

TEETOTALISM TESTED BY SCRIPTURE.

THE question of sin, in one shape or another, has, from the first, agitated men's minds. It could not be otherwise. For God erects a tribunal in the conscience of all,—even of the Gentiles who had not His written testimony. (Rom. ii.) Philosophy gave neither solution to the problems of the intellect, nor relief to the anxieties of the heart; for as it could not rise to the Infinite Source of all good, so it did not dare to descend to the depth of the sinner's need. Evading the difficulties as long as was possible, it ended at last with denying all truth as to either. "The world *by wisdom* knew not God;" and where He is unknown, so is sin in its source, its nature and its doom.

On the other hand, the family of faith have ever had a certain knowledge of God, and therefore of themselves. This gradually increased from the word of judgment on the Serpent, till the Seed came to whom the promise was made. Thus the knowledge, though true and received with a divine conviction, was necessarily partial, as indeed the revelation was, till, in these last days, God spake by His Son, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person. In Him, specially in His death, the real character of every thing was made manifest. There the badness of man, set on by

Satan's craft, was met and overcome by the goodness of God. The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. There is no veil, as there once was in Judaism. With the cross it could not co-exist, but was rent from top to bottom. And if the holy light of God displays what the sinner is in his wants and wretchedness, it cannot but display the ample provision which God has made in the blood of His own Lamb. Thus is the poor believer taught what sin is by what it has cost the Son of God; and he adores as he sees that where sin has abounded grace did much more abound.

Hence the distance between the wisest unbeliever and the least instructed believer in their thoughts about sin. To the one, Jesus is nothing; he may admire, and ask what is truth, but, like Pilate, he goes out without waiting for an answer. To the other, Jesus is all, Jesus is truth, and he knows it to his peace and blessing. The former is satisfied with stepping into the troubled waters of Bethesda—with a reformation of man as he is. The latter sees in sin, not sickness only, but moral death, and therefore can rest in nothing short of the quickening power of the Son of God. He knows that for faith is reserved the resurrection of life, the complement of the spiritual resurrection which is already enjoyed. Alas! he knows too that those who hear not the Saviour's voice have not life, and cannot escape the judgment which shall be executed by and by. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true: and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus

Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." (1 John v. 19, 20.)

Now, the Teetotal system, however modified, will be found to offend against these fundamental truths. Having a low estimate of sin, it presents as low a remedy. Even as to the single evil with which it seeks to deal, it barely skims the surface. It does not, it cannot touch the heart within, and so it wreaks its vengeance upon the liquors without. Pharisaism washed the hands, Teetotalism washes the lips. But the same word of the Lord detects the inadequacy of both. "Hearken unto me, every one of you, and understand: there is *nothing* from *without* a man that, entering into him, *can* defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark vii. 14-16.) The entire spring of moral action, the heart, is corrupt before God. What man *is*, taints what he *does*. Hence, while the human method is to cut off this and that, the divine is, first of all, to make the tree good. If that be done, good fruit is sure to follow: if not done, the more men work about it they only get more bad fruit.

It is a new life which the sinner requires as the starting point; not a step Godward can be taken previously. But it is precisely this which the Gospel proclaims at once, without money and without price. The gift, the free gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. And God will own no way, no truth, no life, no Saviour but His Son. Therefore, to occupy men with a Teetotal pledge, is in fact to divert them at best with a quack medicine, and this, not for the root of the disease, but for a

particular symptom—to divert them, I say, from the Gospel, which is as efficacious a cure in the drunkard's case as in all others. For it is the power of God unto every one that believeth.

Since the days of Cain, man has never wanted some new or revived invention wherewith to patch up his outcast condition. If Teetotalism, then, had come forward merely as a medical discovery, or even as a branch of philanthropy, it might have passed unnoticed save by those whom it concerns. But seeing that, in its grossest form, it taunts the servants of Christ with their vain efforts, and professes to outdo the Gospel; seeing that, in its least offensive shape, it claims Scriptural authority, and aspires to be the pioneer and the handmaid of the Gospel, the subject calls for a passing notice.

