

SERMON ON OFFENCES,

SUITED TO THE TIMES,

AND RECOMMENDED TO THE CAREFUL PERUSAL OF ALL SUCH AS
ATTEND METHODIST WORSHIP IN THE BOUNDS OF THE SALIS-
BURY DISTRICT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE
OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH.

BY REV. S. D. BUMPASS.

Beware, believe not every *spirit*, but *try the spirits* whether they be
of God?—1 JOHN, IV. 1.

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MEMORIAL TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

IN RELATION TO THE

PROVISIONS OF THE ACT OF PARLIAMENT
IN THAT BEARING RELATION TO THE
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MEMORIAL

A SERMON ON OFFENCES.

“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”

MATT. XVIII. 7.

The occasion of this text was a contention among the disciples of our blessed Saviour, which of them should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In common with the rest of their countrymen, they had fallen into a radical error respecting the character of this kingdom. Supposing that it would embrace the state as well as the church, and associating with it such ideas of preferment and honor as they had learned from human governments, they had almost necessarily imbibed that spirit of ambition which influence worldly aspirants. These mistaken views and feelings led, by natural consequence, to that unprofitable contention on their way to Capernaum, which the Saviour found it necessary to reprove. On reaching the house, he inquired what it was they had disputed among themselves by the way.* Being convicted in their hearts by this inquiry, and probably too, filled with amazement at the wonderful knowledge of their master, they “held their peace.” The Saviour continued, “if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.” Not feeling fully satisfied with this, they asked him plainly, “who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” They could have had no idea that this dignity had already been conferred on Peter, when on a former occasion, the Saviour had promised him the keys of this kingdom; nor did he make the slightest allusion to any such purpose. Instead of this, “he called a little child and set him in the midst of them,” and assured them that except they should be converted from their present erroneous views and feelings, they could not even enter into this kingdom. About this time the reproof became so distressing that John sought to divert his

*To see the connection given in these introductory remarks, compare the context with Mark ix. 33, &c., and Luke ix. 46, &c.

attention by calling it to another subject: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followed not us"—just such bigotry as may always be expected from unconverted disciples and worldly minded priests.—The Saviour condemned this also: "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us;" and then firm to his purpose, he brought them back to the original subject. Transferring their thoughts from this significant emblem, the little child in their midst, to the child of grace who should be converted from worldly ambition, pride, and covetousness, by the spirit of the living God, and become humble, sincere, and teachable, like a little child, he gave a more direct answer to the inquiry of his disciples, by assuring them that such characters as these little ones stand so very high in favor at the court of glory, that their angels do always behold the face of his Father which is in heaven. As a still further proof of Christ's intense love for his "little ones," he assures his mistaken disciples that all offenders or stumbling-blocks, such as they were likely to become unless speedily converted, should be visited with the heaviest woes. "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.—Woe unto the world," &c. And we are persuaded that an *explication* and faithful *application* of this last verse will save the present generation of God's children from delusions and dangers greater than those into which the disciples had fallen.

1. The term "offence,"* upon the sense of which the force of this text very much depends, is liable to be misunderstood. It commonly means something disagreeable, calculated to disgust or insult; here it means just the contrary, something quite agreeable, but which is calculated to deceive, mislead, and ruin. The primitive meaning of the original is a trap, or rather the trigger of a trap to which the bait is tied; and when touched, it gives way so as to let the trap fall or the spring fly and take

*Perhaps the word *scandal* would come as near expressing the full force of the Greek [*skandalon*] as any other term, but since this too is often used in another sense, we prefer the term employed by the translators.

the animal that touched it. Hence by metonymy it means a stumbling-block, a stratagem. An offence, then, is a moral trap, baited for the taste, and suited to the capture of mortals, a stumbling-block rolled in their way, a stratagem calculated to deceive and ruin them.

As the skilful hunter has many kinds and sizes of traps, hooks, and nets, for all kinds and sizes of animals—from the tiny mouse to the roaring king of the forest, from the little minnow that plays in the mountain brook to the leviathan of the great deep, from the sparrow that chirps around the cottage to the soaring eagle—and as he takes care to conceal these in every forest, to hang them out in every stream, and spread them in every field, that by all means he may take some, so satan hunts for men. He has stratagems of all sorts and sizes, carefully concealed in all the walks of life, and suited to the deception and ruin of all classes and conditions of men. The only precaution which he finds it necessary to use in order to success, is to conceal the immediate danger so as not to give alarm. The partridge has often seen her mates entangled in the sportsman's net, yet will she be taken in the same way; the fish also has seen his fellows drawn from his native element by means of the fisherman's hook, but bites at the very same bait; and such is the infatuation of our fallen race that we are enticed into those very sins by which we have seen so many thousands ruined. And more stupid even than the brute creation, we are most easily deceived by those very stratagems from which we have barely escaped with our lives. It avails but little to warn us of unseen consequences, to tell us of the hundreds that we ourselves have known destroyed in this very way; this often serves to make us both blinder and harder. Unless we are made to see the danger with our own eyes and to hear it with our own ears—unless we can see the frightful hunter and feel the piercings of his barbed hook—we will not be alarmed. Even then, satan often finds means to deceive; and his hapless victim turns all his spite against the kind friend who would save him from ruin, and blindly follows the monster who is conducting him to the chambers of death!

