

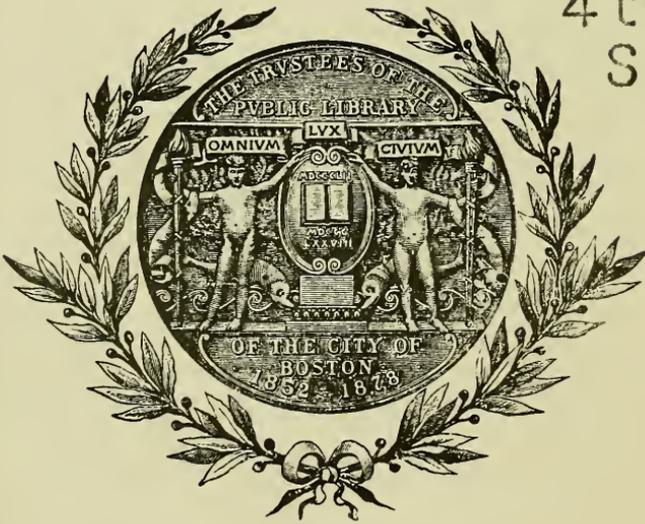


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# TEMPERANCE AND PURITY:

WHAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE CAN  
DO FOR THEM.

BY

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BOSTON.

c

B. H.

Dec. 17, 1892

“The object of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity ; and all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to unite and co-operate with it for that purpose.” — ARTICLE I. of the *By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association.*

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## WHAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE CAN DO FOR TEMPERANCE AND PURITY.

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[An address given to the Young People's Meetings held in Boston, Mass.]

I AM glad to speak on this subject, — glad for two reasons: (1) because I am so convinced that Temperance and Purity lie at the foundation of all strong, noble life; and (2) because there is so much that young people can do for them.

It is not luxurious homes, nor costly dress, nor lavish pleasures, nor all the rich means which give command of these, which make a happy life or a really noble society. "The life is more than meat," — yes, more than all life's gear and trappings and externals. It is *the life*, the deep inner being and self, which dominates all else; and right at the foundation of that deep inner life lie these two things, — Temperance and Purity.

I speak of Temperance first, because it lies most directly in our way whenever we talk of nobler life or nobler society. The sins against Purity lie deeper in, are less palpable, — more subtle too, and more difficult to reach. But this terrible vice of intemperance lies right upon the surface. You do not need that I should go through the well-known figures to tell you how many per cent of those who fill our poorhouses and prisons and lunatic asylums have come there through drinking. You do not need to go to such places in order to have the evil and the curse brought home to you. You cannot pass along the streets without seeing something of it; you see it through the

open doors of the dram-shops and in the coarse faces of the drinkers loafing about. And here and there you keep coming upon it in homes that you know, or know of. It is less so, indeed, in this country than in some others. It is far less here than in England, both in public and in private. I do not see one drunken man in the streets in Boston or New York where I used to see twenty in Manchester or Liverpool;<sup>1</sup> and there is less private drinking here, too. And still, in how many homes is this the "skeleton in the closet," hidden out of sight perhaps, prayed against with many secret tears, but still there, with its clammy touch of hopeless and ever deepening degradation.

Well, but *what can you do about it?* You feel so powerless! Yes, I know that feeling of utter powerlessness, — of wishing one could do something, but not knowing what in the world to do. And yet you young people are not so powerless as you think. If you only wish and long to do, you can find something that you can do now and much that you can gradually do as you grow older. I do not mean any one patent way of doing away with the evil; I am afraid there is not any one patent way. But in the quiet, steady fighting against all this drink evil, and undermining it, and putting something better in its place, — in all this you may have your part *if you want to do*, — yes, and a stronger part than you realize, and a part that will keep growing.