The Christian reads the Old Testament. He finds that wine intoxicated Noah and Lot, (Gen. ix. xix,) and that it afterwards afforded occasion for frequent and solemn remonstrance. (Prov. xx. xxiii. Is. v. xxviii., &c.) Again, he finds wine brought as a natural comfort to Abraham and Isaac, (Gen. xiv. xxvii,) and often so treated, literally as well as figuratively. (Deut. xiv. Ps. civ. Prov. ix. xxx. 6. Cant. *passim*, &c.) He sees in the New Testament neither contradiction nor difficulty. The Lord commenced His miracles by making water into wine, (John ii.) was invidiously compared with His forerunner because He abstained not, (Luke vii.) and made *bread and wine* (*which John the Baptist never used*)* to be the chosen, constant memorial of His dying love till He come again, the symbol also of our communion with each other:

* Will it be said that the use of either is, abstractedly, wrong? Was John the Baptist more pure than his Lord and Saviour? Note well, too, that he abstained from bread as well as from wine. Are we, therefore, to abandon either, or both?

Finally, the Holy Ghost more than once dwells on the end of the drunkard, (1 Cor. vi. Gal. v.) corrects the unhallowed licence of the Corinthian church at the Lord's Supper, (1 Cor. xi.) and warns believers, especially such as were prominent, against excess in daily life. (Eph. v. 1 Tim. iii. Titus ii.) At the same time, He takes pains (1 Tim. v. 23) to remove the scrupulousness of a devoted young servant of Christ, and enjoins the use of a little wine, rather than water, for his stomach's sake and often infirmities. So graciously does God deign to interest Himself even in the bodily weakness and wants of those who love Him! The conclusion is irresistible. Total abstinence, as a *general* rule, has not, nor ever had, divine sanction. It is a device at issue with the plain facts and doctrine of Scripture; and this as to Christians no less than as to Jews. In the Old Testament *yayin*,) and in the New Testament *olvos*—that is, the ordinary words for “wine” in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures—are used both in a good and in a bad connection; because the moral evil lay not in the thing itself, nor in its use, but in its abuse. There were different kinds of wine then, (Neh. v. 18,) as there are now. But not a single text intimates a particular sort of *yayin* which could not inebriate. Nay, more: what Scripture does say, disproves the fancy, as the sequel abundantly shows. Thus, Num. vi. 3 plainly marks off *yayin* as *fermented grape-juice*, and that in the vinous as distinguished from the acetous stage; excluding other fermented drinks, vinegar, unfermented grape-liquors, as well as the solid fruit of the vine. We who adhere to the regular sense of the word are not bound to produce specific proofs; we are entitled to take it in the

same sense everywhere, unless positive cause be shown to the contrary. But those who affirm that in certain places the word has a different meaning, are, in each instance, bound to give Scriptural reasons adequate to produce conviction. This they can never do. We deny their affirmation: upon them falls the burden of proof.*

Not to anticipate, however, the Temperance Reformers may be divided in twain. One party consider that alcoholic liquors are essentially poisonous† and therefore evil as a beverage; that in Scripture times there were two distinct genera of wine, &c.,—the one unfermented and a blessing, the other fermented and a curse. But the moderate own that the use of alcohol is not in itself sinful; that inspired men, and even Christ Himself, did not abstain; that the *habitual* use of fermented beverages may be sanctioned by the Bible: still they plead that, though lawful, it is not expedient. It is plain that the latter system destroys the former. Among themselves the difference is keenly felt, if we may judge by the unusual acrimony of their recriminations. The partisans of expediency pronounce the doctrine of the ultra-tee-totalers to be “preposterous and pestiferous lucubrations,” “mischievous error,” and “modern delusion,” and hear in return that, in its present shape, their theory is “an absurd and blasphemous abomination, and the sooner it is

* Hence the fallacy of reasoning upon such words as “Pagan,” “Knave,” &c., which are known to have shifted their meaning. This cannot be assumed as to *yayin*. Besides, the alleged parallel does not hold good. When “Pagan” was first used, it *had not* the sense of “idolator;” whereas, when *yayin* is first used in Scripture, it *has* the sense of “fermented grape-liquor.” (See Gen. ix. 21; xix. 32-35.)