The text is sometimes mistaken for a decree in which the

Saviour positively ordains that certain individuals shall be guilty of offences, and then denounces a woe against them for so doing, and is considered "a hard saying;" whereas it is no more than a prophecy of what should come to pass. Our Saviour took especial pains to prepare his followers for all the trials that awaited them. On another occasion, he had told them that they would be delivered to the councils, scourged in the synagogues, brought before kings and governors—that the brother should deliver up the brother to death, the parents the children, that children should rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death, and that they should be hated of all men for his name's sake. Now again he assures them that "offences must needs come." The necessity here spoken of evidently originates in sin. It is not asserted either in this or in any other part of the word, that there is an original necessity for sin. This might have been avoided in the beginning, and by the grace of God, it may be overcome now. But sin having been introduced into the world, man will both offend and be offended; and whatever may be the array of circumstances thrown around him, however strong his natural bias to evil, the full concurrence of his own will in the offence, and the conviction resting upon his mind that he could have done otherwise, are sufficient to justify the severest sentence of woe upon his soul. And the practical lesson which the Master here teaches is, *that no kind of necessity will justify an offence or stratagem by which men deceive, mislead, and ruin each other.*

2. In the particular application of this general truth to the practical affairs of life, it is unnecessary for me to say that falsehoods, flatteries, thefts, &c., are offences of the basest kind. This will be fully admitted by all. But there is another *spirit* which has obtained extensive favor. Concerning its origin men are not fully agreed. Whether it was born in heaven or generated in hell, whether it is to be numbered among the "good creatures of God" or the "crooked inventions" of men, are questions still debated in the schools of disputants; but that it has met with unusual success all must admit. Evidently of low and vulgar habits, it has made successful court

to the great ones of the earth. With nothing to recommend it but the multitude of its slain, and the well known excesses and indecencies which it has committed, under the specious pretexts of medicines, cordials, &c., it has found its way into the highest circles of life and figured very largely in the most fashionable parties. With some more difficulty it has gained upon the good graces of the fair, so far at least, as to find a place in their mince-pies and syllabubs. And although it is the well known author of more jealousies, envies, and divisions in society than any one agent, it enters extensively into the social circle, and from these important services borrows one of its most imposing titles, to wit: "the social glass." This *ardent* spirit has been accused of deception and ruin:—"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." And notwithstanding the number of its dear lovers and the influence of its supporters, it shall not be shielded from a fair investigation of these charges. With this then, we begin the application of the text. And our first and last appeal is, "to the law and to the testimony: if *our opponents* speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them."

(1) The first truths from which we can draw an inference or upon which we can build an argument, are these, that while the Scriptures of the *Old Testament* do generally represent wine and strong drink as great mockers and protest loudly against the evils of drunkenness, they do not prohibit the use of wine altogether, but often speak of the vine and its fruits as great blessings.*

From these truths we may draw the following inferences: 1. Whereas the Old Testament Scriptures do not entirely prohibit the use of wine, therefore if we lived under a dispensation just such as theirs, and if our liquors were as mild as the wines used at that time, it would be wrong for *us* to prohibit the use of such liquors altogether; for in that case they *might* be used without offence. 2. Whereas the Old Testament Scrip

* The art of distillation was not known to the ancients, and much of their wine was not intoxicating or very slightly so, and was used for *nourishment*, as it still is in some European countries.

tures do often represent wine and strong drink as the causes of great offences, we may infer, that if our dispensation was as dark and our liquors as mild as theirs, still these liquors would be the cause of frequent and outrageous offences; and that while they might be innocently used by some, they would prove an occasion of stumbling to thousands. But whereas the Christian dispensation is much brighter than the Mosaic, and whereas the liquors used at the present day are far more hurtful than the wines of the ancient Jews, the first of the above conclusions cannot be drawn, while the second is much strengthened. That is, the fact that the Old Testament does not entirely prohibit the use of such wine as was then made, is no evidence that the Bible does not condemn the common use of such spirituous liquors as we have, while every thing that is said in the Old Testament against drunkenness &c., the increased light of the New Testament dispensation, and the more intoxicating quality of our liquors render it extremely probable, if not absolutely certain, that the Bible condemns their common use. You need not be at all surprised, gentle hearer, if some such condemnatory sentence should be brought forward, if indeed it has not already appeared.