But now, to speak of practical ways. I wonder whether the first thing I have to suggest will seem whimsical to you. I do not think it is, because at the root of any

<sup>1</sup> Preparing this for the press, in May, 1892, after my return to England, I am glad to say that this statement is true of what *was* rather than of what *is*. I have been greatly struck with the improvement in England, nothing like so many drunken people about as I used to see twenty years ago.

doing at all must lie the wish, the longing to do something ; the feeling that the evil is so terrible that you *must* do something. So the very first thing I would put to you is to face the evil, not to try to shirk the sight of it, not to turn away from looking at it when it comes in your way. I remember how this came to me years ago. In the great city where I was living, there were two ways to one of the places to which I had often to go. The shortest way, the direct way, lay through one of the worst quarters of the city, something such a place as "Seven Dials" in London or the "Bowery" in New York, — full of repulsive sights of poverty and degradation, and especially of drunkenness. And only a little way round, there was a comparatively pleasant way through good streets and squares. This was the way I usually took ; till one day it suddenly came to me that *I must not do it*, that it was a kind of cowardice, that Jesus Christ would rather have gone through the worse streets, even if it was painful. It came like "a word of the Lord" to me, — I imagine that is about how the Lord does speak to all of us, — and ever since it has seemed to me one of the principles of life. For it is so easy to choose the brighter ways, to avoid the painful sights of want and sin that cower in the by-ways of the city. So I would say to you young people : Go the direct way ; face whatever may be there. If your way leads you beside sorrow and want and the poor bruised lives that have "fallen among thieves," suffer it to be so ; do not "pass by on the other side." Of course it is painful ; but it is a good pain. That is the kind of pain Christ felt. It is the kind of pain that has to be at the heart of all real Christ-like helpfulness, at the heart of trying to lift up the fallen out of any of these terrible evils that drag down human lives.

This first matter, however, touches the wanting to do something for temperance and purity rather than what to

do. Coming now to this, I want, as my second point, to put it to you young people, how much you have in your power in your own homes and among your circle of friends. I do not mean by any preaching, or lecturing those about you, after the fashion that I have sometimes read of what are called "ministering children" in story books. I do not even mean by becoming "teetotalers," and setting an example of avowed total abstinence. I used to believe that this was the one great remedy for intemperance, and that to persuade men to it was the special temperance work that was most needed. I must confess that I have lost faith in that; but for those of you who think so still, all I can say is, hold to it openly, fearlessly. But what I am most anxious about is that those who believe in total abstinence should not feel that that is all that can be done, and that those who do not believe in it should not therefore think that there is nothing they can do. That is not so. You may not be able to believe that these things are poisons, and that they ought to be totally and absolutely disused; and yet you may be sure — as I am — that the use of them is a great deal too common. It is not so free as it was in the days of our fathers, but it is still a great deal too free; their use is beyond all bounds of a noble simplicity in living, even when not carried to what the world calls excess. Many people seem to fancy that there can be no enjoyment, no hospitality without wine. That idea wants doing away. All this too common use, just as an element of sociality or hospitality, all this apparatus of drinking at parties and on social occasions, — I think it is a perilous, mischievous thing. Now it is exactly in all this that you young people can not only do much, but can do almost everything. For it is you who set the fashion of the social world, and you can have it very much as you will.

If you, young man, say to your father that you mean

to have that little party of your friends next month, or that college-spread that is to come by-and-by, without wine, you may be pretty sure your father will be glad.

If you, my dear young lady, when that wedding is coming off, — if you will quietly set down your foot that at the wedding feast there shall be no champagne, why, you know you can have it so!

Or the question will come up about that little club some of you are getting up, or for that excursion into the country, or for this supper, or that entertainment, — constantly this question keeps coming up, of having wine: — VOTE AGAINST IT!

