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MRS. Edwin C. Dinwiddie

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THE MORAL DUTY

OF

TOTAL ABSTINENCE.

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived hereby is not wise.”—PROVERBS XX. 1.

I PROPOSE to discuss the very important question, What is the duty of every Christian in reference to the use of intoxicating drinks? No question is, at the present moment, agitating more minds than this one. None has a better right to enter the pulpit on the Sabbath; to no other moral question can a minister of Jesus Christ be more imperatively required to return a candid, careful, and most unmistakable answer. In every domain of practical Christian morals, the pulpit ought to make the path of duty so clear that “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.” A minister should carry no dark-lanterns.

During the past week, I have found my mind disturbed afresh, and deeply, too, by the state of things around us. To the outward eye, the business and the social life of this city have gone on as aforetimes. But the eye of God, looking into the interior moral life of this community, has seen

strange and sorrowful things. He has seen struggles with terrible temptation that you have little dreamed of. He has seen several thousands of people strongly tempted to do that which inclination or custom prompted them to do, and yet the very doing of it might be fatal to the body and damning to the soul. He has seen some young man stretching forth his hand, with anxious misgiving, for his first glass of strong drink; and some aged hands reached out to clutch the glass, which should be almost their last. He has beheld thousands of our neighbors entering the door of the drinking-saloon without even heeding that awful inscription written over that door by the hand of Truth—"Whosoever is deceived here, is not wise. Here rich men are made poor; thrifty men are made idle; healthy men are poisoned with deadly disease; parents are made childless; wives are made widows; and immortal *souls*, for whom Jesus bled, are dooming themselves to the outer darkness of eternal despair!" The Omniscient eye has seen some parents setting the sparkling cup (which "biteth like a serpent") right before their own children; and even church-members have offered that ensnaring cup at their hospitable boards to guests, who have been confirmed in dangerous habits by the example of professed Christians! The eye of God has seen the woes, and the ear of God has heard the wails, of the drunkard's home. Beneath all this smooth surface of society, God has witnessed the most terrible passions of lust, sensuality, anger, cruelty,

and often of red-handed murder—all fomented and kept in hot fury by the monster curse of the intoxicating bowl. And now, up from this seething caldron of misery and sin, marches the question to-day to every Christian conscience, “What is my *duty* in regard to using or offering these deceitful and destructive drinks?” Surely our All-wise and Heavenly Father has not left us in the dark on so momentous a question of Christian duty. If our Father has made known to us his will in regard to alcoholic intoxicants, where shall we discover it?

I reply that we shall discover it in two clearly legible laws: the one is the law written on our *bodily constitutions*; the other is the law written in this blessed book, the *Bible*. God is the author of both the body and the book. What he has written on the one never contradicts what he has written in the other. Truths never conflict. An established truth of science never contradicts an established truth of revelation. And when any man or any minister attempts to prove that the Word of God justifies and encourages the use of intoxicating beverages, he puts a fatal weapon into the hands of the infidel. For the shrewd sceptic quickly retorts, “I know that alcoholic stimulants are deadly poisons to the human body and mind; if, therefore, your Bible justifies and encourages their habitual use, then your Bible must be false. I prefer to stick to what I know, rather than believe what you make your Bible to say.” So reasons the cunning sceptic. But you

may be sure, good friends! that I am not going to put such a logical bludgeon into the hands of the infidel; neither shall I put into the mouth of the Christian any excuse for violating God's law, whether written on the human body or in the heaven-sent book. Our bodies, so "wonderfully made," were created to be temples of the Holy Spirit, and not to be dens of debauchery. We are commanded to "glorify God in the body," and every Christian is bound to pray that his "spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. Now let us enquire what law in regard to the use of alcoholic intoxicants, God has written on our bodies?