(2.) Another fact bearing strongly upon this subject, is that certain holy characters were not allowed to use wine at all: such as, the priests when they went into the tabernacle, that they might thereby "put a difference between holy and unholy;"* the Nazarites, because they were "holy unto the Lord;"† certain remarkable personages: as Samson, John the Baptist &c.; and the Rechabites, because they had been so instructed by Jonadab their father.‡ To test their firmness, these last were taken by Jeremiah, a prophet of the Lord, into the temple of God, and there, in that holy place, and by that holy man, pots full of wine were set before them. A stronger temptation could not have been but in their way; but they firmly resisted it; and God signified his approbation of Jonadab's charge and of their obedience by one of the most lasting promises to be found in his word: "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever."§

*Levit. x. 9, &c.

†Num. vi. 3 &c.

‡Jer. xxxii. 10

Christians are true antetypes of such characters as the above. They are a "royal and holy priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*—kings and priests unto God†—he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist."‡

Take the former of these facts for the major proposition of a syllogism, and the second for the minor, the conclusion will be that christians should not use even such wine as was made among the Hebrews. For if priests when they entered into "the tabernacle made with hands" were forbidden the use of wine, and if christians are "a royal priesthood," who have entered "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," surely they should not use it so long as they continue in Christ.—If Nazarites were forbidden to use wine because "the consecration of God" was upon their heads, and because they were "holy unto the Lord," and if christians are a "holy people," fully consecrated to God by baptism, surely they are likewise forbidden to use it during all the days of their separation from sin.—If such characters as Samson, John the Baptist, &c., who were rendered great among men by the distinguished services they had to perform, did not use wine, and if the *least* christian is *greater than John the Baptist*, how can such a one reconcile it to the dignity of his station and the important duties which devolve upon him to use even the mildest kind of wine? Even this, taken in the smallest quantities, would have defiled a priest or Nazarite, shorn Samson of his strength, converted the Rechabite's blessing into a curse, or disqualified John the Baptist for his important services; and such are its withering influences still. Though holier than a priest of the living God and purer than a Nazarite—though greater in privileges than John the Baptist and stronger in faith than Samson was in body, the christian will feel its defiling, its weakening, its deadening influences in all the powers of his ransomed soul (till he fall like lightning from his heaven of holiness and love into the lowest depths of sin and misery.) Hence we venture the assertion, and we do it without the fear of successful contradiction, *that there is not*

*1 Pet. ii. 9

†Rev. i. 6.

Mat. xi. 11.

*a single passage in the New Testament, which, when rightly understood, will sanction the continued use of wine among christians except for medical or sacramental purposes.**

* Some contend that we have the Saviour's example for the use of wine. "John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking," &c.—they fill up the elipsis with the terms "bread and wine." But an improbable conjecture which has no stronger evidence than this to sustain it may well be doubted.

But suppose the Saviour had used wine, it would no more follow that we should do so likewise than it does that we should be circumcised, keep the passover, wear sandals, recline at the table, &c., because he did these things. Christ was the representative of two dispensations; and it was just as necessary for him to be a fair representative of what was inoffensive in the Jewish dispensation as to set an example for his own. The law he fulfilled in his own person, and consequently fell into the innocent customs of the law. The feast of the passover, marriage feasts, and as we have already seen, the use of mild wines, were among these customs. With the first two of these customs he complied, in order to fulfil the law; and if he did with the last, (a position which still wants proof,) it was for the same reason.

The above reason may also account for his making wine at the marriage feast, and using the cup at the passover; but there are still more spiritual reasons for both of these transactions.

Wine was one of the promised blessings (or curses) of the tribe of Judah to which he belonged, (Gen. xlix. 10, 11,) and may be considered a prophetic badge of this tribe. Immediately after foretelling that the sceptre should not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet till Shiloh come, &c.—a prophecy which is universally referred to Christ—Jacob adds (still speaking of Judah) "binding his foal unto the vine, he shall wash his garments in wine." So that this first miracle may be in some sense a fulfillment of prophecy, by which he more fully identified himself with the tribe of Judah as being that Shiloh that had been promised.

Again, as the marriage state is a beautiful figure of Christ's union with the church, so this wine made at the marriage feast may be regarded an expressive figure of his passion by which his marriage to the church was fully consummated. And this view of the subject is much strengthened by the fact that wine in the Eucharist has been continued as a memorial of that transaction.

