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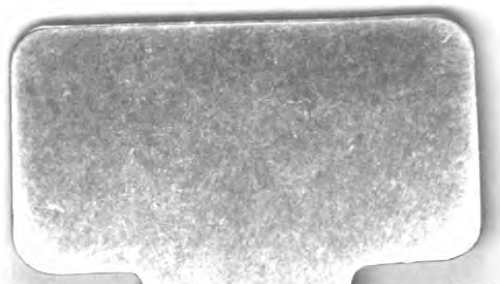
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# THE CLAIMS OF ABSTINENCE

FROM

## INTOXICATING DRINKS.

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### The Anniversary Sermon

PREACHED IN CONNECTION WITH

THE NINTH ANNUAL SESSION OF THE GRAND LODGE OF  
SCOTLAND OF THE INDEPENDENT ORDER OF  
GOOD TEMPLARS,

IN SOUTH COLLEGE STREET UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, EDINBURGH,  
ON 21ST JULY, 1878.

BY

THE REV. PROFESSOR JOHN CAIRNS, D.D.

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# THE CLAIMS OF ABSTINENCE

FROM

## INTOXICATING DRINKS.

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“Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”—I. CORINTHIANS, x. 31.

LET me, while acknowledging the favour done me by the Grand Lodge of Good Templars in Scotland, in asking me to preach this sermon at their annual session, also express the great and sincere pleasure with which I comply with their request. Next to the preaching of the gospel, I have had, for some time, greater satisfaction in nothing than in advocating the cause of temperance; and I gladly embrace the opportunity of briefly re-stating the claims of total abstinence—not, indeed, with any special reference to the Good Templar organization, but on grounds in which it can fully share, as warranting its existence and sustaining its efforts and its hopes. This audience will excuse me if I have not, amidst the pressure of other studies, found time for so much research as I could have desired; but I have endeavoured to state and illustrate, as well and fairly as I could, the general principles which commend the abstinence cause to my own convictions and sympathies, and which, in humble dependence on Divine help, I would now seek to set forth before those who may not yet be equally convinced.



In this sermon I shall endeavour to discuss and to prove two closely allied and yet distinct and separate points :

*First*, The claims of abstinence from intoxicating drinks as a personal habit ; and

*Second*, Its claims as a public and national policy.

I. In raising, then, the *first* question, which respects the personal choice of the individual and takes, this form, Shall I abstain from intoxicating drinks, or shall I not abstain? it is evident that we start a question in Christian morals (for I argue here only with professing Christians) which admits of being argued, and which is not instantly decided by the unequivocal testimony of Scripture and the universal consent of Christians. We dare not say that the decision is so clear as in the alternative when proposed to any Christian conscience, Shall I abstain from murder, from adultery, from lying, from theft, or even from excess in intoxicating liquors? Here all Christians are instantly at one ; and therefore our conclusion is more a matter of inference and deduction from general principles about which we are agreed. But I cannot hold with those who, for this reason, speak of the total abstinence conclusion as if it occupied some lower ground than that of morals and Christian principle, or were, as is sometimes said, a question of expediency, whatever that may mean. It is a question as to duty, as to Christian duty, as to duty which springs from the application of universal principles of right to particular circumstances, and which, consequently, lays hold of the conscience ; so that while all Christians do not decide it in the same way, as they decide some other important questions differently, it carries with it the weight of responsibility on both sides—the responsibility of being in harmony or in

conflict with the law which in general terms all Christians acknowledge.

Let me suppose, then, that I am in contact with some Christian enquirer anxious to know what is the will of God in this matter to him; and the argument will not lose its force to others if I suppose this particular enquirer young in years and open to the light, so that without the bias of usage and habit he may ponder the considerations which I now successively advance. I would begin with a class of considerations which are more personal—embracing our duty to ourselves—before I go on to what is more relative, as affecting our duty to others, all in relation and subjection to God and to His glory.

(1.) Let me touch, then, *first* on the duty of total abstinence as connected with *Health*.

