

Strong Drink Versus Christianity

by Catherine Booth

Catherine Booth emphasizes the importance of abstinence in connection with religious aggressive effort, arguing that strong drink is a major obstacle to the spread of Christianity and that Christians must deal with it as a Satan-invented, Christ-dishonouring, soul-ruining abomination.

Scripture: Proverbs 20:1, Proverbs 23:20, Proverbs 23:29, Isaiah 5:11, Romans 14:21, 1 Corinthians 6:10, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Total Abstinence", "Moral Reform"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the value of temperance in religious aggressive effort, emphasizing the need for Christians to actively engage in delivering others from evil habits and the bondage of Satan. She highlights the detrimental effects of intoxicating drinks on society, attributing a large portion of wickedness, crime, and misery to their consumption. Booth stresses the importance of total abstinence as a crucial element in successful aggressive efforts, urging Christians to denounce the use of strong drink as irreligious and immoral, and to deal with it decisively for the well-being of individuals and the advancement of God's kingdom.

Transcript

THE subject upon which I have been requested to write a paper is, "The Value of Temperance in connection with Religious Aggressive Effort."

Before entering directly on the subject, I want to make two or three preliminary remarks, and,

I. It may be well to explain that we understand religious aggressive effort to be, that interference on the part of Christians with the thoughts and actions of ungodly men which the Bible shows to be necessary, in order to secure their present and eternal well-being.

We, Christians, see around us everywhere men and women under the influence of false ideas, given up to selfish indulgences and evil practices, which enslave their faculties and render real happiness impossible to them, either in this life or in that which is to come. Now, religious aggressive effort implies measures taken for their deliverance from these evil habits, and from the bondage of Satan, and the actual bringing of these souls into the liberty, power, and blessedness of the family of God. It is, in short, a holy warfare, prosecuted under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit, to bring men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

II. I want to remark that the very nature of Christianity renders this aggressive effort incumbent on all Christians. Not only are there many passages directly enforcing this duty, but it is assumed as a fundamental principle, underlying the whole economy of grace, that the truly regenerate will be benevolently active for the good of others. A desire to save the lost seems to be a divinely-inspired impulse in the soul of every real child of God, as it were a holy instinct, in which the disciple ever resembles his Master, and the servant his Lord. I am aware that there is a great deal of professed Christianity in these days which lacks this lineament of the Divine likeness, and makes so much of faith that love is deemed almost superfluous. An inspired Apostle, however, declares that there is something greater even than faith, which is charity, and though we have a faith that will remove mountains, if we have not charity it profiteth us nothing. Truly an inoperative faith neither profiteth its possessor nor those around him, but is only as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal, The faith which is of the operation of the Spirit "worketh by love," and ever leads its possessor to follow Him who went about doing good, and who persistently taught His disciples that self-love, self-interest, and self-indulgence must be sacrificed to the utmost, whenever the interests of His kingdom or the salvation of their fellow-men should demand such sacrifice.

III. I want to observe further that THE USE OF INTOXICATING DRINKS AS A BEVERAGE IS THE CAUSE AND STRENGTH OF A VERY LARGE PROPORTION OF THE WICKEDNESS, CRIME, VICES AND MISERY WHICH EXIST AROUND US. With this proposition many of us here are sadly too familiar; it needs neither proof nor illustration; indeed, with some little modification, it is coming to be admitted in almost all quarters, even amongst the greatest enemies of our principles. The time is fast passing in which there has existed a difference of opinion amongst the wise and good, as to the real character of these drinks. The baneful harvest of crime and misery which their consumption has entailed on us as a nation, has opened the eyes of almost every thinking and patriotic mind to the fact that the drink, not the abuse of it, but the drink itself, is an evil thing, in very truth a "mocker," the product of Satanic art and malice, to be rejected and eschewed by all who have any regard for their own or their neighbour's well-being. We might adduce overwhelming evidence that strong drink is the natural ally of all wickedness. Unquestionable statistics have been produced which show--that its stimulus is essential to the plotting and commission of almost every kind of villainy. The gambler seeks it to aid him in the craft and cunning by which he lures his victim on to financial ruin. The seducer has recourse to its deceptive power to pave the way for his cruel licentiousness. The burglar braces his courage and hardens his conscience by its exhilarating fumes. The harlot drowns in the intoxicating cup her sense of shame, and from it gathers strength to trample out the deepest, tenderest instincts of womanhood. The murderer is powerless to strike the fatal blow till maddened by its infernal stimulus. In short, all classes and sizes of criminals unite to testify, 'By the influence of drink we are what we are,' and missionaries, Bible-women, chaplains, jailors, magistrates, and judges, say, "Amen" to their testimony.