Certainly there is nothing in all this to justify christians in the common use of wine. What have they to do with Jewish customs? Have they a law and a prophecy to fulfill by the use of wine?—a passion to prefigure?—a miracle to work? Are they Hebrews? Do they live under the Mosaic dispensation?—Do they belong to the tribe of Judah? Blind and sordid indeed must that mind be, which can find in such spiritual and holy transactions as these a justification for one of the lowest sensualities! Truly such may be said to follow Christ, not

(3) Having shown that the common use of even mild wine is calculated to offend spiritual christians, we might build upon this showing a powerful argument against the use of more intoxicating liquors; for surely it is a greater offence to drink

because they "see the miracle, but because they do *drink of the wine and are drunken.*"

That "the fruit of the vine," first used in the Eucharist was not intoxicating wine, is sufficiently evident from the occasion on which this sacrament was instituted, namely: at the feast of the passover. At this feast the Hebrews were strictly forbidden to use any thing that was leavened (Exod. xii, 15, &c.) The word here translated "leaven" applies to any thing which is "sharp, pungent, or sour," such as "vinegar," (see Genesis.) and is believed to include fermented wine. Again, the Jews used unleavened bread to show their haste in leaving Egypt; for the same reason should they have used unfermented wine. Another obvious reason for this prohibition applies with more force to fermented wine than to leavened bread; for the whole nation being assembled together for more than a week at this feast, was in great danger of falling into excesses; therefore leavened bread and fermented wine were prohibited for the same reason that dainties and liquors should be banished from our camp meetings, to prevent gluttony and drunkenness. This was the occasion on which our Saviour instituted the Eucharist; and we cannot for a moment suppose that he would so far depart from the letter and spirit of the law as to use leavened bread or fermented wine.

But suppose the wine used in this sacrament had been of an intoxicating character, yet this very use of it is one of the strongest reasons why it should not be drunk on ordinary occasions. Wine is here made an emblem of blood, the use of which is forbidden both under the Mosaic and christian dispensations, (Levit. xvii, 14; Acts, xv, 20, 29.) It is consecrated to a sacred purpose, and nothing can have a stronger tendency to disqualify a communicant for the solemnities of the Eucharist than the habit of regarding its elements articles of common use. The bread used on such occasions to represent the body of Christ, should be unleavened, unseasoned, such as we do not eat at ordinary meals; and the "fruit of the vine," representing his blood, should never be used on ordinary occasions.—The very thought of these articles should be associated with the sufferings and death of our Saviour, and forever banish a taste for any thing that will intoxicate.

As for those passages where it is said a bishop or deacon should not be "given to wine—to much wine," (phrases of synonymous import,) we have sufficient evidence in the case of Timothy, how they were understood by the first ministers of the gospel. He would not use even "*a little wine*" for medicine without the prescription of an inspired man. And these (the Eucharistic and medical) are the only innocent and safe uses that can be made of it at the present day.—Whatever christian uses it in any other way does so without the support of bible authority, without the sanction of the Saviour's usage, and without a precedent of apostolic example, but in *direct opposition* to the whole of these authorities.

ardent spirits than it is to use wine. But we prefer to try this evil upon its own merits by the same standard of unerring truth. And since we must now introduce a subject by which to test its effects, we will begin with the occasional moderate drinker. The characteristics of an offence are deception and ruin. Let us see if these are developed in him. He supposes then that there is nothing in God's word to condemn his practice, and that in persisting in it he is transgressing no moral precept of that word. He makes these suppositions, I say, otherwise he is an acknowledged stumbling-block. The former of these suppositions has already been shown to be a mistake, the latter is easily proved to be such. If he did not contract this habit by taking sweetened drams from the hand of an imprudent mother, or by following the prescriptions of a still more imprudent physician, it is more than likely that he acquired it by the ungodly advice or example of improper associates. Here then, at the very threshold, he has fallen short of that "love" for the brethren which Christ makes one distinguishing trait of his disciples, and preferred the society and advice of others; he has "walked in the counsel of the ungodly;"—(for none but the ungodly would give such counsel)—he has neglected that fatherly injunction, "come out from among them and be ye separate"—that wholesome caution, "look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup," and that still more pointed warning, "touch not, taste not,—all of which perish in the using." Yet he supposes that his course is not opposed to the principles of the Bible!

The occasional dram-drinker supposes further, that he is doing no spiritual injury either to himself or others, for unless he drinks with this understanding he must know that he is drinking with offence. But let us see if he is not mistaken in this also. A very moderate dram stimulates the system and excites the mind. This excitement being needlessly brought on is not controlled by the Holy Spirit, for it is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;" and a man in such a state will think, speak, and act as he would not otherwise have done. He feels an unusual degree of levity.

and gives way to “jesting, filthiness, and foolish talking”—of anger and indulges in “wit, evil speaking, slanders, backbiting, or railing”—or of pride, which leads to “vain boasting.” These states of mind are directly opposed “sobriety” and “watchfulness,” to “purity, meekness, and humility,” all of which are enjoined in God’s word; and this unbridled use of the tongue is by no means “seasoned with salt, and meet to minister grace to the hearers.” After the stimulation there follows a reaction; and then it is impossible to be “diligent in business, fervent in spirit serving the Lord—to love the Lord with all the heart, mind, soul and strength,” for the subject feels almost devoid of either. Meanwhile his example has a most withering influence upon the morals and destinies of the rising generation; and some unguarded expression (for no allowance is yet made for his “being in liquor”) creates envies, discords, and divisions, in society around. Yet he *supposes* that he is doing no harm!!

