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AN ESSAY

ON THE

TEMPERANCE QUESTION,

By ISAAC M. ^{copy-1} WISE.

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[Read before the Friends of Inquiry in Cincinnati.]

Is it morally wrong to take a glass of beer, wine or Champagne at dinner, or at any other time?

Or is it hypocrisy for hypocrisy's sake that persons using such beverages do it secretly as long as they can hide the fact?

Let us see first what might be called morally wrong.

Morally wrong is that which the intelligence by common consent calls so; or, as our religious friends maintain, which the Bible characterizes as such.

All nations of antiquity used wine, or strong drink, as they called it in Hebrew, as a beverage, and as ingredients of the sacrifices.

Among modern nations, the Mohammedans only make an exception. They drink no wine and eat no pork. We have no statistics to prove that this has made them any better, purer or wiser than Christians or Jews. They use other stimulants and in another form, some of which are of an unchaste and destructive nature, such as opium and polygamy.

There is no difference in taking the stimulants in this or that form, the effect being precisely the same.

Outside of the Islamites, however, the use of

wine or strong drink as a beverage is common among all classes of society, ~~excepting, of course,~~ honest and upright temperance people, in our country and in England, who are rather scarce, as were the Nazarites and Rachabites among the ancient Hebrews.

Well, then, intelligence, by common consent, does not declare the use of such beverage as being immoral; hence, it is as moral as eating choice food, sleeping on costly couches, promenading or seeking amusement and pleasure in any legitimate form.

What does the Bible say on this subject?

Moses certainly had no idea of prohibiting the use of wine or strong drink; for he says to the priest (Leviticus x. 8): "Wine and strong drink thou shalt not drink, thou and thy sons with thee, when ye come into the tabernacle of the congregation," etc., or wherever and whenever acting in an official capacity; but outside thereof no such prohibition exists in the Law of Moses for either priest or people; and Moses was very strict in dietary laws.

Whatever was sacrificed upon the altar—like salt, flour, oil, pigeons, doves, turtle-doves, sheep, goats and cattle—was also intended as most desirable articles for common consumption.

With the exception of the Feast of Booths, wine was one of the ingredients of the sacrifices, and included also in the tithes given to the priest. So it was considered one of the necessities of life. The law concerning the Nazarite is an exception

for the sake of gloomy ascetics, in which the Orient abounded.

Whatever Moses did not prohibit, the prophets did not.

Isaiah, upbraiding the weakness of his people, says: "Thy wine is adulterated with water," and the Psalmist sings: "And wine gladdens the heart of man."

Rachabites are praised by Jeremiah for their obedience to their father's teachings, without any recommendation whatever of the custom.

The ancient Hebrews called the public banquet *mishteh*, "a drinking occasion." They opened and closed every meal on Sabbath or holidays with wine, closed the Sabbath with wine, and solemnized marriages again with wine, as is the case to this day among the orthodox Jews, who must have wine to perform their religious duties well.

Moses and the Talmud are not opposed to the use of wine or strong drink. The Jew might consider it superfluous to be more orthodox than Moses, the prophets, or the rabbis of old.

I did not succeed in finding in the New Testament that anything "going into the mouth" is sinful. Jesus and his disciples did drink wine, that is certain, even at the last supper; so did the primitive Christians, as Paul says, and so does the Church to this day.

There is not a passage in the New Testament which prohibits the use of wine or strong drink as a beverage, and it is difficult for Christians of the nineteenth century to be more orthodox than Jesus and his apostles.

Therefore, it must be admitted that intelligence, by common consent, and the Bible of both Jews and Christians, do not consider it a moral wrong; hence, it is not a moral wrong to use wine or strong drink as a beverage. This admitted, it follows that you have no right to tell this or that man, "I may, but you shall not take a glass of wine; it is moral for me, but immoral for you," unless you argue from the principle of economy, which makes no moral wrong of the thing itself.