This may seem to be a low ground to begin with, but if it be solid so far as it goes, that can be no objection to the argument, because the care of health is a duty we owe to God, for the right discharge of which we shall be held responsible in the great day. Christianity never teaches that we should make light of the body; on the contrary, it confirms all the lessons of other moral teaching and natural science in this direction. Natural science is that which is occupied with things material, and we find the very centre of all natural science in the human body, showing how fearfully and wonderfully it is made. The Bible, while taking up the lessons of nature, carries them to a higher point, teaching us the great importance of the body in connection with the grand doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God, who took a true body, and in connection with the doctrine of the resurrection of the body to share in the blessings of eternal life. Whatever lessons come from the study of

the laws relating to our physical constitution, belong not only to natural science, but also to morals and Christian theology, and we are bound to listen to their teaching. Whosoever disregards these teachings does not eat or drink in harmony with "the glory of God," because we cannot disregard the laws of bodily health and energy without offending against the will of God. Now, at this point, great light has recently come in through scientific enquiry and discussion. Beyond the outrage, which it was always known that the excessive use of stimulants inflicted on the body, it has been proved that even the moderate and so-called temperate use of them is not only useless, but is seriously injurious, and that abating certain exceptional necessities when the body is in a state of disease, the most advanced science has nothing to say in their favour. These conclusions, impartially wrought out by Dr. Richardson and others, have laid a broad basis for all the moral and spiritual considerations which follow. I am far from saying that had it been proved that the moderate use of intoxicating drinks was a physical benefit—that alcohol was food, or heat, or other physically beneficial agency—our cause would have been lost. I believe the very contrary; that there would have been moral and spiritual considerations that would have overruled such conclusions, so that it might have been our duty to surrender these blessings for higher benefits. But as it is, no man surrenders anything in renouncing all intoxicating liquors, but an element of injury, which is always evil, and tends to be worse. Surely these are conclusions of great importance, as well as of great interest, in connection with this whole department of enquiry and of duty. If these articles are useless and seriously injurious, generally speaking, so far as health is concerned, even were there to be nothing at all like habits of intemperance, then

surely it is our duty, as we regard our bodily constitution, to keep at the greatest distance from any injury or mischief that may arise from the use of intoxicating drinks. These conclusions, in their main issues, have been accepted by criticism not otherwise favourable to total abstinence. They have been admitted by others than total abstainers into not a few seminaries of elementary education. They are silently leavening the public mind, and are dispelling the idea that abstinence has in it anything ascetic or anything fanatical, since it is rather in perfect harmony with the constitution God has given us, and with our duty as His creatures to do ourselves no harm.

(2.) *Secondly*, Total abstinence is supported by the argument drawn from the duty of Christians in regard to their *Property*.

God has implanted in every breast the desire of property, and has more or less given to all, in the opportunities of work, with its savings, the means of fulfilling that desire. He has, then, made all responsible for the stewardship thus entrusted to their care, so that all that is expended shall be expended for "the glory of God." But can it be believed that generally in this professedly Christian country, there is anything like a diffusion of this sense of stewardship in regard to expenditure on intoxicating drinks? If it be proved that they are wholly needless, then they can only be defended as a matter of luxury; and on the ground even of luxury they stand exposed to many objections. They meet a purely artificial taste; they lead on through a wholly indefinite career of expense, where everything has only a fancy value; they minister only to the body, and to no true necessities of intelligence, friendship, and affection: and worst of all, as everyone knows, the use of these drinks as

articles of common beverage is surrounded with elements of special danger and temptation, so that the money bestowed on them is too often bestowed not merely on waste, but on corruption. This is not only the case with the working classes, whose hardly-earned wages are so sadly squandered, and put as into a bag with holes ; but with the upper and middle classes also, where there may be comparative decorum and even refinement in expenditure of this kind, can it be said that the vast outlay gains one end for which society is made brighter, richer, more harmonious with itself and with the will of God? My friend, Professor Leoni Levi, has recently endeavoured to show that the larger part of our national expenditure of more than £140,000,000 annually on intoxicating drinks is incurred by the more educated and virtuous classes of the community. It is likely that so eminent a statistician is right : but if so, can we say that our national expenditure of property is flowing in a right or exalted channel? Do we not rather see what immense resources are still to be liberated for far higher and more generous ends? and how certain is it that we shall gain in every sense, both individually and as a people, by seeking out fields of outlay where there will be a more substantial and lasting return? I leave this to the decision of the Christian community.