Every repetition of the stimulant helps to create a habit, not only of drinking, but likewise of speaking and acting under its influence, which, with little less than omnipotent power, is fastening upon his soul. The dram-drinker must know that thousands of better, wiser, and stronger men than himself have been brought so completely under the power of this habit as to ruin both themselves and their families; and indeed he feels it rapidly increasing on himself, (for any person who drinks at all will sometimes drink too much,) yet in the face of all these facts, he makes another supposition sufficiently strange to astonish both men and angels—hear it, O heavens, and be confounded, O earth!—He supposes that he is in no danger of becoming a drunkard!!! Was ever a mortal more deceived?

As the moderate drinker has not yet forsaken the house of God, it is possible that his eyes might be opened to see his danger if Satan did not find means to increase his delusion.—It would be tedious to follow him in all his stages down this dark “valley of the shadow of death.” Let it suffice to say that he takes one step and then another—falls into stratagem after stratagem, till with a bloated face, distorted features,

and ruined constitution—till having wasted his estate and reduced his family to beggary, having lost all affection for his wife, all sense of shame, and all love for God's people—with a mind in the very image and superscription of the devil—till peeled by the gambler's cunning, and tainted by the harlot's rotten breath, he sinks down into a state of drunken sot-tishness. We will not say that this man was deluded all the while. Blind indeed must he have been if he did not at last begin to see that he was departing from the living God; hard must have been his heart if he did not feel pangs of keenest remorse. But habit had then enslaved him, sin had corrupted his heart, and he was "led captive by the devil at his will." Now again in fits of the *delirium tremens* and *mania potu* he is made to feel some foretaste of hell, and to see the companions of his future home. But what does all this avail? His moral powers are now completely paralyzed, and nothing but a miracle of grace, such a one as is not often wrought by the weak faith of this generation, will save him. And now, "who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contention? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?" Is it not he that "tarrying long at the wine" has fallen into "a narrow pit?" Yea, he has felt that "her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword"—that "at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder."*

And now alas, alas, for the broken hearted wife and helpless children! Ye friends, cover your heads for shame, and ye parents, bow down your grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.—But why attempt to describe the evils of this offence? Had I a thought sufficiently powerful to shock the universe, and had I a word to convey this thought which would blight like the mildew and shiver like the lightnings of heaven—had I power to compare this word up to the superlative degree and charge it with the seven last woes of the Apocalypse, and had I an angel's voice to sound it till it should howl with the storm around every sea bound shore, and till every mountain rock should rend with its echoes, it would give but a fee-

* Prov. xxiii, 27, 32.

ble expression of the evils produced by this single offence. Yea, a thousand such thoughts and ten thousand such words could not conceive the depths of woe or express the pangs of sorrow occasioned by offences.

3. From offences we proceed to apply the truths of this text to offenders as the moral agents by whom offences come : “ woe to that man by whom the offence cometh ! ”—to the distiller who makes the spirits, the merchant who sells it, the landlord or candidate who treats with it—to the man who teaches another to gamble, or entices him into any other sin. But the offender has apologies for his course, and before he is finally condemned it is but fair that these should be heard.

(1) He contends that he is not responsible for other men’s sins ; for they are moral agents fully accountable for their own conduct.—He does not *compel* them to sin ; they do it of their own free choice ; and he thinks it hard that he should be punished for other men’s follies.

In meeting this objection to the application of our text, we feel that we could not do the subject a greater injustice than we should by singling out a few instances in which one man is held responsible for the moral influence of his conduct upon others as if these were all that could be adduced. Whereas the application is made upon a universal principle, founded upon the uniform testimony of God’s word and acknowledged in all associations whether social, civil, or religious. It is this which makes the parent feel such a deep solicitude for the good of his children, which gives the statesman so much concern for the welfare of his country, which burdens the minister’s mind with such a weight of responsibility for the people of his charge ; in short, which binds together the whole frame work of society. The objector himself acts upon this principle in all matters in which his immediate interest is not concerned. If he were on a jury, and four men were brought before him and proved guilty, the one of making a plot to murder a man, another of furnishing a rope to tie and a knife to stab him, a third of tying, and a fourth of stabbing him, as an honest juror the objector would feel himself bound to convict them all of murder. It would

not do for one of the counsel to argue that any man might sell a knife and rope, which might be used in murdering a fellow being, and that it would be illegal to punish such vender; therefore this man who furnished the knife and rope for the very purpose of assisting a murderer should not be punished;—the attorney would gain nothing by contending that if his client had not assisted in making the plot another would; therefore he ought to be acquitted, for his refusal to assist would not have saved the man's life. Any juror of common sense would at once detect such barefaced sophisms; yet these and like flimsy apologies are the only justifications which many have, when fully convicted of furnishing facilities, making plots, &c. to destroy both soul and body in hell forever!

