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FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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The Moral and Social Aspects of Temperance.

A PAPER WRITTEN BY MISS L. M. KIRK, OF WELLINGTON, AND READ AT THE MEETING OF THE WOMEN'S NATIONAL COUNCIL IN CHRISTCHURCH.

If you look up the word "temperance" in a dictionary, you will find "moderation" given as one of the first synonyms; but in the great contemporary controversy which finds most frequent need for the words, the irony of custom has stamped them with contrary meanings. As applied to the drink question "moderation" retains its primary meaning of moderate indulgence, but "temperance" has come to mean the habit of total abstinence from intoxicating beverages; and when I am asked to discuss "The Moral and Social Aspects of Temperance," it is the moral and social grounds for or against total abstinence into which I am expected to enquire. The subject appears to me to be particularly well chosen at the present time. The drink question in this country has assumed such an engrossing political interest as to obscure in the eyes of both parties to the fight, the homelier, but equally vital matter of private ethics. It is well in the brief lull that follows the triennial poll to consider the matter of indulgence in alcoholic liquors from the individual standpoint, as a matter for him to settle for himself in his own conscience, with-

out the threatened interference of the collective conscience called the State, to embarrass his decision. That drastic State action will still be needed for the final determination of the problem may be considered probable; but it is equally certain that that action must proceed from a quickening of individual consciences, to a degree hitherto unrealised, if it is to be successful and permanent.

But for the purposes of this paper the question resolves itself into this:—(1). Is alcohol good or bad in its effect upon the individual? (2). Is it good or bad in its general effect upon society? First as to the individual; if he were an isolated atom, perhaps there would be no obligation to abstain; at any rate in a normal individual the obligation would be only one of prudence; he would be fairly entitled to cheer with wine his solitary existence, even though by so doing he shortened its span. Self-denial for the sake of self-denial is simply asceticism, and neither Christianity nor common-sense. As Prof. Drummond says:—"The only greatness is unselfish love. Even self-denial *in itself* is nothing—is almost a mistake. Only a great purpose or a mightier love can justify the waste." But probably the world will not see another Robinson Crusoe, so that the private right of an individual isolated in that manner does not affect the question here and now." Washington Gladden says:—"If there

were a man who had no neighbour, he could not obey God's law; he could not be a man in any proper sense of the word." With the social aspect, then, the moral also arises; the individual's duty with regard to alcohol must depend upon its *effect on society*.

IS ALCOHOL GOOD OR BAD IN ITS GENERAL EFFECT UPON SOCIETY?

Let us take the opinions of those who from their official position can speak with authority as to the darker side of society. Dr Guthrie calculated that 99 per cent. of the destitute children of Great Britain owed their destitution to drink. Dr Barnardo, who at the beginning of his investigations believed this to be a gross exaggeration, arrived at a minimum of 99 per cent., and became a total abstainer in consequence. Dr Stephenson, a man of almost equally wide experience among the poor of great cities, gives a similar estimate. Mr Charles Booth, the great authority on London pauperism, who is sometimes quoted as having given a smaller estimate of evils attributable to drink than other authorities, nevertheless is careful to say that of all preventable causes of misery, drink is the most prolific. The newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury says—"Of all the preventable evils in the world, intemperance is perhaps the greatest." Councillor Alexander McDougall, vice-chairman of the Manchester Board of Guardians, after a most exhaustive enquiry, sums up his results thus—"My