(3.) The *third* argument which I bring forward is the relation of total abstinence to the preservation of *reason and mental vigour*.

A worse evil than bodily disease or poverty, from which total abstinence guards, is that sad obscuration or enfeeblement of intellect to which the use of strong drink so often leads. Multitudes, no doubt, who use these liquors escape intoxication ; and multitudes more, who are occasionally

intoxicated, never become even partially insane—yet how mournful, humbling, and fraught to a right mind with permanent self-reproach, is even one experience of this degrading mental disorder and eclipse. The most loathsome disease of the body, the most grievous wreck of fortune, does not thus stain the soul; and if it were not that the disturbance of reason often comes on imperceptibly, and that through insidiousness of the temptation, men are overtaken in this fault, rather than descend to brutishness with their eyes open, the shame and horror on awakening would be still more overwhelming. Now to this “horror of darkness”—this temporary, this frequent, it may be habitual insanity, ending even in utter incapacity of recovery to mental freedom, any one who tampers with intoxicating agents may descend. Too often we see the deadly blight fall where it was least expected, turning the gift of reason into a nullity or a curse, and spreading a large circle of sorrow and shame. Even if intoxicating agents added grasp to reason, and gave wing to genius, what a terrible penalty in the intellects they have shattered, and the promise they have quenched in night! How much more when no true inspiration has ever kindled at their impulse, no heavenward-pointing ray ever mingled with their *ignis-fatuus* gleam! The world is not, I venture to say, the wiser or the better for one single discovery or godlike thought due to such a source, nor will the brightest creations of the future owe anything to such a fount, or be stopped by its cessation; but all the energies of intelligence, as if relieved of some despotic enchantment that at once repressed and over-strained them, working with health, with regularity, and with devotion to truth and righteousness, produce a happier age in which the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea! Who would not

have a share in such a new creation? Who would not hasten the day when all the light of now extinguished reason shall be saved, and added to the general illumination of the world?

(4) The *fourth* and most important argument which I can bring forward, is the duty of total abstinence in regard to *spiritual wellbeing and salvation*.

We here rise into a higher region—higher far than that of health, of well-used substance, of mental clearness and integrity. The redemption of the soul, and the securing of heaven is precious,—is a blessing transcending every other as far as heaven is above earth and eternity is longer than time. In regard to spiritual wellbeing let me say—first, that as the use of intoxicating drinks tends to that drunkenness which so often arises and puts a bar in the way of salvation, so wherever by the grace of God working through the habit of abstinence there is an avoidance of this danger, there is a gain to salvation in the removal of this frequent hindrance; and further, when, by the converting grace of God bringing men to repentance and salvation, there is a continuance in the habit of abstinence, there is a guard, so far, and a security for the working out more fully and uninterruptedly of salvation to its results and consequences. These two points can be proved, so far at least as the *tendency* is concerned.

We do not affirm that the total abstainer alone is saved, or will be saved by total abstinence. This has never been maintained so far as I know. We hold that salvation is only through Christ and faith in His blood. What is contended for is, that in so far as total abstinence defends from the dangers connected with the use of intoxicating drinks, there is a protection against one of the common

evils which hinder salvation. Is it not evident that from the use of intoxicating drinks as beverages, and the actual cases of intoxication that arise from that use, there is a bar and hindrance in the way of the Christian salvation? Take the drunkard as an example. Can it be said with the least truth that he does not hinder his own salvation? He is not, so far as he is living in such a habit, capable, generally speaking, of that reflection which the Christian salvation requires for its attainment. His ordinary natural affections are impaired or extinguished; his purposes and resolves are wavering and weak as water. Is this a state of mind at all likely to lead to salvation? I do not limit the grace of God, for there have been drunkards who have been brought to Christ independently of total abstinence, although the natural tendency is that total abstinence should be associated with such conversions. But who will deny that, in so far as total abstinence hinders the downward progress and preserves so much of reason as would otherwise be destroyed, there is, so to speak, a further opportunity for the gospel to exert its saving power on the soul; that so far there is a preparation at least for the decisive working of the Spirit of God, and a great bar taken out of the way of the regenerating and saving energies connected with Christianity as a divine and remedial system. We know that, as seen in recent revivals of religion when men have been awakened and so far impressed by the gospel, there comes to be a dreadful conflict between these impressions and the habits engendered by the use of intoxicating drinks, when these evil habits have gained the mastery, so to the degree in which this conflict is prevented, there is a great barrier removed from the salvation of mankind. Those who were victims of these evil influences before, are rescued indeed mainly by Christianity—for we give to