Nevertheless if particular texts of scripture, showing a man's responsibility for the moral influence of his conduct were demanded, they are ever at hand. And what could be plainer than the text? "Woe to *that man* by whom the offence cometh!" Again, it is said in the law, "thou shalt not put a stumbling-block before the blind—cursed is he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way."* Who is blinder than the man led by his appetites and passions? and what is a greater stumbling-block than something calculated to excite these "blind leaders of the blind?" Take another case; if a man had an ox that had been "wont to push with his horns in time past, and it had been testified to the owner, and he had not kept him in, but that he had killed a man or a woman," the sentence of the law was, "the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death."† We have inspired authority for saying that the oxen in the law that trod out the corn are a figure of the christian ministry; and this one that "pushed with his horns" is quite as apt a figure of any thing that injures mankind. Only name him whiskey, brandy, or rum, and the rest of the verse is easily interpreted. Again, "did not Achan the son of Zerah, commit a trespass in the accused thing, and wrath fell upon the whole house of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity."‡

*Levit. xix.14; Deut. xxvii, 18. †Exod.xxi.29. ‡Josh. xxii. 20.

And did not the distiller boil his kettle, did not the bar keeper deal out his liquors, and did not the landlord and the candidate treat with them, and wrath fell upon the entire community around? and these men perished not alone in their iniquity. Yea verily they did, and God saw it and said as from the thunders of Sinai, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink!"*—He that hath an ear to hear let him hear."

Cases like the above might be multiplied to almost any number, but if there were not another case in all the Bible, that of eating meats sacrificed to idols would be sufficient for our purpose. In Rome† and also in Corinth‡ it was the custom to sell meats in the shambles which had been offered in sacrifice to their idols. A question, it would seem, arose in the churches at these places, whether it was lawful for christians to buy and eat these meats with the understanding that they had been offered to idols. Some believed that it was, others that it was not. St. Paul decided that it was sinful to eat such meats, upon the ground that it had an unhappy moral influence upon others. He admits fully that eating such meats was not sinful in itself to one who gave God thanks and did not eat with conscience of the idol,§ and bases his decision altogether upon the bad moral influence which it would have upon others. For there were some who still regarded these meats "with conscience of the idol," yet they might be emboldened to eat by seeing others do so, and this would bring them into condemnation. In this event, brethren who set such an example, in sinning against the brethren and wounding their weak conscience, would "sin against Christ," and "destroy him with their meat for whom Christ died." This would bring them also into condemnation with such as they had offended. And most wholsomely did the apostle caution them to "take heed lest this liberty of theirs should become an occasion of stumbling to them that were weak"—he assured them that it was "good neither to eat flesh, nor *drink wine, nor any thing else* whereby their brother stumbled, or was offended, or made weak," and sustained the

*Hab. ii. 15.

†Rom. xiv. 14 &c.

‡1 Cor. viii. 1 &c.

§Rom. xiv. 14; 1 Cor. viii. 8.

whole by an example worthy of all imitation; “wherefore, it meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth.”

Suppose the use of spirituous liquors, at the present day, the practice of gaming, the wearing of jewelry, attending balls, worldly amusements, &c., were as inoffensive to some as the simple act of eating, yet would those who practice such things be in the same predicament with their elder brethren of Rome and Corinth. It will not be denied that there are thousands of others who still use these things with offence to themselves and ruin to their families: such is their weakness that they cannot use them otherwise. This they are often emboldened to do by the example of such as esteem their own course innocent and do not run into great excesses, but who, by the hurtful influence of their example, become destroyers of “the work of God,” sinners “against Christ, partakers of other men’s sins.”

Let us allow then that your conscience is not at all defiled by the moderate use of spirituous liquors, or by the simple act of distilling and vending the article—that you can attend the dance, the giddy play, the circus, the race field without feeling the least remorse for doing so—let us further allow that you are so far an exception to the general frailty of human nature, that while thousands of every grade in society and condition of life, from the least esteemed to the most useful member of the church, are daily falling from the moderate use of spirits into drunkenness, disgrace, and ruin, you are entirely safe from such consequences—let us allow, I say, that you can practice such things with a clear conscience as to their evil effects upon yourself, and with a perfect exemption from the danger of excess, yet unless you can go further and assure yourself that you have not one ounce of moral influence upon your fellow men, you must feel that you are defiling weak consciences, and so sinning against Christ. For if any person who esteems your course sinful should be misled by your example, or if any person in attempting to follow your example as innocent should fall into greater excesses, you will thereby become the author of his destruction. Un-

less you have the full assurance that none of these consequences will take place, you pursue your course, to say the least of it, with a doubting conscience; and “he that doubteth is damned.”—No, you do not, you cannot, doubt that the influence of your example is of a most destructive character. This you must know and feel.