To this question, both science and universal human experience give answer in a voice as distinct as the thunder of Niagara. Science has made long and patient investigation of the statutes which the Creator has written on the human organism, and has established the fact that alcoholic intoxicants are a poison. Science holds her inquest over the bloated, disfigured body of the man who is drunk, and brings in her verdict, "This man is poisoned!" Alcohol poisons the blood in every vein. It assaults the very throne of our manhood and poisons the brain. It produces such a subtle derangement of the very texture of the brain, that the drinker is tormented by recurrences of thirst for strong drink long after he has broken off the indulgence. There is not a reformed inebriate who does not carry in his brain

a powder-magazine ready to ignite at the touch of one drop of strong drink. Alcohol is one of the most malignant of all poisons, for by its horrid sorcery it strikes through, and poisons the immortal soul! Yet, like other narcotic poisons, alcohol has the magical power to deceive its victim by making him absolutely believe that it is doing him no harm! The "father of lies" never made such a liar as alcohol. Even if we never had any Bible, science would inscribe on the forehead of every habitual drinker of intoxicants, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

2. Science has a second testimony to furnish. She declares incontestably that alcohol is not a "good creature" of the God of love; for it is nowhere to be found in the whole domain of nature. While the Almighty has created innumerable fountains of sparkling water, he never created one gill of alcohol! It is the simple product of the fermenting vat and the distillery. It is born of vegetable decay. God made the golden corn to nourish and sustain his mighty family; but distillation throws the golden grain into a vat of rotteness, and presses out of the rotting mass the fiery juice of alcohol. God hung the purple clusters on the vine to gladden the human eye and the palate; but fermentation turns the pure blood of the grape into a maddening intoxicant. Even if we never had an inspired Bible, yet science would have written on the rosy-hued decanter, "Look not on the wine when it is beautifully

red, when it sparkleth in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly ; for at the last it will bite like the serpent, and sting like the adder.”

3. But science and human experience have a third testimony to offer, and it is the most convincing of all. They reveal to us that God has written on every human body a law of abstinence from intoxicating beverages, by decreeing that alcohol shall lessen the muscular power, and diminish the animal heat, and derange the digestive organs of the human body. All these laws are as immovably true as the law of gravitation. Alcohol is not food. It positively interferes with alimentation. Alcohol, instead of helping digestion, tends to destroy the digestive organs. Yet thousands of deluded people are swallowing doses of gin and whiskey and wines every day, under the ignorant infatuation that these draughts will aid them to digest their dinners. Men will even cling to this delusive lie long after their stomachs have been burnt out by their fiery potations.

If alcoholic drinks do not feed or warm or aid the digestive functions of our bodies, then “surely,” says the drinker, “they will strengthen me.” No, sir! your “mocker” is lying to you again. Intoxicating drinks actually lessen your muscular power. They waste your vital forces. And they waste them to such a damaging extent, that no sane life insurance company will take a risk on your lives if you are habitually addicted to the use of alcoholic drinks. When the most famous of modern pugilists was asked if he did not use plenty

of ale and porter while in training for his brutal prize-fights, he replied, "When I have business on hand, there is nothing like cold water and the dumb-bells." The shameless bully cared nothing for God's law written in the Bible; but he knew too much about God's law written on his body to weaken his giant strength by using alcoholic poisons. I was once told by the most famous American pedestrian, that nothing was so fatal to his success when engaged in a great feat of walking, as even the moderate use of wine or of whiskey.

Science and human experience do not halt at these two individual examples. They point us to the whole mighty and innumerable array of noble feats of the hand, and feats of the muscle, and feats of the brain, and feats of the giant intellect, which have been wrought by men who were clean from the taint or touch of alcohol, and they defy you to match those feats by any performances of bodies or of brains which were poisoned by strong drink. Science and experience point to the fact that every healthy human frame instinctively recognizes alcohol as its enemy, and tries to expel it. Science and experience testify that alcohol does not feed a human body, but impoverishes it; instead of warming the body, it first scorches, and then leaves it to freeze; instead of building it up, it tears it down; instead of prolonging life, it breeds a legion of diseases; and, with the smile of pleasure on its face, it wields the red dagger of the assassin! Science and experience invoke before us to-day the millions of human

forms that are scarred, and defaced, and disfigured, and diseased by strong drink ; and summoning from their putrid graves the myriads upon myriads who for forty centuries have been murdered by strong drink, they propose to them the question, "What is God's law written upon your bodies?" And from the whole mighty multitude of living bodies and of the dead, comes back a voice loud as the seven thunders of the Apocalypse—TOTAL ABSTINENCE! TOTAL ABSTINENCE!!