Christianity the glory,—but rescued in so far as the way may have been prepared by total abstinence, and are, through God's grace, rescued more readily and more easily in this habit than would otherwise be the case. I am far from limiting the grace of God, but that grace works by means that are reasonable. However firmly we may believe in the power of Almighty grace to effect a drunkard's conversion, we do not see that grace generally acts in such cases; nor is he likely to be found within the range of those outward means and ordinances through which the Spirit of God works on the soul. Drunkenness is therefore, beyond all question, a great bar to salvation; and hence the man who exposes himself, more than he needs to do, to the risk of becoming a drunkard, is not doing all that he can do in the way of prevention against one of the most common hindrances to salvation. He is contracting habits and associations that often make religious decision less easy; and thus, even before he becomes a Christian, he is less responsive to that dawning light which often heralds the Christian day.

What we further contend for is, that abstinence is a help to full salvation, for when one has become a living Christian, with that new sense of gratitude to God in Christ, of devotion to his law, and of horror of evil, which only Christianity gives, the entanglements of sinful habit, where the moderate use of drink had gone on to excess, are hard to break, even though the working of grace is real and saving; the danger of backsliding is greater; and the serenity and security of the Christian life are less assured. Is it desirable for any to expose themselves—even on the happy supposition that they ultimately become Christians—to a more difficult, shaded, and chequered Christian life than would otherwise have been theirs; and can those who are already Christians, and

who are continuing those habits of occasional conformity to worldly usages, out of which so much evil has arisen, be said to be taking every possible stumbling-block out of their future path, and to be in the fullest sense working out their own salvation with fear and trembling? I dare not judge those Christians who are distinguished by many and shining graces; and I would ever remember that a more advanced position (as we may think) as to temperance, may be counter-balanced by great and visible defects in other directions. But I cannot but look on the anxiety of total abstainers at this point, to watch and pray that they enter not into temptation, as coming of good and tending to good; and I cannot but believe that the Christian Church would be richer in all the fruits of salvation, if, without letting fall other graces and attainments, it abounded in this also. I sincerely avow my conviction, that nothing would give a greater impulse to the evangelistic and regenerating agencies of Christianity than the general adoption of total abstinence; and it is for this reason that my sympathies are mainly with the movement here in progress.

These considerations bear specially on the duties of every one of us towards himself; yet it must be obvious that, in so far as we discharge them aright, we are also lending most important help towards our neighbour in the discharge of his parallel duties. But there comes in here a peculiar claim of our neighbour, from the circumstance that intemperance is to so large an extent connected with social usage. If the partaking of intoxicating drink were a mere private indulgence, like the use of opium, there might not be so much force in this argument, but intemperance is sustained by a thousand forms of social usage; and when we think of the degree in which drinking usages are connected with the