We have no hesitation in affirming that strong drink is Satan's chief instrumentality for keeping the masses of this country under his power.

IV. If the foregoing propositions, are correct-if Christians are bound to aggress on the kingdom of Satan, and if strong drink constitutes one of the mightiest forces of that kingdom, then it follows inevitably that TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN AGGRESSIVE EFFORT CHRISTIANS MUST DEAL WITH THE DRINK. To attempt to make war on the enemy's territory without contemplating this gigantic force, is kindred folly to that of France in going to war with Prussia without having duly estimated the strategic skill of their great general. Such folly must always be followed by failure and defeat. Doubtless one secret of the church's failure in

nearly all aggressive measures has been her ignoring the power of this great adversary. Why, even heathen chiefs, the heads of savage tribes, have sent us word that it is of no use to send them the Bible, if at the same time we send them strong drink.' Alas! That Christians have been so slow to learn the power of this mitrailleuse of hell, but, thank God, some of them are beginning to appreciate it at last, and these are crying, what is to be done? How shall we deal with the drink? We answer, in the name of Christ and humanity, deal with it as you do with all other Satan-invented, Christ dishonouring, soul-ruining abominations. Wash your hands of it at once, and for ever! And give a united and straightforward testimony to the world that you consider it an enemy of all righteousness and the legitimate offspring of Satan!

I submit that there is no other way for Christians to deal with strong drink. All other ways have been tried and have failed. The time has come for Christians to denounce the use of intoxicating drinks as irreligious and immoral; and God Almighty will put immortal renown on those of His servants who are sufficiently true, and brave, and self-sacrificing first to run the gauntlet of earth and hell in doing this. "They shall be had in everlasting remembrance," and counted amongst the greatest benefactors of their race.

We contend that the attempt to make what is termed the moderate use of strong drink consistent with a profession of religion has signally and ignominiously failed; and the common sense of mankind is turning upon those who have made it with these most pertinent questions--How can that which produces all this crime and misery be a good thing? and if it be an evil thing, how can it be moderately used?

This question comes with overwhelming force to those who stand forth as labourers for the spiritual benefit of mankind. At every step the drink difficulty meets them. They can no longer ignore it, it must be met and grappled with. In America, the importance of this question in its bearing on Christianity, has been so fully recognised, that almost every Christian minister has become an abstainer; and I venture to affirm, that the religious instinct of Christians in both countries has pronounced this action to be consistent and praiseworthy. If consistent and praiseworthy in America, would it not be equally so in England? God grant that such may soon be the case here?

But I must hasten to point out two or three particulars in which this principle is specially valuable in connection with religious aggressive effort.

I. ABSTINENCE IS VALUABLE TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED TO MAKE SUCH EFFORT

--1st. As a source of strength.

No man can deny himself, constrained by Divine love for the good of others, without improving his own moral nature and giving increased scope for the operation of the Divine Spirit within him. "I Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."

2. Abstinence is valuable to the Christian labourer as a safe-guard against temptation. It is well known that a large majority of those who become subjects for church discipline, owe their fall directly or indirectly to drink. The man who never uses it can never fall through its influence. He is safe thus far, because he goes not into temptation.

3. Abstinence is valuable to the labourer, because it helps to beget a conviction of his disinterestedness in the minds of those whom he seeks to benefit, which conviction is indispensable to his success. Doubtless

the unwillingness of religious teachers to forego their own indulgence in the use of wine and spirits has greatly diminished their influence, and helped largely to beget that prejudice with which great numbers of the common people regard them. We are satisfied that if the Gospel is to make any great advance on the masses of this country, those who seek to propagate it must abandon the use of drink. As Dr. Guthrie remarks, in his preface to 'Scriptural Claims of Teetotalism,' 'I am astonished that so many ministers of the Gospel and Christian people can turn aside from the fight as they do. When I laboured among the lower, and, indeed, lowest classes of society in this city, I was met at every corner by the demon of drink. I found it utterly useless to attempt to evangelise the heathen and raise the lapsed masses without the aid of total abstinence. With all my trust in the promises of God, and blessings of the Holy Spirit, I felt that I must be able to say to the people not 'Forward,' but 'Follow.' This first induced me to become an abstainer; and I am convinced that it is the duty of every man, who would do his utmost for the glory of God and the good of his fellow-creatures, to discountenance by his example the use of intoxicating stimulants.'