† Writers on Toxicology include alcohol in the list. But so the ablest consider the chloride of sodium, or common salt. See Taylor on Poisons, pages 2, 3, 291. Is then the use of *salt*, as a condiment of food, evil or immoral?—The same principle applies to *vinegar*.

universally scouted and scorned, *the better*—"a fraud and a counterfeit of the worst description." Since this is their spirit to each other, he who is forced to condemn them both, can expect little courtesy from either.

Let us, however, examine their arguments; and first, of those who advocate "thorough and consistent Teetotalism."

The words for wine, says Dr. Lees, "must have been, *at first*, necessarily applied and restricted to *fresh unfermented juices*. The primitive process of wine-pressing is well expressed in Gen. xl. 11; and also by Milton," &c. Now, every Scripturian must know that this statement is not only without Bible evidence, but contradicted by it. Noah "drank of the wine and was drunken." This is the *first* recorded application of the word "wine." Is it restricted to fresh unfermented juice? Or does it not necessarily mean the fermented liquor of the grape? This case was *long before* the dream of Pharaoh's butler, even if the process described there had been called *wine-pressing* in the chapter, which it is not. Nor are the reveries of "Paradise Lost" as to Eve, of weight on such a question.

We are referred to Lev. x., "where *Teetotalism* is proclaimed as the Eternal's selected remedy for intemperance." But, in the first place, the restriction applies simply to *Aaron and his sons*. Secondly, it was in force only *when* they went into the tabernacle. Is this to proclaim Teetotalism? Does it not rather imply the ordinary liberty of the priests to use what on a special occasion was forbidden? Another writer reminds us that under the New Testament all believers are priests. Does he forget that if Aaron's sons are to be spiritually interpreted,

so is the type of wine and strong drink? Thus natural joy and excitement seem to be shadowed under these drinks, as the uncovering of the head and rending of the garments were the symbols of natural sorrow. Neither becomes those who enjoy nearness to God. His presence was meant to silence both. Whether, therefore, we look at the type or the antitype, Lev. x. does *not* proclaim Teetotalism.

Next, we are told of "the establishment of the *first* Teetotal Society among the Holy Nazarites." Now, not only is their case a peculiar one like the priests, but there are points essential to the Nazarite which differ alike from the theory and the practice of the Teetotal Society. *His* separation consisted in three grand heads; he was to eat or drink nothing that came from the vine, to let his hair grow, and to come at no dead body. None of these things is put forth as a moral principle more than another. The whole was a carnal ordinance imposed until the time of reformation. To drink wine was defiling to the Nazarite, but it was equally so to cut the hair. Christianity is subject to no part of the ordinance as such, though we may well profit by the truths which it figures. Moreover, when the days of his separation were fulfilled, God ordained that the Nazarite should shave his head and might drink wine. (Num. vi. 13-20.) Does God ordain what is wrong? The Nazarite was then free to drink the very wine which before had been forbidden. Does this permission really square with Teetotalism? Lastly, what has the principle of a separation from *all* vine-produce, in common with the Teetotal pledge? The Nazarite was forbidden the unfermented as well as the fermented, the solid no less than the

liquid. Does this accord with the reasoning of "*Tirosh lo yayin*," or of any other accredited work of Teetotalers? If *not one entire verse* of Num. vi. can be honestly interpreted in favour of their society, why cite the Nazarite ritual as their precursor? And how do they seek to escape from the net in which they have entangled their own feet? They are forced to allow that from every thing pertaining to the vine the Nazarites equally abstained; but, with self-complacent scepticism, they add, that we, with our better chemical knowledge, of course do not! Can Christians tamely listen to such contempt of God's Word? The folly, too, of these speeches is only less gross than the sin; for, what had a Nazarite to do with chemistry?

