

MISCELLANY.

LONDON TEMPERANCE SOCIETY.

The first public meeting of the London Temperance Society was held on the 29th of June. A letter was read from the Lord Mayor expressing his regret that official engagements prevented his attendance, whereupon Sir John Webb, Director General of the Medical Department of the Ordnance, was called to preside. On taking the chair, he mentioned the evils of spirit-drinking in the army and navy, and in the community at large, as they had come before him as a magistrate. Intemperance, in his opinion, was the cause of most of the vices that prevailed.

The Secretary then read a report, exhibiting the principles of the Society, and the progress of Temperance in America, and in Scotland and Ireland. In England, 30 Societies had already been formed, and 100,000 tracts put into circulation.

The meeting was then addressed by W. Allen, Esq., the Solicitor General of Ireland, Rev. Dr. J. P. Smith, Professor Edgar, of Belfast, Rev. Dr. Hewitt, of Connecticut, Rev. Dr. Bennet, Mr. Collins, of Glasgow, Mr. Carr, of New Ross, Ireland, the Bishop of Chester, and Rev. G. Clayton.

The Solicitor General of Ireland, after alluding to his official connexion with another Temperance Society, (the Hibernian) and his devotion to the cause, proceeded to give his views at length on three points—the objects of Temperance Societies—the necessity of them—and the adequacy of the measures adopted by them, to secure their end.

The object of Temperance Societies was simple and single, it was but one. The principle was so simple, that it was amazing it had escaped the skill, the ingenuity, and the talent of so many centuries and had remained to be discovered, within the last few years, by a clergyman in one of the northern states of America. The simple principle was, that the common use of ardent spirits, was one of the chief causes of the crimes, the misery, the poverty, and the distress of mankind in the present day (cheers); and that there was one efficient remedy for the subjugation of that hostile principle, which had been preying against man's best interests for so long a period of time; namely that it was the bounden duty of all who loved themselves, who loved their neighbors, and who venerated their God, to abstain from ardent spirits themselves, and by influence, example, and authority, to discountenance the use of them in others. Suppose ardent spirits were altogether unknown—suppose the knowledge of the mode of distilling them was lost, would there not be a gain by the loss? O, there would be great losers by it; all the dram-shops would be shut up, the public houses would be closed; but much of the Sabbath breaking would be put an end to (cheers); much of blasphemy would be stopped; much of perjury, swearing, assault, riot, and even murder, would be banished from the land. Temperance Societies wanted to get rid of these poison shops altogether. That was the object of the present meeting; and was there any man, who had the heart of a man, that would raise his hand against it? The language was, perhaps, too strong, but he was about to say, was there any man so cold-blooded, so careless, so indifferent about the interests of his neighbor as to stand neuter when an intestine war was waging between holy and unholy principles? Yet that was the situation in which these stood who called themselves the temperate drinkers of the present day. The sword was drawn, the war was proclaimed—temperate members of society against ardent spirits; and how could these men answer for it, to their conscience, who were quietly standing by? They were traitors to the cause. He would enforce the Athenian intestinal war act against them, that where two parties were contending, the man who stood neuter should be put to death. He begged permission to give his idea of a temperate man, because he knew that legal subtleties had been set up against these institutions. A temperate man was he whose reason ruled his appetite, and the intemperate man was he whose reason was ruled by his appetite. No man, in his humble judgment, could be considered a temperate man who, to indulge his appetite, would do an injury either to himself, or, above all, to his neighbor. Now, if he were right in that definition, and if he could show that the man who used ardent spirits, in the most moderate degree, was doing an injury to his neighbor, then he dethroned him from the situation in which he had placed himself as a temperate man; and the individual was, according to the true, logical, and philosophical definition of the word temperate, an intemperate man. He was now about to advert to a calculation, and as he knew that he was not addressing an audience of Irish inflammables (laughter,) but that every position he stated would be made the subject of criticism and of arithmetical calculation; though he spoke in round numbers, yet he was determined that his statements should abide the test of that criticism.