And will any one be hurt? Yes, a few fast and giddy young people will sneer, perhaps. But every one whose opinion is worth having, will say, "Well done!" and will respect you for your principle and still more for having the courage to stand by it. And you, young man, will have taken a position which will make you a little stronger for the right, a little readier in speaking up for the right all through your life. All this has nothing to do with teetotalism! Take your stand for the sake of a manlier, purer simplicity in living. Yes, set yourselves for *that*, not in this thing only, but all through. I tell you, modern life is having the heart eaten out of it by all this display and catering to self-indulgence and measureless luxury; and I know no better service that young men or women can do for their society and their time, than quietly, without any affectation of puritanism, but as doing the right and proper thing, to set themselves for a little simpler living, and especially to begin with this most dangerous of luxuries and simply have nothing to do with it.

Then for a third point, applying especially to young men, — though you young women may have a most helpful part in encouraging them to it, — but you, young men, at

twenty-one you are citizens. Then comes your responsibility; and I want you to face it like earnest men, and not merely to think of it as of being able to vote with this or that party, but as of having your part to do for making your city and your country better. Have the hurrahing and the processioning and the torch-carrying if you will, only that is not how the world is going to be redeemed and this old city come a little nearer the kingdom of God! I tell you there is an immense deal to be done in a great community like this, an immense deal which by being rightly done or wrongly done may tell for sober, orderly, temperate living, or directly the other way. Look, for one thing, at the enormous mischief of the present system of public drinking places; and for another, at the way in which the organized liquor interest stands against every attempt at purer city government. I am no Prohibitionist, but I do not therefore believe in letting things go on as they are. Only a year or two ago, when I was asked to join in a prohibition movement, I said that I believed that if half the energy and work which is thrown into the movement for new laws on the subject were put into making the best of the laws we have, Boston might be a model city. There is the struggle for to-day and for to-morrow and many to-morrows, — to have our laws obeyed, to prevent men from making a gain and traffic out of temptation and vice; and I want you to be prepared, as soon as your voting time comes, — now, if it is come, — to take your part in this struggle, and to let it be the intelligent and fearless part of Christian citizens!

But now, what shall I say about the second part of my subject, — Purity, and all this dark shadow of impurity? It is so terrible, — all that is covered by that word impurity in our modern world, — so terrible and yet so subtle, so difficult to grapple with, so painful even to speak of. One is tempted to pass it by on the other side.

But that is not possible. You may ignore it, but you cannot be ignorant of it. It stares you in the face in the shape of lewd pictures on the theatre notice-boards, just as near indecency as they dare go. You cannot take up a newspaper but you come upon the tokens of it, — divorces, ruined characters and lives, scandals and hints of profligacy, a slimy ooze of foul and crawling lusts that keep sinking into those bottomless depths of hopeless vice which are earth's most real hell.

See how the significance of all this has come home to me. In the different places where I have passed my forty years of ministry, and tried to help men toward strong Christian life, I have seen many successive sets of boys grow up to manhood. I have known them first as bright, happy, wholesome lads, and my heart has gone out to them, thinking of all they would have to face in the world; and, oh, how I have longed to see those lads grow up strong, true-hearted men! And some have done. I know nothing that has so touched me when I have gone back among my old parishes in Sheffield and Manchester, as to meet the warm grip and the clear open look of many of those little boys of twenty or thirty years ago, for whom I had longed with such trembling, now true-hearted, useful men with children of their own. Ah! but how many have I known — and which of you elders, here, has not — who gradually changed? I watched them passing out of boyhood, losing the bright face and the open look, getting among fast companions, putting on not manly self-control, but only mannish indulgences, and gradually mannish vices. And I have known how fathers warned and reasoned with them, and mothers prayed and clung to them and tried so hard to keep them to the right, but could not. And so they went down and down, until some came to be such as Shakespeare says —

“Can smile and smile and be a villain,”

and some sank into early and unhonored graves; and most, perhaps, have grown into such common men, men, who, though no public shame may dog their steps, — such as awaits the woman who should sin a hundredth part as much, — will yet bear to their dying day the impress of a low, coarse, fallen life.

Oh, what a pitiful weakening of the world! And that is the story of how human lives are growing up — and, alas, growing down — in every city. But now what can be done about it, especially what can you young people do about it?