(2) The offender pleads necessity. He has a family to support, debts to pay, a house to raise, company to entertain, an election to gain, &c., and there is no other means by which he can effect these desirable ends.

Here he tacitly admits his responsibility for the moral influence of his conduct, and would feel that he was committing a great sin to pursue the course he does if the necessity which impels him to it were removed; but so long as this remains, he thinks it an entire justification. In other words, the object in view is a good one, and this, in his estimation, will justify the means by which it is accomplished. But let us see if this will stand the test of Scripture. “What shall we say then?” says an inspired man, “shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.”* The apostle, it would seem, had been charged with holding the very doctrine which we have put into the mouth of the objector, but was not willing to lie under such an imputation.—“And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil that good may come? *whose damnation is just.*”† A rebuke which should hush in eternal silence the voice of all such as think to pervert the principles of truth in this way.

To give this plea a fair test, let us change the object of good and see if *that* will justify the use of unholy means. Let us suppose then it was necessary to distill, vend, or drink ardent spirits, to dance, gamble, &c., in order to family prayer, reading the Scriptures or hearing the word, duties quite as important as those above named; would any protestant feel himself under obligation to perform such duties? would it not be at once perceived that the unholy means necessary to be used would be a full discharge from the obligations to duties

*Rom. vi. 1.

†Rom. iii. 8.

proposed to be effected by them? Yet if the good done in supporting a family and paying debts would justify the making and sale of ardent spirits, that to be attained by family prayer, &c., would sanctify all the cruelties of Popery itself. In direct opposition to this, our holy Christianity requires the sacrifice of every evil, however dear or profitable, that good may come. In order to keep their conscience undefiled, good men have found it necessary to put away strange wives,* to forsake fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, houses, and lands, to cut off right hand and pluck out right eye sins, to take joyfully "the spoiling of their goods," to wander about in "sheep skins and goat skins," to dwell in "caves and dens of the earth," to pine away in prisons, and to perish by thousands at the martyr's stake. All this they have done, when by a far less evil than that of vending or drinking ardent spirits they might have shunned the cross. Deluded mortals! What a pity it is that they had not lived in this enlightened day, when they could have enjoyed the same religion exempt from all its sacrifices!!

Before dismissing this plea, let us turn it over again and give it another test. If the necessity of supporting a family or paying debts will justify the sale of ardent spirits, the same necessity will justify the use of any other means not more injurious to mankind to effect the same object, and vice versa. Now I presume no person in his right mind will contend that the necessity of supporting a family or paying debts will justify the use of robbery, theft, or murder to effect either of these objects. Then this necessity of supporting a family or paying debts cannot justify the use of any other means which does the same amount of injury to mankind as robbery, &c. While we do not compare the *disgrace* of making, vending, and drinking spirituous liquors with that of robbery, &c., we do contend that the spiritual evils produced by such offences are, in many respects, more injurious to mankind. Common robbery or theft deprives a man of nothing but his money; offences, such as those above named, take away money, time, health, senses, character, peace of mind, and hope of heaven.

*Ezra x. 11.

and in their stead inflict sickness, disgrace, poverty, and ruin.—Which is the greatest evil?—Common murder kills the body, and after that has no more that it can do; offences destroy both soul and body in hell forever, and not unfrequently leave a widowed wife and fatherless children to mourn the loss. And can the necessity of supporting one man's family or paying his debts, even supposing there was no other means of effecting these objects, justify him in sending the soul of another man to hell, and reducing his family to want? The answer is emphatically no. When in the changes of human affairs the day shall come, in which there is no other way for the good man to take care of his family, but by distilling and vending ardent spirits, or throwing stumbling-blocks of any kind in the way of God's children, he should feel himself called upon by a special dispensation of divine providence, to lie down with his wife and children and die; and the sacrifice, as has been well remarked, would be a noble offering to virtue.

4 In the exposition and application of this subject, we have shown you that the term "offences" here means such stratagems of Satan and his emissaries as are calculated to deceive, mislead, and ruin—that spirituous liquors is one of these stratagems which leads to many others of a most destructive character, and that the man by whose instrumentality any of these offences comes, in spite of all his apologies, is subject to the woes denounced in this text. The sentence of the law is, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." In order to estimate the severity of any man's punishment, we need only sum up the amount of injury he has done. And what has the offender done? The man whom he offended, it may be, was the husband of an affectionate confiding wife, the parent of dependent children, or the child of doating parents whose life was bound up in his—he was a useful member of the church of God, a distinguished citizen, a kind friend—he had a cultivated mind, a wide circle of influence, and important offices both in church and state. These important trusts are all betrayed into the hands of the enemy, these fond affections are crucified, these bright hopes are all buried in the drunk-

ard's grave! And for all this evil will the offender together with the person whom he has offended be punished in the day of his visitation.