origin of drunkenness and the evil arising from these habits, we see a powerful argument in favour of the conclusions for which I plead. There may be dangers to others which are more formidable to them than to us. I would never speak lightly of the danger which exists for all of us. I would never say I remained an abstainer merely for the sake of others. I am bound to have a regard for the danger to myself. Still, no one can deny that the social usages around us are dangerous to others, even where they may not be equally so to ourselves. Children are continually forming under their pressure; the more dependent classes in every circle imitate those who give a tone to that circle; those who are on the downward slope are hindered in their well-meant efforts at self-preservation; those who have fallen are weighed down by an adverse custom which at every point checks their recovery. It is admitted by every one whose opinion is worth listening to, that those who are falling or have fallen, can alone be recovered by total abstinence. Yet this remedy on their part is opposed not only by the growing and destructive habits which act as it were from within, but by the most formidable hindrances which come from without, and which turn the confession of weakness, and the sense of danger, into the materials of ridicule and the provocatives of fresh temptation. Is there a situation which more pathetically appeals to Christian sympathy and practical succour? Can the man be said to have done all that belongs to him as his brother's keeper, who merely pities the tempted person, advises him, warns him, or even prays for him; and yet stops short of the most effectual step of all, which seeks to protect him by example and to break the iron fetters of social usage of which, to so large an extent, he has been the victim? There is an element of generosity and self-sacrifice in total abstinence which

appeals instinctively to every Christian heart; the same element which led the great Apostle to avoid everything by which a brother is stumbled, or offended, or made weak; and this spirit, nursed by Christian love, and made more and more availing by the power of numbers, and by the discovery that society is really cherishing not only the drunkard's enemy but its own, will one day gain the victory!

Before leaving this part of the subject, I would just glance at one difficulty which may seem opposed to our conclusions in regard to abstinence. I mean the tone of certain references to wine in Holy Scripture. I do not profess to be able to clear up every text, and remove every difficulty connected with this part of the question; but yet to my own mind it is not a difficulty which has any practical force. Even if I could not fully meet this difficulty, I would find it hard to shelter the drinking system of our country under references to a state of things in many respects so different as that which existed in a vine-growing country, now that distillation has produced beverages so much more fiery and potent than any referred to in Holy Scripture. I would call to mind that Christ's is a religion of great moral principles, and not of particular prohibitions, so that if our Saviour had forbidden wine by an express statute, it would have been liker the course of Mahomet, and might have degenerated into mere externalism; and I would be satisfied if to the general Christian conscience the cause of abstinence commended itself on the ground of glory to God and good to man, without our being able to solve every particular text, instance, or allusion. Even were it proved that our Lord turned water into a mild fermented wine at Cana in Galilee, all I would conclude would be, that He

had a good reason for it ; not that I was forbidden to discountenance and put down the widely ramified, gigantic, and destructive drinking usages of this country in the nineteenth century.

II. I now come to the *second* branch of this subject, viz., the claims of total abstinence as a public and national policy. This is evidently a distinct enquiry, since many things may be right and binding on the individual conscience, which it would not be within the scope of public law to enforce, and to attempt to enforce which would do injury rather than good. There may be noticed in the utterances of our best public opinion, and in the enactments of our best recent legislation, a two-fold tendency—First, To exempt from the sway of legislation all matters most spiritual and internal, and to leave them to the regulation of individual conscience and the action of the Christian Church ; and Secondly, To enlarge the scope and increase the stringency of legislation on matters more outward and secular—such as sanitary reform, restricted labour, and compulsory education. Now, it is to this latter class of subjects that laws bearing on the manufacture, sale, and use of intoxicating drinks belong ; and I make, in support of such laws, the following observations :—

1. *It is within the right of public law, not only to restrict, but, if it seem fit, to put down the whole manufacture, sale, and legalised use of intoxicating drinks.* This is universally admitted in so far as restriction is concerned. Our whole national action towards drink is one of restriction. Notoriously one day in seven is in this part of the United Kingdom exempted from its sale by law ; and there are many other prohibitions. The whole principle is thus con-

ceded. The traffic is regarded as hazardous, and as requiring special guards. The very same consideration for the public good and safety would warrant society in putting it wholly away. It is granted that every restraint on liberty ought to be justified. But restraint is here justified on every ground that brings in elsewhere the coercion of law. It is the function of law to deal with crime, and surely it may deal to the utmost stretch with what is the chief source of crime. It is its function to deal with disease, with lunacy, with social nuisance, with pauperism, and all these stand related to the use of intoxicating drinks as effect and cause. The exigencies of police, judicial, prison, and workhouse administration, with the consequent burdens of taxation, surely give a right to deal with the root of all this evil in a summary way ; and if a majority chooses to surrender any supposed advantage in this traffic as counterbalanced by greater public inconveniences and inflictions, it is hard to see what right a minority, constitutionally outvoted, has to resist or complain. I for one would deal liberally with any claims of property that might stand in the way of such legislation. But I would do so only as facilitating a settlement, and not as granting any right in vested interests or in minorities to bar the sweep of prohibitory law in such arrangements for the public good.