II. WE REMARK FURTHER THE VALUE OF ABSTINENCE TO THOSE ON WHOM HE HAS TO AGGRESS. 1st. It is indispensable as a pioneer in reaching the drunkard. The motives, arguments, and persuasions of the Gospel are addressed to the reason, conscience, and feelings of men, and, of course, presuppose a sane condition of mind. Everybody knows that it is useless to present these to a man when intoxicated; therefore, in the case of thousands who live in a perpetual state of intoxication, the only chance of salvation is to rescue them from the influence of drink. Drunkenness is a physical, as well as moral disease, and if we would remove it, we must proceed on the same principle as we do with the insane; we must restore the reason before we can sanctify the heart. Some of our Christian friends object to this, and say, 'Then it is the Gospel and total abstinence.' We say emphatically, Yes, just in the same sense as in the case of a lunatic or a man raving in a fever; it is the Gospel and the Physician.

If any of our friends doubt whether so many are thus perpetually under the influence of drink, let them pay us a visit in the East of London; and, alas! we can point them to multitudes of besotted, benighted beings, who are never sufficiently sober to be able intelligently to comprehend the truth, even if they could be got to listen to it. Their mental faculties are so benumbed with the imbruting drink, that a vacant stare is often, the only response to the first attempt at arousing and reclaiming them; and all our labourers feel that there is but little hope unless they can by some means be kept from the drink, until reason and conscience have a chance to operate. Thanks be to God, many of this class have been reclaimed and transformed in connection with our mission work; but I am not acquainted with a single instance in which the drink has not been entirely abandoned. In our last year's report. "The Masses Reached," Mr. Booth, has selected one hundred instances, out of hundreds of a similar character, of the power of the Gospel to save the vilest and worst of sinners, and at least eighty of these were drunkards of the most terrible description. Let any friends sceptical as to the thoroughly imbruting effects of drunkenness, read these instances. It would be difficult to believe that man could fall so low, unless one had indisputable proof.

We would ask those who object to the use of abstinence as an instrumentality in Having the drunkard) what plan they would suggest for his restoration to sense and reason?

The plan hitherto adopted by many of them, we lament to say, has been simply to leave him to his fate. While giving countenance and patronage to the drink which has made him what he is, they have left him in his helplessness and misery to sink into a drunkard's hell! We might ask how it has come to pass that with such a confessedly alarming number of drunkards in our midst, there has not been put in operation one Christian organisation specially adapted to reach and save them! Has not the felt inconsistency of trying to save the drunkard while patronising the drink, had something to do with this anomaly? It is a significant

fact, that we rarely find any who are not abstainers who care for the drunkard. We admit, however, and believe, that the pioneering work to be done in order to reach the drunkard, and bring him under the influence of the Gospel, ought to be done by Christians; but until Christian ministers and people will forego their own indulgence, and undertake the labour of hunting down the drunkard) we say, for pity's sake, let those do it who will, for any man has a better chance of salvation sober than drunk) under any circumstances.

2nd. Total abstinence is valuable in separating men from those associations and habits which prevent them from hearing the Gospel. How shall they believe except they hear? We find large numbers of people who, though not drunkards, are so mixed up with, and hedged in by drinking customs, that it is impossible to get at them with religious truth. The streets and public thoroughfares are the only places where even a solitary sentence of Divine truth can be sounded in their ears; and, alas! There are but few Christians who attempt to catch them in this vulgar and out-of-season fashion; consequently, tens of thousands of them never hear at all that Word by which alone they can be saved. Now, abstinence reaches many of these, and by separating them from old associations, and creating a vacuum in their social life, throws them in the way of religious teaching and influence. When a man who has been accustomed to spend his Sabbath evenings, as thousands do, in pleasure-parties, tea-gardens, or in family gatherings, where the social glass forms the principal bond of union, when such a one becomes an abstainer, he is thrown out of his orbit, and necessarily looks round for some way of disposing of himself. He wants somewhere to go, and somebody with whom to associate, and in numbers of instances betakes himself to the house of God, because this offers the readiest way of meeting his difficulty. We know of numbers who have thus been won to Christ and happiness, and doubtless there will be many more when the Church learns better to adapt her measures and services to the capacities and necessities of this class of hearers.