Let us examine for a moment into the argument of economy. It is maintained that the products of nature and industry are for the sustenance and comfort of all. If one uses and wastes so much more than his just share as a person, another must be deprived of his, *i. e.*; provided there is no more than exactly enough for all. Therefore, to waste God's gifts, they say, is indirect theft. The materials changed into fermented beverages are wasted, turned to useless purposes.

It is not established in my mind that this proposition will be indorsed by modern practitioners of medicine, who stimulate patients to quicken the functions of the organism.

It is not decided in physiology and dietetics that the alcoholic ingredients in man's food are superfluous. Nor is it satisfactorily established that men who must perform a certain amount of labor in a given time and under exhaustive circumstances can do without stimulants, and in justice to their health and vigor. But these being

strictly scientific questions, I can not discuss them here.

We know that many a gem of poetry and song owes its existence to a smile of beauty, or an affectionate glance from bright eyes.

We also know that many others, and no less charming beauties of poetry and music, owe their existence to a cup of old wine.

We know, furthermore, that talent and genius sleep on the calm mirror of imagination; they rise and flash forth their innate fire by the undulations of the phantasy, as the ocean shows its silvery hue by high towering waves.

Genius and happiness delight in undulated imagination. But this is a psychological question, to which I can not do justice here.

We know that nine tenths of all human beings use stimulants in this or that form, hence, if common usage proves anything, it can not be called superfluous or a waste of material. Still we will not insist upon this disputed point. For argument's sake, let us admit it is one of the many forms of waste common to civilized society, and so consider the point.

Now I will say nothing about our good ladies' bonnets, flowers, feathers, braids, curls and butterflies; not a word about laces, ribbons, velvets, silks, scarfs, sashes, tassels, fringes, chatelains, fans and parasols; not a mention of necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings, finger rings, breastpins, hair-pins, of card cases and porte-monnaies, chains, watches, lockets and charms; not a whisper about puffs, veils, panniers or flounces; diamonds, gar-

nets, carbuncles, emeralds, sapphires, amethysts, ambers, rubies, opals, pearls, or glass beads, for I really think if it were not for the beautiful variety of woman's dress, in shapes, colors and textures, these streets and houses would look as prosaic and as monotonous as a coal-mine.

Speaking of waste, I am merely going to make war on the gentlemen's buttons. Every one wears at least one dozen of buttons on his coat, when actually, in summer, he needs none, and in winter four will do him. This waste of buttons costs the country no less than five millions of dollars a year, which is clearly wasted.

It is true, the land producing wine, or corn, barley and hops, used in making fermented liquors, might serve better purposes; so might the fields and meadows yielding oats and hay for our aristocrats' horses be also used for better purposes; and the material and labor squandered in the construction of gala carriages, and gala furniture, would build comfortable houses for all the poor families in this country.

But here I have inadvertently run my subject into the province of national economy, to which I can not do justice here.

Civilized society has ideas of its own in this respect, especially the friends and patrons of commerce and industry.

In national economy it makes no difference whether so and so many thousands of persons derive their support from the manufacture and sale of fermented liquors or silk ribbons, cigars or beer, wines or matches, Champagne or bracelets.

It is all waste, in one sense, and none in national economy.

Therefore, the same right which that poor girl has to purchase cheap trinkets, looking from a distance like that wealthy lady's costly jewels, the same right has the poor man to purchase his cheap drink, and to derive the same satisfaction from it as Mr. Toplofty does from his imported Champagne and Habanas; more so, even, for the money spent by the former remains in the country.

If this is correct, it follows that the use of wine or strong drink can not be called immoral, impious, ungodly, or even a waste of property; not even by those whose terminology is shaped by the extra dictionary, supposed to have been revised by the Holy Spirit, which editions are very cheap and extremely useful in shaping things for the popular market.

But it is not the use, it is the abuse, of the thing which is the cause of the complaint and excitement.

The intemperate use of wine and strong drink degrades, brutalizes, ruins body and soul, stupefies reason, benightens the judgment, and is frequently the cause of shocking crime and untimely death, of sorrow and affliction, of insanity and suicide.