Not very much in any collective, organized fashion; but so much individually, personally. Much, therefore, of what I have said about helps to temperance, applies as strongly to this matter of purity. All that can strengthen character, give life warm, vivid interests outside of self; all that can make women more independent; all that can make life simpler and less costly, and so marriage less difficult; all that can elevate women's requirement of character in the men whom they will marry, and the public requirement for the men who shall be promoted to honor; and all that can purify literature and the drama, and make the law more stringent and effective against those who would make gain of vice, — these are the things which make for purity in the city.

And can you young people do nothing in all this? Nothing? Why, almost the whole thing rests with you! Not, perhaps, what the city shall be this year or next, but what this city shall be in twenty or forty years, depends almost entirely upon what you young people are and do. Yes; and not upon what you will be and do *then*, thirty or forty years hence; but what you will be and do *now*. For, one year now counts for ten! What you shall be and the city shall be forty years hence depends upon what you are and do for the next four.

Yes, look at these helps I have just outlined, one by one, and in every one the work rests most of all with you young people.

(1) At the heart and centre of all is character, — pure, clean, manly and womanly character. And is not *to-day* “the day of salvation” in that? Will any one call it “salvation” for a man to go on sinning, — living a low, coarse, evil life for sixty or seventy years and then manage to get what little scrap of soul is left allowed to go to heaven? I suppose some people would call that “salvation.” But we Unitarians do not! What! let a candle burn down till it is almost guttering in the socket, and then blow it out and call *that* “saving the candle?” Save this life, this character that is in you, now. Oh, young men, keep yourselves pure! Now, while you have a chance of shaping your life the better way, do not throw it from you. Do not be misled by the miserable sophism, that because these passions are in your nature there is no harm in gratifying them. I know how widely that is urged, but there is not one grain of truth in it. This matter of Purity is one in which the deep real truth is only to be seen on the longer view of human life; but there it is clear as daylight. “Keep thyself pure” is not only the law of Christ, it has been the voice of all the wisest thinkers, looking to what is morally good for man, and it is what every trainer for a boat-race or a foot-ball match puts just as strongly as the moralists. And do not be misled by that other miserable sophism, that there is something strengthening to the character in experience of evil. Knowledge of evil you cannot help, alas! if you live in the world. But there is the knowledge of the man who has steeped and fouled his soul in it, and there is the knowledge of the man who has resisted it, and walked amidst it with pure, upright, pitying strength. Do you need me to tell you

which is the most strengthening way of these two? Young men, all the real nobleness of life is rooted not in self-indulgence but in self-control. Keep yourselves pure, then, — pure from the start. Say not it cannot be done! It *has* been done. Whole races have done it! Read what Cæsar and Tacitus, looking with the eyes of men accustomed to the profligacy of Rome, say of those Saxon and Germanic peoples of which our English-speaking race is the strongest outgrowth. "They live," says Tacitus, "under the influence of a secure chastity. . . . Nor does any German smile on this vice, nor apologize for it by calling it 'the way of the world.'" Purity *is* possible; and though it be sometimes like the "plucking out of the right eye," it is worth it. Resist the beginnings of impurity. Keep pure in heart. It is from idle and impure imaginings that the most terrible sins flow. Do you say, "Who can help his thoughts?" Old parson Gadsby used to say, "You may not be able to keep a bird from lighting on your head, but you can keep it from building its nest there." Keep head and heart occupied with better things. That was another distinct point I made: —

(2) To give life eager, vivid interests outside of self. Is not that something for young people? A man of sixty said to me a while ago, "I have never cared for anything but business all my life, and now I don't know how!" No; but if that man had gone to some one when he was twenty, and said, "Teach me your interest in plants or birds or stars, or in history, or in working for the city; or, at any rate, let me help you and be with you in it, that I may have a chance to be interested," would not life have been better for that man? Would he have been so likely to use its leisure in mere amusement, and to have been tempted, as his passions grew, into the base, evil pleasures that leave a bad taste in the mouth through life? No! I believe that a very large part of the dissipation

there is, arises from life being so uninteresting; let the mind go without its own interests and the body will thrust in its appetites. Young people, have something to do, something outside of business and work; and only do it hard enough and you will take an interest in it before long, never fear!