3rd. Abstinence is a valuable ally of the Gospel in the case of those already under its influence, because it tends to keep the intellect clear and the conscience awake for the perception and application of Divine truth. There is every reason to believe that vast numbers who regularly sit under Scriptural teaching are enabled to stifle the voice of conscience and resist the claims of God, through the exhilarating or stupifying effects of, what is termed, "moderate" quantities of stimulating drinks. We have spoken with numbers of people after religious services whose breath has been laden with the fumes of wine or brandy, indicating that sufficient has been taken during the afternoon to blunt the moral susceptibilities and to beget a self-complacency just the reverse of that state of mind necessary for the proper reception of Divine truth. Satan seems to have got wiser for his malicious purposes since our Lord uttered the parable of the sower. He does not wait now till the seed is sown, but is, in the case of thousands, beforehand with the sower, rendering the soul impervious to the precious seed by deadly opiates of diabolical concoction. We believe this indirect result of drinking to be even more widespread and ruinous than the more direct; and that in the great day of account it will be found that multitudes in this Gospel-enlightened land of ours were enabled to resist the most pungent appeals of truth, to silence conscience, and effectually to resist the strivings of the Holy Ghost, only through the influence of strong drink.

III. TOTAL ABSTINENCE IS A VALUABLE ALLY OF THE GOSPEL, AS A CONSERVING POWER. We must not only aggress on the kingdom of darkness, but we must use every means to keep the spoils. When the evil spirit is cast out, we must do our utmost to keep him out, or the last state of our convert will be worse than the first. When a man is brought under the influence of the Spirit, to see himself a sinner, and to embrace the Saviour, he should be taught that he has only just entered on his heavenward course, and in order that he raw so run as to obtain, he must cast aside every weight, keep his body under, watch

and pray, and keep out of temptation. In the case of those who have been addicted to intemperance, all but universal experience proves that there is absolutely no hope of their "standing fast without the entire abandonment of the drink. Our Lord taught His disciples to pray to be kept out of temptation; and again and again we are warned and enjoined to keep ourselves out, and on this condition all His promises of grace and deliverance are suspended. God has nowhere promised to keep the man who needlessly, and for the sake of his own indulgence, runs into temptation. How fearful, then, the responsibility of those Christians who tell the reclaimed inebriate, aye who tell any man, 'You may safely tamper with the drink! 'You may play with this fire of hell, and trust in God 'to keep you from being burnt.' Alas, how do such counsellors unwittingly play the part of Satan in his cunning approaches to our Lord. "Cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot, against a stone." Oh, that all our brethren and sisters would ever bear in mind the memorable answer, "Thou shalt not tempt thy Lord thy God."

But, further, not only is abstinence valuable, nay, indispensable, in order to preserve those rescued out of the power of this great destroyer, but it is equally valuable to prevent others from falling into it. We all profess to believe that prevention is better than cure; seeing, then, that strong drink is proved to be the most dangerous foe to perseverance in righteousness, and the most potent cause of declension, inconsistency, and apostasy, ought not Christians to strive, both by example and precept, to warn the young, the weak, and the inexperienced from touching it? Can any man answer for the consequences of putting a bottle to his neighbour's mouth, be it ever such a small one, or ever such a genteel one? God has recorded His curse against the man who does this, and thousands of hoary-headed parents, broken-hearted wives, and weeping, blighted children groan their amens to the dreadful sentence! Perchance, there are some men who can take these drinks in what they call moderation, and suffer no visible injury; nevertheless, let that man beware who touches that which God has cursed, for there are injuries invisible more to be dreaded than all the plagues of Egypt!

But, suppose some people could take these drinks without hurting themselves, will they dare answer for their children? Alas! There are thousands of parents to-day in connection with the various churches of our land, whose gray hairs are sinking in sorrow to the grave through the intemperance of sons and daughters, who first acquired a taste for drink by sipping out of their own glasses, never used but in moderation! I ask these parents, I ask you, Christians, was not the curse of God on the liquor rather than on the size of the glass which contained it; and might not these parents have known, if they did not, that if they sowed the east wind they must reap the whirlwind. If time would permit, we might give illustrations here that would almost wring tears from demons, but doubtless you are familiar with too many already. Christian parents, save your children from this moral pestilence oh! as you value their happiness, their chastity, their godliness in this life, and their felicity in the next, save them from acquiring a taste for drink. Christian ministers, deacons, elders, members, warn your young people that they come not within the fatal gaze of this moral basilisk. Oh! warn them that they enter not the outermost circle of this eddying maelstrom of perdition, crimsoned already with the blood of myriads once as fair and pure, as virtuous and true, as they are now.