It is enough to remark on the message of the angel of the Lord to the mothers of Samson and of John the Baptist, that theirs was an extraordinary Nazariteship.—Again, the Rechabites obeyed, in neither building nor sowing, quite as much as in drinking no wine. Their case, if applicable at all, would involve far too much. If, according to it, men ought to drink *no wine*, they ought, by the same rule, to build *no houses*. (Jer. xxxv.)—So Daniel and his friends abstained from the king's meat as well as his wine. If they drank water, they eat pulse. It was a question of Jewish cleanness,* not of morality. Accordingly, Dan x. 3 clearly implies that, save in special circumstances, as fasting, the prophet *did* eat flesh and drink wine.—The cup offered to the Lord upon the cross, and refused, did not consist of wine merely, and there-

* Who is it that appeals to the priests or the Nazarites, Samson or Daniel? Is it not the Teetotal advocate? And who, then, is chargeable with the fallacy that the record of a Jewish practice establishes its propriety as a Christian principle?

fore does not bear on the present question.—The case of Timothy, as we have seen, proves the reverse of what it is cited to prove.

The reader has before him the Scriptural argument of the extreme party. Let him judge whether the case of the moderate section is not as decided a failure. They appeal to Rom. xiv. 21 and 1 Cor. viii. 13. The question is: Does the scope of these texts coincide with that of a Teetotal Society? Is a drunkard the "weak brother" for whose sake the Christian is to forbear using his liberty? *

The simple reading of 1 Cor. viii. shows that nothing is further from the mind of the Spirit. The question here is one "touching things offered unto idols." The Teetotal question has nothing to do with such offerings. That is, the essential features of the Corinthian difficulty do not exist in the case of Temperance. Rom. xiv. (though it mentions wine, which 1 Cor. viii. does not,) is as little to the purpose. At Rome, the dispute grew not out of *Gentile idolatry*, but out of *the religious scruples of the Jewish converts*, who, on certain days, would not partake of meats and drinks. Thus have we seen Daniel abstain from his customary food for three whole weeks, and every Jew similarly testified the affliction of his soul on the Day of Atonement. But it is preposterous to apply such a principle to a Temperance Society: Some Gentiles in these days may refrain from fermented liquors; others may adopt a vegetable diet. Is the Christian to be tossed to and fro at the whim of a world which perverts every thing? Is he to refuse anything which God hath created to be received

* See the "Scriptural Claims of Teetotalism. By Newman Hall, B.A.," pages 4, 10, 11, 15, 16, 24. (1848.)

with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth?—Lastly, the way in which “the weak brother” is treated is as revolting as untrue. 1 Cor. v. proves beyond cavil that a drunkard is a wicked person to be put away from the Church, not a weak brother to be borne with. But Rom. xiv. describes a class as different as possible—not false professors of lax, unholy walk, but real Christians who had feebly realised their deliverance from all questions about things legally clean or unclean. Therefore they retained a conscience in bondage to days, meats and drinks. Where is the analogy between the Roman and the Corinthian cases, and a Teetotal Society? There is none. But if so, it is clear that their argument from Rom. xiv. and 1 Cor. viii. totally perishes.

Those who would glance at the various words rendered “wine,” “strong drink,” &c., may consult a tract entitled “The Testimony of the Bible to the Use and Abuse of Wine.” No wise man will deny the possibility or the fact of mistakes in human translations, nor will he say that the least error is of no moment. Yet, the believing soul will rejoice to prove afresh how God has watched over His Word, not indeed to keep the erudite from error, but to feed His babes day by day, even through the least exact translation. A show of learning may puzzle the unlettered Christian who meddles with it, as it will surely mislead those who trust it rather than the Spirit of God. But the minutest accuracy serves only to confirm the general teaching of Scripture, as might be expected by the heart that knows who and what God is.