But a single offence is not all the harm he does. As a small pebble thrown upon the waters of a smooth lake will agitate its whole surface, so one offender with his distillery or grog-shop, or with his doors thrown open for the dancing party or ball, frequently corrupts a whole neighborhood or village;—as the smallest atom of matter has an attractive influence upon the largest and most distant spheres, so the smallest sinner's influence is often felt by the greatest men, and that too at an astonishing distance of time and place. Even a small offender will mislead and ruin many innocent souls. But there are tall oaks of the forest which carry down all the surrounding undergrowth in their fall—primary planets accompanied by a host of satellites—large streams which inundate whole districts of country; and there are great offenders whose influence is sufficient to corrupt whole cities, or to involve whole nations and empires in bloodshed and ruin. For all these probable evils—for all the “filthiness and foolish talking,” for all the blasphemies, thefts, robberies, and murders occasioned by offences, and for all the consequences to grow out of these things in ages yet unborn, is the offender responsible. Loaded with the guilt of these sins, and with the ponderous weight of his own, will he stand agast at the judgment bar to receive the woes denounced in our text. And O, if one single transgression in the beginning was sufficient to ruin our innocent world—if the guilt of a single sin would damn a soul in hell forever—who can tell the eternal weight of misery due to so many offences? Yet must it be poured without mixture, as the cup of the wine of God's wrath into one defenceless soul, “the smoke of whose torment shall ascend up forever and ever!” Friends, you have heard faithful descriptions of starving Ireland—of the horrid battle-field—but these are not woe eternal. You have set in the sick room and witnessed the dying agonies of some guilty sinner, and you have followed him to the grave, and there heard the wailings of his family relations—but all this misery was not

hell. When God lets loose "the thunder of his power" and causes all his wrath to beat upon the soul, a single sigh from that tormented spirit would be to you a wider, deeper hell than you have ever yet imagined. May God save you from such a fate!

These, hearer, may sound to you like terrible sayings; and such indeed they are to the impenitent, but to you they are words of mercy. If it is in your power to do so much injury, it is certainly your privilege to do an equal amount of good; and the blessings on mount Gerizim are more than equal to the curses on mount Ebal.—Instead of offending these "little ones," it is your privilege to do them much good;—instead of "destroying him for whom Christ died," it is your privilege to increase the number of "God's elect;" and then, instead of a curse for turning christians out of the way, you may inherit a blessing for every "cup of cold water" which you give them. To this end the words of our text were first spoken in the ears of Christ's erring disciples, and to this end they are given to you to-day. They teach you how he loves his children—yea they teach you how he loves the sinner. This barrier of woe raised here on the shores of time between the sons of men and the gulph of ruin is one of the strongest demonstrations of Christ's love to them. It is full proof that he would not have them lost. In order to save them from this fate he apprises them of their danger while yet there is time to shun it—acquaints them with their privileges while they have opportunity to improve them. Believe it, dear friend, these are not the words of an enemy; an enemy would never have spoken thus. But Christ loves you; he feels for you; he tells you what is best. Hear him. He says, "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee"—if that trade or profession which is as necessary to your support as a hand or foot, or that friend who is as dear to you as an eye, offend you, cause you to neglect duties, make you less spiritual, lead you into sin—do not think of retaining it, or parting with it little by little—but cut it off at once, and then cast it from you, out of your house, out of your sight, and especially out of your mind.

The operation here enjoined is severe—it is hard indeed for one to cut off his own hand or foot, or to pluck out his eye, harder still to give up his bosom sins—but the motives are powerful: “It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed,” as thou mayest surely do by taking this advice, “rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire,” which will be the inevitable consequence of neglecting my words.—It is better for you without health, friends, fortune or fame to enter into life eternal where all these losses will be compensated a thousand fold, rather than, having all that earth can give, to be cast into everlasting fire, for the woes of which there can be no compensation—It is better to part with a few sinful pleasures now, than it will be to part with friends and with heaven forever hereafter—It is better to endure the short pains of a separation from sinful associates now, than to have them converted into everlasting tormentors.

These, dear hearer, are the admonitions of one who loves you better than father, mother, husband, or wife. They are bedewed with his tears and steeped in his blood. His unworthy servant would approach you in the same spirit, and with the best wishes for your eternal welfare, he would beseech you in the name of a bleeding Saviour—by all the motives to be drawn from time and eternity—for the good of immortal spirits and for the welfare of your own—by all these considerations would he beseech you to hear these instructions of our common Lord and Master. Amen.