II. We have been reading the law of the Creator written on the human body ; now let us read and interpret the law written in this inspired *book*. What saith the Lord? In approaching the Word of God to receive its testimony, we must come to it in the spirit of devout candor, and with no disposition to seize upon certain isolated texts, and twist them into hooks to hang our pet theories on. We must study each passage in the light of the whole book. We must look fairly at the general aim and scope and spirit of the entire volume. What is the general aim and spirit of God's glorious Word? No one will dare to deny that the aim of this book is to elevate man, and not to degrade him ; to purify him, and not to poison him ; to keep his soul and body undefiled, and not to make either body or soul a den of uncleanness. The whole trend of the Bible is towards sobriety and self-control. It enjoins watchfulness and "keeping the body under," and crucifixion of all sensual lusts. It commands us to be holy even as God himself is holy. No virtue was more persis

tently preached by our Divine Redeemer and his apostles, than the beautiful virtue of self-denial. No sin is more condemned than the sin of self-indulgence. Our Father sent this blessed book to lead his frail, sinful children up toward heaven, and not to mislead them towards drunkenness and damnation. I therefore assert, without fear of successful contradiction, that from the first syllable in Genesis to the last love-note of Revelation, the whole *spirit* of God's Word is in favor of entire abstinence from every practice which tends to degrade and destroy the human body or soul! The divine law in the book confirms the divine law on the body. All attempts to dragoon the Scriptures into a support of the modern drinking customs—like all similar attempts to dragoon them into a support of modern slavery—only end in making scoffers and sceptics.

Our opponents will say that this is dealing too much in generalities. They demand an examination of particular texts. Their demand shall be gratified. We have no fear of the result. "Let truth and error grapple; who ever knew truth to be worsted in a fair encounter?"

We affirm that the holy Word of God enjoins the duty of abstinence from alcoholic intoxicants. Before this assembly, as before a court, we shall summon witnesses from the inspired record to prove this declaration. First of all, we summon the ancient patriarch Noah, who "planted a vineyard, and drank of the wine, and was drunken!" As we gaze upon the poor old man lying in his

debauch, we discover plainly that the grace of God never will protect even a good man from the consequences of sin, while he is breaking God's law written on the body. Had Noah been a "tee-totaler," he never would have been drunk. The very "preacher of righteousness" who could withstand a world of scoffing idolaters could not withstand the wine-cup. What member of Christ's church will dare to tamper with a tempter which laid even Noah on his back?

I next summon Moses, the man of God, who has recorded Jehovah's solemn prohibition of the priesthood from touching wine when engaged in their sacred duties: "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die." Even that one passage, in the fourteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, which is often claimed as a warrant for tippling, I am not willing to surrender. In that passage, Moses records this permission of God to his people on festal occasions, "Thou shalt bestow that money for oxen, for sheep, for wine or strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth, and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God." This word "strong drink" has a very ominous sound; but it is the incorrect translation of the Hebrew word *shakar*, which signifies a sweet drink expressed from fruits, and often drunk in an unfermented state. It is the root of our English word *sugar*. This passage gives no warrant for the use of alcoholic poisons, even on the most innocent occasions of festivity.