[After showing the entire usefulness of ardent spirit and the immense expense of it in the United Kingdom, he proceeded:]

Let all persons become subscribers to this institution; and without adding 1s. to their expenses they would cut off ten millions of expenditure which they would have in their pockets to contribute to benevolent societies. The honorable and learned gentleman then proceeded to state, that three fourths of the cases of crime, of premature death, and of lunacy, and other violent and distressing maladies, were occasioned by intemperance. And he would ask, whether, if there were a person present who would refuse to become a subscriber to this Institution, that person were not an accessory to the commission of these crimes, and to the procurement of these ills? He would boldly state, that if any person, after examining the documents which he should now present to the meeting, could coldly stand back and say, "I will not support your Society, and thus give to the public the benefit of my example;" that individual would be chargeable with the guilt of an accessory to the evils which spring from this fruitful source

of crime, disease, and death. The honorable and learned gentleman here read the certificates to which he had referred. The first was that of the physician-general of Ireland, the second was signed by 77 professional men of Edinburgh; he had others, also, from Manchester, Bradford, and other respectable and populous towns. They all reprobated, in strong terms, the use of ardent spirits, as dangerous to the health and existence of those who indulged in them, and recommended their entire disuse. These physicians, the honorable and learned gentleman proceeded, had told the meeting, that out of the use of ardent spirits grew the direst maladies to which the human frame is subject.

He had been long in the habit of prosecuting criminals at the bar of justice in Ireland, and he could state, positively, that at least three fourths of the criminals tried there, were led on to crime by intemperance. The greater part of the crimes which were committed in Ireland, were the results of intoxication—of the use of ardent spirits. He had the sanction of all the high authorities in Dublin to the statement, that the disuse of ardent spirits would be one of the most effectual means of preventing crime there. And would not the same cause produce similar effects in London?

An individual who has been in the habit of visiting the cells of the condemned, had told him that a condemned criminal had stated, that the plan adopted in the commission of murder, was, to get hold of some man fond of liquor, and having taken him to a public house, having there made him high in spirits, to reveal gradually the plan laid for robbery and murder, and then to prevail on him to execute the fatal deed. First hints would be thrown out, and then more explicit statements would be made, and he who at first shuddered at the very thought of crime, would ultimately yield to the effects of liquor and persuasion, and consent to do the deadly act proposed to him.

After referring further to the effects of ardent spirits, which he contended were crime and bloodshed, the honorable and learned gentleman proceeded to inquire how the monstrous evil of intemperance was to be remedied. It would be impossible to stop up the mouths of its victims. The plan, therefore, would be to bank up the polluted channel through which enormous evils complained of flowed. But, how could this be done? Suppose every man were to say, "I will form a temperance society in my own house." What harm, he would ask, could result from this experiment? None, whatever. Suppose every man were to do this, or if the reins of government were absent, suppose every lady were to do this, what harm could possibly result? None, whatever; but, on the contrary, great benefits would accrue to society. The effect of example, every one knew, was great, and such an example, as that which he proposed, would be productive of incalculable advantage. Let every man of consequence light up his taper at the Temperance Society; and how many would it reclaim from the dark and dismal paths of insobriety and crime! Great men were like cities set on hills, and would throw their light a great way. But there were also lesser fires which might be lighted up in every house. Let every man belong to a public society;—let every one enrol himself as a subscriber to some Temperance Society, and he would soon perceive that this conduct would have its effect both on himself and others; it would, like charity, produce a double blessing, for both the person who took, and the person who gave, would bless himself and his country. The honorable and learned gentleman then proceeded at some length and with great eloquence to refer to the advantages of associations; to the example offered to us by the temperance societies of America; to the success of the efforts made in the Western World to put a stop to the use of ardent spirits; to the necessity for a total abstinence from spirituous liquors; and to the indispensableness of our "moderate men" joining temperance societies.

Professor Edgar, of Belfast, who has devoted much time and labor to this subject, and with great success, inquired:

Did they know that a magistrate of the county of Middlesex, in assembly of his colleagues, in the capital of the kingdom, had declared his conviction, that the increase of madness, poverty and mortality was owing to the increase of the consumption of distilled spirits? and that they had confessed they had no power in their hands to check the horrible evil? But was it impossible to check it? He would read a letter from an eminent member of the medical profession, which said no person had greater hostility to dram drinking than himself; inasmuch as he never suffered spirits to be in his house, considering them to be evil spirits; and if the poor could see the white livers, the dropsies, and the shattered nervous systems which he had seen as the consequences of drinking, they would be aware that spirits and poisons are synonymous terms; but he considered the scheme so Utopian, that he could not join his name to it, believing it as possible to stop the cataract of Niagara, as to prevent the poor from destroying themselves by them. What answer should be returned to this objection of Sir Astley Cooper? The promoters of the Society would say, we have counted the cost, and to our consciences and yours we say, ours is the duty, and the difficulties we leave to God. They made no pretensions to miraculous power; they knew it would be absurd to attempt to stem the cataract of Niagara, but they possessed the means of awakening the dead sinner to life, and to bring down every strong hold of Satan. It was our place to cut off the source of the evil. It was perfectly true that the trade in spirits was not supported by drunkards, but by temperate men, and even the drunkard pleaded the example of the temperate and religious. But leaving religion entirely out of the question; if the drinking of spirits could be rendered unfashionable, the society would accomplish its object; could the practice be made disreputable, no man would dare indulge in it. In the county of Antrim a young man, who had enrolled his name as a member of the Temperance Society, was one night assailed by one of those men who know, that to ruin a man, it is only necessary to give spirits; he treated him with half a glass under the specious pretext of doing him good, and preserving him from the cold; but he did not stop at the half glass; and the next morning when the young man's neighbour, a farmer, looked out, he saw him stretched in the snow, and stiff in death! The minister of the parish thought this a favourable opportunity to endeavour to put down the practice of giving ardent spirits at wakes and funerals. He went to the father of the young man, and pointed to the corpse of his son, and said, "O, how will any one lift his voice against you for banishing these murderous liquors, when you have suffered so severely by them?" The poor man said, he should like to follow the advice of his minister if he could, "but you don't know," said he, "how I should be laughed at; it is the custom of the place." Of whom was that man afraid? Not of drunkards, nor of the ridicule of drunkards; no, but of the respectable and temperate persons around him. An opinion had gained ground that the drunkard could not be reformed. Why could not the drunkard be reformed? Look to yourselves, Christian people! With yourselves rests the melancholy cause of spirit-drinking. He had heard from the schoolmaster of a small parish in Ireland, the miserable end of twenty-two persons through drinking spirits;—nine were drowned, five were found dead by the road side, and the rest were taken home, and laid on that bed from which they rose no more—all these died drunk in one parish, in a short space of time. Were not these very individuals once as temperate as any in that assembly? He could not but advocate this Society, since he had witnessed its beneficial effects;

every Sabbath day he looked down from his pulpit and saw six families who were never seen in a Christian congregation until their heads became members of the Temperance Society.

The Rev. Dr. Hewitt, after a few introductory remarks which were received with great favor, gave a sketch of the history of the Reformation in this country.

Mr. Collins of Glasgow, one of the most active and efficient friends of the cause in Scotland, said:

It was his intention to have given a very full development of the principles of temperance societies, and to have refuted the objections which led men to refrain from supporting them, and, also, to have given an experimental explanation of the whole; but in consequence of the protracted length of the meeting, he should defer it until a future opportunity. He stood on that platform with deep emotions to witness the first public meeting of the kind in this metropolis, because he claimed to himself the high honor of being the founder of that Society. He had, however, experienced considerable difficulty in forming it. He came to London, and after trying several weeks, he could not get a single person to join him. He left London, and when he was fifty miles off, God turned him back; but his second attempt was not more successful than the first, and he left London again. He went down to Bristol, and returned to London, and a third time endeavored to form a society and succeeded.

The Bishop of Chester said: It was unnecessary, even if he were able, to add any thing to what had been advanced in favor of Temperance Societies; facts, argument, exhortation, and example were before them, and it only remained for them to act upon what they had heard. He was sure they would not separate without joining in the motion he had to propose, which was one of thanks to the Right Rev. the Bishop of London for his patronage, and to the chairman for his services that day. Many and interesting as the meetings had been this year, he thought it might be said, the best was kept till now.

The Rev. G. Clayton, declared his conviction that spirits caused the increased profanation of the Sabbath, and the progress of infidelity. The apostles of infidelity never exhibited so fluently, nor the disciples assembled with so much zest, as after large potations of these evil stimulants; indeed he believed the spirit of infidelity was in many instances the spirit of gin. And if ever revolutionary hands should rise to overturn the altar and the throne, gin would be the great engine to prepare them for their work of confusion, mischief and murder.

The Chairman, in closing the meeting, observed that it was in contemplation to withdraw spirits from the army ration.

Among those who added their names to the list of members, were the Bishop of Chester, the Bishop of Sodor, and Man, and Lord Calthorpe.