

INTEMPERANCE

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Intemperance by Henry Horace Pereira

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HENRY HORACE PEREIRA

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BY

HENRY HORACE PEREIRA

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CHAPTER I

THE URGENCY OF THE EVIL

It would be strange if this series of Handbooks for the Clergy did not contain a volume upon the subject of Intemperance. All kinds of social problems and questions force themselves upon our attention. We recognise the claim they have upon our time and thought. We acknowledge that it is a distinct and leading part of our duty to strive to solve and answer them. The well-being of the people is, in a sense, our very *raison d'être*. Could we, then, pass by this great evil without giving the most searching thought to the discovery of the best means by which to raise the heavy burden under which so many are groaning, and to remove this gigantic obstacle which stands between them and their service of Almighty God?

There have been epochs in the past which, as we can see clearly now, were marked by achievements which had called loudly for accomplishment—times in which “the people then living” had committed to them a special work to do. Is this not such a time? and is not our task that of the amelioration of the general condition of the masses, by

the controlling, guiding, uplifting power of our Holy Faith? and are not the sufferers from the great sin of Intemperance calling to us the most loudly for help and for deliverance?

Much has been said and done in regard to this sorely needed work of reformation which has been worse than unwise, a fact which makes it ten times more necessary that men of zeal, who are at the same time men of sense, men filled with enthusiasm for their Master and also of discerning love for their fellow-men, should be the leaders and the workers in a cause of such magnitude and unspeakable importance.

But am I assuming too much when I imagine that we are all agreed that this is an evil of gigantic proportions; that it is a national vice; that it is a source of bitter suffering and shame and loss to multitudes of our people? It may be that I am; for this I know, that, although I have been directly interested in the work of temperance reform for over five-and-twenty years, and have attended a great many meetings upon the subject, and have heard speeches almost without number about it, the researches which the writing of this little book required have proved a revelation to me, and have shown that I had not half understood the real dimensions of the evil. With others it may be as it was with myself.

Two hundred years ago Chief Justice Hales said of a catalogue of the worst crimes: "I have found that, if they were divided into five parts, four of them have been the product of excessive drinking." Have things greatly improved since then? Let us listen to Lord Chief Justice Coleridge: "Judges are weary with calling attention to drink as the principal cause of crime. If they could make England sober, they would shut up nine-tenths of her prisons!" And what of the inevitable result of this? The fear is at last being felt by those in chief authority that degeneration and decay may be the fate of this country if things continue as they are.

Major-General Sir F. Maurice, in the course of an address given at the annual meeting of the Manchester Sanitary Association, stated that three men out of every five who volunteered for the army were rejected as being physically unfit. This question of physical decay was, he asserted, one of appalling national magnitude. Among the contributing causes he referred to the custom of giving babies intoxicating drink. Doctors had told him that "gin livers" in children under three years of age were a common feature in hospital practice. The resulting infant mortality was a most serious consideration, and the survivors were anæmic, miserable specimens of humanity, not fit for civil work, far less for military.