Here let me remind you, once for all, that the Word of God speaks sometimes of certain drinks as a "blessing," as innocent in themselves, and as a symbol of spiritual blessings. In other passages, God's book condemns certain drinks as dangerous and deadly. Most unfortunately and ignorantly, our English translators of the Bible often translated both the innocent and the hurtful beverages under the common name of "wine" and of "strong drink." That acute and profound scholar, Professor Moses Stuart, of Andover, has wisely said, "My final conclusion is, that wherever the Scriptures speak of wine as a comfort, a blessing, or a libation to God, they can mean only such drinks as contained no alcohol; but in those passages in which they denounce wine and prohibit it and connect it with drunkenness, they can mean only the alcoholic intoxicant." Facts show that the ancients not only preserved wine unfermented, but regarded it as of a higher flavor than the fermented wine. This unfermented wine, or blood of the grape, could be used without any inebriation whatever. Why, then, shall we not take the sound and safe position that only the harmless and innocent beverages are commended in the Bible, and that it is the alcoholic intoxicant which is there denounced and prohibited?

My next witness is Samson, the stalwart deliverer of Israel; the "muscular Christian," for whom, when he was "sore athirst," God wrought a miracle to give him drink. And that drink was not

wine or whiskey, but pure cold water. As this man of giant strength comes on the witness-stand before us, he testifies that he never touched wine or strong drink, nor even ate of anything that cometh of the vine! Nor did his mother do so before him. He thus escaped the danger of an hereditary appetite for strong drink, which is the fatal secret of the drunkenness of thousands. Fathers! mothers! if you would have sober and healthful children, keep the virus of this accursed appetite out of your blood!

Now, what saith the wise man? Let us call up Solomon, to whom God gave an understanding heart, so that there was none like unto him. I will read for you his testimony in close and literal translation from the original Hebrew. Hear his inspired words! "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath strifes? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath blurred eyes? Those who tarry long over the wine; those who enter in to try mixed drinks. Look not on the wine when it shows itself ruddy, when it sparkleth in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly. For at the last it will bite like a serpent, and sting like a viper." Is there any one in this house who can possibly twist this passage into an apology for "moderate drinking"? Then you might as well say that Solomon believed in a moderate playing with snakes, or in being moderately stung by a nest of adders.

I might summon before you the prophet Hosea, with his solemn declaration, "Whoredom and wine and new wine, take away the heart." And sublime

Habakkuk, too, with that terrific word of warning to every one of us, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him!" I wish that this thrilling passage of God's Word could be posted, not only over every dramshop door, but also over every table on which false hospitality ever places a decanter.

Many other Bible witnesses, too, I might summon. But let us make room for Paul, the heroic, self-denying apostle, who strove to "keep his body under," and who exhorts us all to present to God even our bodies as a "living offering." He it is who was inspired to utter that fearful announcement, "Nor drunkards shall inherit the kingdom of God." We may reasonably expect, therefore, that he will give his fellow-men no excuse for tampering with that which leads to drunkenness. We are not disappointed. Paul is most emphatic in his counsels to entire abstinence. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, he says: "Let us watch and *drink not.*" This is the honest reading of the Greek word, which our translators have rendered "sober." In describing the qualifications for a Christian minister, Paul says: "A bishop [*i. e.*, an overseer of souls] must be abstemious, sober-minded, *not sitting by the wine!*" I translate this vitally important verse thus by the authority of the late Dr. Edward Robinson and other profound scholars. I could not ask for a stronger command to total abstinence on the part of every Christian minister.

So rigid was Paul in his total abstinence princi-

ples that, when he writes to his abstaining brother Timothy, he does not recommend him to use wine as a beverage. He carefully says, "Do not drink any longer water only, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake." He prescribes "wine" only as a medicine, and but "little" at that. (Will some one here please to prove to me that even that little wine was an intoxicating drink?) But lest Paul's position could be possibly misunderstood, he has left to us that memorable utterance so redolent of Gospel philanthropy: "It is good not to eat flesh [*i. e.*, meat offered to idols], nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth." It is claimed that this passage enjoins total abstinence on the ground of "expediency." Well, you may use this word if you choose, but I maintain that it is an expediency that has the tremendous *grip* of a moral duty. For if my obligation to do anything which is required to save a fellow-creature from ruin be not a duty, I should like to know where, under the broad heavens, there is a duty? My Bible teaches me that a pernicious example is a sin against the law of love for my neighbor.