(3) And close on this follows that other point I spoke of in regard to temperance: Stand for simpler living, — less costly, less luxurious living! Does not this touch purity at many a point? Does not thoughtful self-control and self-denial in eating and drinking make the will stronger over every indulgence and every appetite? And besides, how much of vice among men springs, or is made more confirmed, by the difficulty of marrying, by the expense of it? The innermost safeguard of all, for purity, is true, real love; but who does not know how the natural manly and womanly instincts of affection are hindered, thwarted, thrown all awry by the conventional extravagance of living? How can numbers of young men of the middle class marry, now-a-days, in face of the scale of living which is considered respectable? Yet, need it be so? Why, it need not be so for a day, if only you young people would have a little more courage. If only you will give up expecting to start where your fathers and mothers leave off; if you will not be ashamed to live in small quarters, and will believe in *work*, and in doing for yourselves and one another, then marriage need not be any impossibility. Do not wait till youth is over and love's fresh joy is faded and your way is made; make it together, and you will find life blessed and enriched far more than by great wealth. That way, lies one help toward more purity in modern life.

Then, there are some ways in which young women especially can help. Every step toward greater independence for women, toward more self-reliance and more self-

respect; every way opened for women to be able to rely upon themselves; every girls' club or friendly society for drawing those who do so work and rely upon themselves into closer, more sisterly association and helpfulness,—everything of that kind is a help toward social purity, a help against the temptations of want, of loneliness, and often of vanity, by which so many in our cities are dragged down. These are all things that you young women can have a hand in. But what I think is wanted of you, most of all, is to insist upon a higher standard of purity in men. Why should there be one standard for women and quite a different one for men? I want to see the day when, in society, women will treat a loose man with something of the reprobation which they would show in a moment to a fallen woman. I want to see the day when women will claim the same purity in any man they would accept for husband, as the most profligate man requires in the woman he would make his wife. I do not say that day is near; but if it ever comes it will come by you younger women taking that stand; and if it ever does come, it will be like a new birth alike for womanhood and manhood.

And so, as you grow older the way will keep opening for more and more that you can do; but you must begin it all *now!* Begin it now in the books you read, in the companions you choose, in the amusements you go to. Choose the good; only go to the good. When things are doubtful, let your rule be to “keep well on the right side.” It is you younger folk who, more than any others, can purify the theatre. Who cares much what we older people say of this or that play? But if *you* set your faces against anything even shady or doubtful, *that counts!*

Also, when now and then the city does something toward purifying the theatres or closing drinking-places, or lays a strong hand on gambling, or stops some brutal

exhibition or sport, do not you sneer at it; do not you take the too common tone of cavilling at it as puritanism. We do not want puritanism, but we do want purity; and we not only want it in private action, but as far as public law can help it on, we want it that way too.

Oh, friends,—all you young men and maidens who stand facing life and longing for some greatness and worth in life, and thinking sometimes that all that was in the past and not in these trite common ways of to-day,—oh, friends, there never was a greater time for noble living, in the name of God, than now!

“You need not quit for cloistered cell  
Your neighbor, and your work farewell,  
Nor strive to wind yourself too high  
For sinful man beneath the sky.”

You do not want the monk's cell or the monk's garb. You no more want to be separate from the common throbbing life of your time, than Christ was. But in the midst of all this life you want to live in a kind and fearless simplicity, doing your work as your service to God and man, rejoicing in such pleasures as befit the pure in heart, full of helpful kindness to those around, and strong for the conflict of the right.

And would you know, in one great word and name, where is the spirit and the leadership for all this nobler life? It is here, in Jesus Christ.











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