(2.) *Secondly, Public opinion ought to be enlightened, so that as soon as possible it may exercise the right of suppressing the drink traffic.* The right to send forth a mandate of prohibition is one thing: the preparation of society for it is another. We say not that public opinion is enlightened enough as yet for this change. But it is rapidly receiving enlightenment, and every contribution of discussion and of personal influence matures the public mind.

This enlightenment will come by dwelling on and exposing the evils of the free and permitted use of intoxicating agents. It will come by the discussion meanwhile of more limited remedies, and by the evidence that they have not been applied in vain. It will come by the experience of other countries that may be in advance of ourselves in this direction. And it will come, not least, by showing that there is a distinct place for law, as well as for voluntary effort, and that the strong arm of the national will gives a security for the complete and permanent eradication of so widespread and manifold, as well as subtle and tenacious an evil, which the most diffused and energetic opinion, short of this legal grasp, can hardly hope to supply. It will be a noble field that is thus given to the promoters of temperance to cultivate: and it will be theirs to prepare for one of the greatest victories of law over lawlessness, and even over itself, in recalling its mistaken license, which has too sadly proved to be no real liberty.

(3.) *Thirdly and lastly, The success of prohibitory legislation depends on a large increase of personal abstinence.* I for one do not believe in a prohibitory legislation, which is not thus prepared for and seconded. The base of the pyramid must be the altered practice of the people. Otherwise we shall be like an army rushing forward without supports, which cannot hold even the positions it may temporarily gain. Every abstainer is not only like a soldier to win the advanced post, but like a fortress to keep it, and no great revolution such as we contemplate can rest on legal acts and securities, if it be not upborne by the steadfast pressure of a widely diffused and cherished abstinence. I would therefore humbly impress this idea on all who hear me, and whom my words may reach, that next to improving our

own discipline, and imploring the blessing of Him to whom all success is due, we can do nothing so hopeful in the face of the decisive struggles that are at hand, as to recruit continually our ranks, and that not only from the tempted and endangered (though, God be praised, they are most deeply welcome), but from all earnest lovers of the Church of God and of our common country, that thus a great deliverance may not only be wrought, but assured, and that from generation to generation, in happier ages to come, prohibitory law may prevail, and yet may be only like the flag that surmounts, or the outward fence that guards the citadel of a Christian Temperance wrought into the rock-like foundation of our national character.

My Brethren and Sisters of the Good Templar organization, let me, in closing this discourse, address to you the earnest exhortation to abound more and more in the good work of reclaiming the wandering, and strengthening the exposed, in which, in this particular form, many of you much longer than myself have been engaged. Our Order is only a means to an end. Let us constantly strive that the end may be fully gained. Let us labour on for the glory of God, and for the temporal and eternal well-being of our fellow-creatures. Let us give prominence to that side of our principles which connects us with Christ and Christianity. Let us throw our hearts into those prayers which we regularly offer in our meetings in His name, and let us encourage separate devotional gatherings, as in many places is done, to seek His blessing. Our strength is weakness apart from the grace of the best Lover, the truest Helper, the only Redeemer of our unhappy and fallen race. We have much cause indeed to thank God and take courage. But we have also not a little to sadden us, in the nature of the terrible



evil against which we contend—in the difficulty of persuading many, and in the failure to keep not a few who only endure for a while. It is in living Christian principle that there is to be found strength to brave all the difficulties and trials against which we have to contend in opposing an evil of proportions so gigantic. The Lord grant to every Good Templar and abstainer a blessed experience of saving conversion and of personal communion with the Son of God—of pardon through His blood, and of strength through His grace, and then amidst the hardness of the fight and the labour of the way, there will be the best of all solace, the sweetest of all hope, the grandest and loftiest of all inspiration, in the words, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Amen.