We have now briefly examined the testimonies of the chief Bible witnesses on the great question before us. Are there any witnesses to be summoned on the other side? We wait for any to appear. But stop! Here comes an expounder of God's Word who brings forward the example of his ineffable Lord and Saviour, and asserts that Jesus Christ actually manufactured, by miracle, a

large quantity of alcoholic intoxicants to be drunk at a wedding-feast!

If we had not heard this portentous assertion made ten thousand times already, we should be horrified. But let us look it squarely in the face. Our opponents will admit that our divine Lord "knew what was in man." He certainly knew also the nature of an alcoholic drink, its temptations, its woes, and its viper-sting. He certainly *could* have created a perfectly innocent unintoxicating wine, similar to the pure blood of the grape. In view of this perfect knowledge and sovereign power of our loving Lord, we defy any man to prove that he actually created and gave to his own children a draught of alcoholic poison. If the Son of God then and there created alcohol, then was it the first time and the only time in human history when divine power ever made what nowhere else exists in nature!

"Thou hast kept the good wine until now," said the governor of the feast, when he tasted of the beverage which Jesus had made. Was that wine "good" which ministered to drunkenness? Was that wine "good" which contained beneath its ruby sparkle the fang of the viper and the sting of the adder? What were considered the best wines in Palestine?

A pertinent answer to this last question is given by the late Moderator of our Presbyterian General Assembly, who declares, in his learned comment on this passage, "All who know of the wines then used well understand the unfermented

juice of the grape. The present wines of Jerusalem and Lebanon, as we tasted them, were without intoxicating qualities such as we get here in liquors called wines. Those were esteemed the *best* which were least strong." He is firm in his judgment that the wine at Cana was not alcoholic.

This satisfactory opinion of the learned Professor Jacobus is also maintained by such eminent scholars as Professor Moses Stuart, the lamented Albert Barnes, Professor Owen, President Nott, Dr. Lees, and scores of careful students of the inspired Word. Our divine Lord never made an alcoholic intoxicant! To this firm conviction I have always stood, and shall stand until I meet him on his throne in the day of his glorious appearing. It is even a profanation to couple his holy name with the fiery potations of our times.

I trust you have not been wearied by this brief review of the teachings of God's inspired book. Those teachings may be summed up in four distinct affirmations. Observe each one of them carefully :

1. The Bible, in various passages, points out the evils and the perils of intoxicating drinks. It never pronounces a blessing on an intoxicant, and often warns men against its use. Several passages forbid such use.

2. The Bible, in several passages, approves and commends abstinence from intoxicating beverages. There is not a single verse in this book which condemns total abstinence.

3. The whole spirit of the Word of God teaches

self-control and self-denial, both for our own sakes and for the good of our fellow-men. The only passage in which the word "moderation" occurs has no reference whatever to "moderate drinking."

4. Lastly and chiefly, I find that God's LAW against intoxicants written on the human BODY is not contradicted by his LAW written in this blessed BOOK. Each one sustains and confirms the other.

Here I might rest this argument. I trust that it has been made clear to you that total abstinence from these deceptive and deadly intoxicants is *safe* and *sound* and *Scriptural*. But, before closing, let me speak frankly, though briefly, in protest against certain views advocated by beloved brethren from whom it pains me to differ.

It has been asserted that the use of intoxicating beverages is in itself neither morally wrong nor morally right, but is a "matter of indifference." A man may drink alcoholic liquors without doing any wrong, or he may let them alone without any virtue in the act of refraining. The question of drinking or not drinking, often involves no more guilt or goodness than the question of getting up before sunrise or after sunrise in the morning!