It is inebriety against which Moses holds up Noah and his degraded son Ham, Lot and his deluded daughters, against which Solomon and Isaiah, and many other prophets and sages speak solemn words of admonition and rebuke.

The abuse is a calamity, which, for the sake of humanity, ought to be remedied by just and proper means.

Here a story of the Talmud must be narrated. A heathen asked a rabbi: "If your God hates our gods and idols, why does he not destroy them if he is almighty?" "You worship sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, and all the various objects of nature," the rabbi replied; "can you expect of the All-wise God that he destroy his beautiful creation on account of some foolish men?" This, indeed, is the real point at issue.

Is it proper, just and wise to destroy and prohibit the use of anything, not improper in itself, on account of some foolish or wicked men who brutally abuse God's gifts?

Is it just and wise to punish the innocent in order to reach the guilty ones?

Have we any right, or is it common usage in the civilized world, to prohibit things because they are liable to abuse by the imprudent or unjust?

Let us quote parallel cases, and decide by analogy.

One of the most horrible causes of calamity and crime, of the loss of honor and virtue, and the destruction of happiness and life, is *money*.

My time is too brief, the wildest imagination too feeble to depict a mere fraction of the woes and crimes caused by money. It makes rogues of honest men, and villains of generous souls. It blinds the eyes of the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous,

Money makes slaves, hypocrites, gamblers, thieves, robbers and assassins.

Money, alas! ruins virtue, beguiles innocence, turns uprightness into falsehood outweighs honor and patriotism, brings wickedness, shame and brutality.

The wealthy, alas! as well as the poor give and take bribes to cripple the arm of justice.

Thousands of souls are lost, other thousands languish in penitentiaries and houses of correction, hundreds expire on the gallows, countless hearts are broken, and families ruined by the curse, or rather abuse, of money and the corrupt appetite to possess it, more, still more, of it.

Brethren, let us pray, sing and preach to abolish and utterly prohibit all sorts of money, which is Satan's medium to purchase lost souls.

Brethren, let us pray for all those poor sinners who use money.

But, before we do, let us look upon another and probably no less fatal source and cause of crime, shame and destruction—its name is luxury. I do not mean effeminacy, sensuality and lasciviousness; I mean extravagant indulgence in expensive diet, costly dress and equipage; to outshine and outlive, if possible, every other person.

Is there any degradation of human nature to which an insane luxury has not misled thousands of God's creatures?

Is there any category of shame or crime which has not received its victims from the corrupting hell of extravagance?

It is the apish pomp and madman's masquer-

ade which ruin persons and families, force business men into bankruptcy and suicide, and innocent persons into the dens of shame and crime.

You have heard of public men who must sacrifice their honor to keep up the capricious style and tone of the day.

You hear and see daily the exchange of purity for trumpery, and of veracity for glittering and deceitful masquerades.

Purgatory is not large enough to hold all the victims of insane luxury.

Well, then, let us have a revival and close all stores which offer for sale such abominable articles offering that horrible temptation to the innocent, ruining so many souls and families, so many helpless women and children.

Let us form calico societies, muslin unions and leather clothes associations, and let us move back into Adam's paradise, because ever so many people abuse God's gifts in this world.

Is there anything in this wide universe, however blessed and necessary, that can not be abused?

Among all the feelings of the human heart none give us more delight or genuine happiness than the love and affection which unite spouses in perpetual and reciprocal esteem, friendship and sympathy.

Look upon the shocking crimes and nameless woes emanating from the abuse of that indential love of the sexes.

Jealousy is the progenitor of hatred, life long and implacable animosity, brutal hostilities, mur-

der and suicide; and all that is of daily occurrence.

Physicians only know how many thousands lose health, cheerfulness and happiness, the noblest functions of soul and body; how many are carried to an early grave; how many poor and guiltless children suffer, wither and perish, and all this by the abuse of the holiest and most generous feelings of the human heart.