Oh Christians! by your peace of conscience on a dying bed; by the eternal destinies of your children; by your concern for the glory of your God; by your care for never dying souls; by the love you owe your Saviour, I beseech you BANISH THE DRINK. Banish it from your tables, banish it from your houses, and oh! for Christ's sake, banish it from His house. Put no longer the sacrifice of Christ and of devils on the same altar! Banish also those who manufacture this "distilled damnation" from your communion, aye, from

your society. Have no fellowship with those who get rich by robbing man of his reason, woman of her virtue, and children of their patrimony and their bread. Cease to recognise, not only as Christians, but as men, those who fatten on the weakness, wickedness, and suffering of their fellow-men. Hoist the flag of death over their breweries, distilleries, and dram-shops, warning the unwary that death and damnation lurk behind their finely-decorated bars, and run like the lurid fires of perdition through their brightly-polished taps! CHRISTIANS OF ENGLAND! THE TIME HAS COME WHEN TO TRIM ON THIS DRINK QUESTION IS THE HIGHEST TREASON TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST, AND THE GROSSEST INHUMANITY TO SUFFERING, PERISHING MILLIONS. Tell me no more of charity towards brewers, distillers, and publicans. YOUR FALSE CHARITY TO THESE HAS ALREADY CONSIGNED MILLIONS TO AN UNTIMELY HELL! Tell us not of a charity that takes sides with the Pharisees who devour widows' houses, and leaves the poor victims of avarice and power to groan, and suffer, and die.

Tell us not of the charity that would have welded the shackles on three millions of slaves in America yonder, rather than have disturbed the comfort and impoverished the wealth of a few rich planters. Such charity savoureth of the old serpent, its speech betrayeth it. Such was not the charity of Jesus. His charity went out after the suffering multitudes, while it consigned those, who fattened on their wrongs and sorrows, to their own place, notwithstanding that they garnished the tombs of the prophets and paid tithes of mint, anise, and cummin! But, say some of our Christian friends, we must have patience. We answer we have had long patience, and the times of ignorance both God and man were willing to wink at, but we declare that the time for patience has passed. The land is flooded with light, and if these men do not see, it is because they will not. AND THIS IS THE CROWNING, FINISHING CONDEMNATION OF ANY CLASS OF SINNERS, THAT "LIGHT IS COME INTO THE WORLD, AND MEN LOVE DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT, BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS ARE EVIL," OR WE MIGHT INTERPRET IT, BECAUSE THEIR GAINS ARE GREAT.

Charity, were we speaking of? O Christians! look on the multitudes who are led as sheep to the shambles by this great destroyer. Look on thousands, yea, tens of thousands of your fellow-countrymen, husbands and fathers, robbed at once of their earnings, their manhood, their reason, and turned loose on their hapless wives and children, worse, more unreasonable, tyrannical and savage, than the wild beasts of the forest. Look upon thousands of poor suffering women called wives, who have to endure all a drunkard's tyranny and fury, while working for the children's bread, and struggling vainly to keep a home where they may lay their heads. Look on multitudes of our youth, lured from their homes, inspired with contempt of parental counsel, drawn into gay and immoral society; dragged down from comparative innocence and virtue to idleness, debauchery, and crime!

Look on hosts of helpless, neglected children, ten times more to be pitied than those whom the heathen mother casts into the Ganges or the Nile; look on their half-starved, half-clad bodies, their untaught, benighted minds and souls, and then say how long this modern Juggernaut shall roll down your streets unchallenged--this chief of Satan's empire sway his sceptre over this vaunted Christian land!

ARISE, CHRISTIANS, ARISE, AND FIGHT THIS FOE! YOU, AND YOU ALONE ARE ABLE, FOR YOUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU! OH, COME UP TO HIS HELP AGAINST THIS MIGHTY CHAMPION OF HELL, AND HE WILL EMPOWER YOU TO LAY HIM LOW, AND TAKE ALL HIS ARMOUR WHEREIN HE TRUSTED.

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