Brethren, I solemnly protest that a question which practically involves the salvation or the damnation of millions is not to be "whistled down the wind" in this summary fashion. I ask you, is it an indifferent matter whether you violate God's law against intoxicants written on your

bodily constitutions? Is it a matter of indifference to go against the whole tenor of God's Word? Is it a matter of indifference to partake of that which doth bite like a serpent and sting like an adder? Is it a matter of indifference for you, fellow-Christians, to give your sanction and *example* in favor of those drinking-customs which are cursing society and crowding hell with their victims? The proposition that the drinking of a glass of alcoholic intoxicant involves no moral right or moral wrong, strikes directly at God's law written on our bodies, and the law of self-denial written in his book. There is not a grog-seller in Brooklyn who would ask to have his dramshop-door set open wider than that proposition!

Again, it is often said that as the use of alcoholic beverages is intrinsically a matter of "indifference," it may be left to every man's conscience to decide. Individual conscience then becomes the arbiter. In reply to this postulate, I affirm that it is as much the duty of every man to regulate his conscience by the teachings of God on our bodies and in his book, as it is to regulate his watch by the movements of the sun. But suppose that a man's conscience allows him to use habitually the deceitful glass, will a conviction of conscience save him from the *consequences* of his acts?

Sixty years ago, there was an eminent clergyman in New Jersey who used wine in order to arouse his nervous sensibilities while in the pul-

pit He conscientiously believed that he could preach more eloquently and impressively while under the influence of alcoholic stimulant. But he soon found that he must increase the amount of his dram in order to quicken his jaded powers, and, before he was aware, he had fallen into drunkenness and public disgrace! He afterwards repented in dust and ashes, and was restored to his ministerial office as a total abstainer. Now, this Christian minister followed the guidance of his deluded conscience until it threw him squarely against a divine law as immutable as the law of gravitation. And this may be the wretched fate of any man who does not enlighten his moral sense by the clear teachings of God and of human experience. Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness! "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

A third proposition is laid down by those who hold to the "liberty" of using intoxicating beverages, which reads thus: "I may use wine in moderate measure, but if I should at length find the appetite for it uncontrollable, I would never touch it again." We would smile at the verdant simplicity of this idea if it were not too sadly serious for laughter. Millions of drunkards now in perdition have lulled themselves at first with this delusion until they found it as deceptive as the liquors which they drank. When the appetite becomes "uncontrollable," it is too late. With

millions of inebriates, the awful appetite becomes their master before they suspect it. For "wine is a mocker." Whoso tampers with it must and will be "deceived thereby." This seductive and blinding quality inheres in the very nature of alcoholic stimulants. And upon this *serpent-quality* of strong drink we base a moral duty to let the adders' nest alone. No man has a moral right to thrust his finger into the cockatrice's den.

Finally, it has been affirmed that this beneficent total abstinence reform—which has been so nobly defended by the Lyman Beechers and the Albert Barneses among the dead, and by the John Halls and the Newman Halls among the living—has no other basis to rest on than the principle of "expediency." Let me here say that I rejoice to welcome to our ranks all good men and women who forswear the intoxicating cup because they believe it expedient to do so. But for one, I practise total abstinence not only because it is expedient, but because it is *right*. The longer I live, the more suspicious I grow as to the use of that word "expediency." It is rather too elastic. It often lacks "bottom" and backbone. As a principle of moral obligation, it will not always "hold water." Nay; I have even known it to be made to hold several gallons of exceedingly bad liquor. I have caught it tripping slyly behind the door. I have seen it tripping up even some good men's heels, when a strong conviction of moral right would have held **them** as firm as the everlasting hills.

To-day I advocate a total abstinence from alcoholic poisons as a *duty* towards our God, a *duty* to ourselves, and a *duty* to our tempted and suffering fellow-creatures. If the use of intoxicating beverages is forbidden by the law of God written on our bodies, and also by several direct prohibitions in God's Word; if such use is opposed to the well-being of man and to the glory of Jehovah, then is it our duty to let them alone.

I therefore set before you the clear, straight path of total abstinence from all intoxicants. It is the safe path. It is the true path. It has led thousands to that cross of Jesus Christ which is the entrance to everlasting life and heaven's unfading glories. It is a path which has no ambushes, or pitfalls for the unwary footstep.

This is the way, walk ye in it! And remember that no man was ever yet lost in a straight road!