I will not shock your feelings by recounting the woes, vices and crimes narrated daily by the press, the social evil, the abortions, the foundlings. It is enough to know and understand what abuse will do.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, let us meet the evil at the root.

The main cause of all these evils is beauty. There shall be no beauty. We will tolerate none.

But as our good wives, sisters and daughters can not help being beautiful, and we do not like to see them do like the sister of Frederick the Great, who wantonly destroyed the beauty of her face, let us build harems and keep every beautiful dame or damsel locked up and well watched until a committee of grave and honorable judges shall declare her decidedly ugly. Then she may go forth into this wicked world without danger to herself or others.

Take religion itself and see what abuse will make of it.

All the barbarous cruelties which man in his brute rage could inflict on man, outrages of all descriptions were committed, persecutions of

individuals and nations were decreed and executed in cold blood, destructive wars were waged, millions of men were made miserable, and other millions slain—all by the abuse of religion.

And just now, generous dames and damsels are misled to abuse prayer and benediction themselves, to take the name of the Lord their God in vain, and make public demonstrations—ladies make public demonstrations—under the influence of abused religion.

There is nothing so holy, so sublime, so divine that man in his delusion can not abuse.

Shall God destroy his beautiful creation because foolish men worship the objects of nature?

Can we abolish money, luxury, beauty or religion, love or prayer, because they are abused and become the sources and causes of misery, affliction, shame, crime and ruin?

Human nature and the civilized world respond emphatically, No!

If the law prohibits that which is not criminal or immoral *per se*, it is despotic, challenges resistance, renders itself contemptible, undermines the respect for good and necessary laws, makes hypocrites and hidden rebels, and defeats its own ends. It demoralizes.

If public opinion stigmatizes that which is neither criminal nor immoral *per se*, it weakens itself and renders itself powerless.

If religion and prayer are abused to wage war on liquor to-day, they may be abused to-morrow, on the same principle precisely, to persecute and pray out of their houses and homes, Freemasons,

Catholics, foreigners, infidels, or anybody who is not fashionable, suits not the tastes of his neighbors, or does not conform to vulgar prejudices.

If the passions may be ignited with impunity to override and defy the law and the Constitution, in this or that form, or by any means, it matters not how or what, we stand at the brink of lawless despotism, and the gates are ajar for all sorts of violence and persecution, oppression and destruction of all personal rights.

As practical a people of common sense as we are, let us keep in sight that the passions once aroused invariably end in mischief and destroy the very thing they mean to build up.

Their passions once fully aroused may lead us back into all the excesses and brutalities of the Middle Ages.

No nation on earth, ancient or modern, can boast of respecting higher or treating better the women of their country than we do; nor do any deserve it better.

We are willing to grant them equal rights in every respect, but we must refuse to be governed by them.

Let them not put us to shame before the civilized world as a priest-ridden and woman-ridden people, after the heroism of our soldiers, the genius of our inventors, and the liberty of our country have filled all with admiration.

There are plenty of means at our command to protect the community against the abuse of liquor, and many other abuses; but passion, fanaticism, despotic laws, priestcraft, and changing the

course of nature in subjecting the law to passion, and man to female dictation, will never accomplish any.

There are means at our command to check inebriety and excess, and I am willing to assist in reducing them to practice; but it is not the theme of this essay.

Here I wanted to establish this:

I. The use of wine or strong drink as a beverage is no moral wrong, nor can it properly be called a waste of property.

II. Whatever is not wrong to one class of our people can not be made so to any other in a democratic country.

III. The abuse of anything not criminal or immoral *per se* does not justify the abolition or prohibition thereof.

IV. Penal or prohibitory laws against acts or usages not criminal or immoral in themselves defeat the very end and object of all law.

V. The abuse of religion and prayer is worse than the abuse of liquor.

VI. The present crusade will not remedy the evil; it is contrary to law and liberty, and it makes us ridiculous in the eyes of the civilized world.

The decree of King Ahasuerus, the ruler of Medo-Persia, reads:

“That every man be ruler in his house, and speak according to the tongue of his people.”