.” On one occasion several instances at Liverpool came before Mr. Justice Mellor of a savagery so loathsome, of a callosity so bestial, of a dehumanisation so unutterable, that he spoke of drink, which in this country is the sole cause of such abnormal wickedness, in terms which might, one would have thought, arouse any country, however sunken. But I will confine

myself to the remarks made by one judge in one Cathedral city—by Mr. Justice Hawkins at the last Midsummer Assizes in Durham. They may be well known to you. Yet I will repeat them. It may be that the words, spoken so solemnly from the bench of justice, may derive yet further emphasis when they are solemnly repeated in the House of God. “When I come,” he said, “to look through the Calendar, and when I see the number of cases which have been committed under the influence of drink, I cannot help saying a word or two on that subject. Every day I live the more I think of the matter, and the more firmly do I come to the conclusion that the root of almost all crime is drink, that revolting tyrant which affects people of all ages, and of both sexes; young, middle-aged, and old; father and son, husband and wife, all in turn become its victims. It is drink which, for the most part, is the immediate and direct cause of those fearful quarrels in the public streets at night which terminate in serious mischief, or some other outrage. It is drink which, for the most part, is the incentive to crimes of dishonesty. It is drink which causes homes to be impoverished, and traces of the misery which it causes are to be found in many a cottage, denuded of the commonest articles of comfort and necessity, which have gone to the pawnshop simply to provide for that hideous tyrant, drink. I believe, knowing what I do, and having by experience had my attention drawn to it, that ” (hear it, gentlemen! hear it, Christians! hear it, ministers of God in this Cathedral which stands at the very centre of all our history!)—“I believe that nine-tenths of the crime in this country is engendered inside the doors of public houses.”

8. Will anyone venture to say—for there is no end to the subterfuges of minds brazened by custom—that these are mere opinions? Well, if you want, not opinions, but hard, glaring, patent facts, untinged with any opinion whatever—facts black, rugged, comfortless, and horrible—facts in all their ghastly nakedness, denuded of all vesture of human thought and of human emotion in narrating them—it will be the most flagrant hypocrisy to say that such facts are not forthcoming for you, when every day and every newspaper

teems with them. Not one single day passes over one single town in England without some wretchedness, crime, and horror caused by drink. Week by week, in the *Alliance News*, is published a ghastly list, called "Fruits of the Traffic." It is not invented; it is not concocted; it is not garbled. It consists simply of cuttings from multitudes of perfectly neutral newspapers, the records of police courts and sessions. I cannot enter into these. The human hand can perpetrate, the human heart can conceive, the human frame can suffer horrors of which the human lips refuse to speak. Take the evidence of two weeks alone; the blessed week in which we listen to the melody of angel songs, and the first week of the glad New Year. For twopence you may purchase the record of events which drink caused for those two weeks in 1882 in England only. It fills a large double columned pamphlet of thirty-six pages. Thirty-six pages of what—in this our Christian England, in Christmas week? Thirty-six pages of stabbing, cutting, wounding; of brutal assaults on women, on children; of public peril and accident; of deaths, sudden, violent, preventible; of homicide; of parricide; of matricide; of infanticide; of suicide; of every form of murder. In four hours on one evening in one city 36,803 women were seen going into public houses! The results formed a tragedy so squalid, and so deadly, as to sicken the heart like the impressions of a nightmare, whose very memory we loathe. Read that hideous list, and then prattle, and lisp, and sneer about exaggeration; read that list, and then, if any man can still quote Scripture for the purpose of checking Temperance Reformers, or of encouraging our immense capacities for delay and indifference, I can only say of such a man, that

" Though in the sacred place he stands,
 Uplifting consecrated hands,
 Unworthy are his lips to tell
 Of Jesu's martyr-miracle;
 Thy miracle of life and death,
 Thou Holy One of Nazareth!"

9. And is all this to take place all over England always? It was so again last year, it has been so for many years

next year again, and the next, and the next, are we, in those two weeks of blessedness, to have the whole country, from John o' Groat's to Land's End, deluged and disgraced by this filthy stream of blood, and misery, and crime? Is *this* to be the prerogative of our national morality; and are we to go on, leaving these crimes, and the sources of them, and the temptations to them unchecked, till the pit swallow us and them?

10. I must end; but I must ask you not to suppose that I have brought before you one half of the evil, or one tenth of the motives which should stir us up to counteract it for Christ's sake, and in Christ's Name. I have not shown you, as I could most awfully show you, how, by introducing our accursed firewaters, we have destroyed and exterminated whole races of mankind, until our footsteps round the world, instead of being "beautiful upon the mountains," have been as footsteps dyed in blood. I have not shown you the extent to which drink neutralises the work of the school, the library, and the Church, so that it is the very chief barrier against the efforts of religion. I have not shown you how, in our great dependencies, it has gone far to turn into a curse the blessing of our rule, so that, to take but one instance, there rises louder and louder, from our great Empire of Hindostan, the agonising cry that her children were once sober, and that we, by our beloved gin and spirits—those good creatures of God—are rapidly turning them into a nation of drunkards. I have not told how this curse transforms into a bane what would otherwise be the great national boons of larger wealth, and higher wages, and shortened hours. And how long do you mean all this to continue? How long are our working classes to be hemmed in with glaring temptations, and their dwellings—in the teeth of their wishes, to the conflagration of their interests—to be ringed by public houses on all sides as with a cordon of fire? How long is the reeling army of our drunkards to be recruited by those who are now our innocent sons and daughters? We pity the gladiators, and the poet cried, "Arise ye, Goths, and glut your ire!" And will you not pity the widows, who are made widows by drink; and the orphans who are father-

less ; and they whose blood is poisoned by it ; and the women who are kicked and burnt by drunken sons and brothers, and husbands ; and the little children who are killed, or who die so slowly that none call it murder ? Will you wait till the accumulated miseries of souls, which might have been innocent,—

“ Plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of the taking-off ;
And Pity, like a naked, new-born babe,
Striding the blast, on heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow these horrid deeds in every eye
That tears shall drown the wind ? ”

And if you are careless about all this misery ; if selfishness, and custom, and the gains of brewers and publicans, weigh with you against all this evidence ; if you see no need to blush for all this national disgrace ; if it rouses in your heart no feeling as a patriot, as a Christian, or as a man ;—are you not at least *afraid*, lest, if we suffer these things to go on unchecked, a voice should at last cry “ Arise ! ” to the awful angel of retribution ; and lest, when he stands with drawn sword over a country so guilty and so apathetic, the cup of our iniquity and of our drunkenness being full, there should be none to say to him, “ Put up thy sword within its sheath ” ?

11. But if all that I have said admit of no possibility of refutation, how could I possibly urge any more effectual plea for an agency which, like our beloved Church of England Temperance Society, has, with such holy earnestness and such conspicuous moderation, been labouring now for twenty-one years to alleviate a nation's misery, to avert a nation's curse ? It needs special support. Help, I entreat you, with warm hearts and liberal hands, to avert the national catastrophe, which would be involved in the failure or exhaustion of a Society so noble and so indispensable ! Let England, if not for very shame, yet at least out of gratitude and in self-defence, provide the Society with the £25 000 which are required. For if Temperance Societies have done nothing else, yet at least, in the words of Lord

Shaftesbury, "but for them we should have been by this time plunged in such a flood of drunkenness, immorality, and crime, as would have rendered the whole country uninhabitable." Will you then be callously supine, will you be immorally acquiescent, about the fate of your country? Your fathers did a thousand noble deeds to put down immorality and wrong; to defend the cause of innocence, and to smite the hoary head of oppression. Your fathers, by the loveliest act in the long annals of English history, swept away the slave trade. With quiet perseverance, which would see no discouragement; with dauntless courage, which would quail before no opposition; with illuminated insight, which pierced the sophistry of interested defenders; with the true freedom which would not be shackled by unhallowed interests—they fought to the end that glorious battle! Will you be unworthy of them? Will you do nothing to deliver England and all her dependencies from a deeper misery and a deadlier curse? Yonder is the grave of Wilberforce; there is the statue of Sir Fowell Buxton; there is the monument of Granville Sharpe. Oh, that God would hear our prayers, and out of the gallant band of godly men who fought that battle

"Of those three hundred grant but three
To make a new Thermopylæ!"

12. Englishmen and Christians, if such facts do not stir you up, I ask, could they do so were they even in the thunder's mouth? It is not in the thunder, it is by the still small voice of history and experience, that God speaks to the reason and to the conscience. It is not by the lightning-flash that He would have us read His will, but by the quiet light that shows all things in the slow history of their ripening. When He speaks in the thunder and the lightning, by the tornado and the earthquake, He speaks in retribution then. And what is retribution but the eternal law of consequences? If you cannot see God's warnings against drink, if you cannot read in the existing condition of things His displeasure and our shame, if you cannot see it in the marriage-tie broken and dishonoured—in sons and daughters ruined—in the peace of families laid waste—in the

work of the Church hindered—in whole districts blighted—in thousands and tens of thousands of souls destroyed :— If you cannot see it in the records of crime, and murder, and outrage, and madness, and suicide ; in the fathers who, in these very months, through drink, have slain their sons ; and the sons who, through drink, have slain their fathers ; and the mothers, who, for drink, have sacrificed the lives of their little ones upon the breast—what will ever make you see it ? Men of England, if these things do not wring your heart, and fire your zeal, what do you expect ? Can the letters glare more plainly on the palace wall of your power ? Are you waiting till there fall on England the same fate which, for their sins, has fallen in turn on Assyria, and Greece, and Rome, and Egypt, and Carthage, and Jerusalem, and Tyre ? They perished ; sooner or later all guilty nations perish, by sudden catastrophe, or by slow decay.

“ The sword of heaven is not in haste to smite,
Nor yet doth linger,”

but when it does smite, it is apt to smite once and smite no more. Will you be so complacent over your epigrams, and your vested interests and your Biblical criticism, when vengeance leaps at last upon the stage, and strikes sore strokes, and pity shall no longer avert the blow ? You are Christians ; yes, but see that you have not been admitted into a holier sanctuary only to commit a deeper sacrilege ! Why, had you been *Pagans* these very same arguments ought to be irresistible to you ! To millions of Pagans they have been so. The sobriety of China was due to Confucius. The sobriety of India and of Burmah are due to Buddhah. The sobriety of vast regions of Asia and Africa was due to Mahomet. In the day of judgment, shall not Confucians, shall not Buddhists, shall not Mohammedans, rise up in judgment against this generation and condemn it, for they abstained from strong drink at the bidding of Confucius, Buddhah, and Mahomet, and behold a greater than these is here ! Ah, if the voice of all these tempted, suffering, perishing miserable souls be nothing to you—if the voice of your country be nothing to you—yet, if you be Christians, listen to the voice

of Christ, pleading with you in the pathetic accents of myriads of the little ones that it is not His will, that it is utterly against His will, that His Cross and Passion should be thus rendered of none effect to multitudes for the very least of whom Christ died. "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not" (when now, at any rate, you have no excuse for not knowing it), "doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? and He that keepeth thy soul doth not He know it? And shall not He render to every man according to his works?"

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