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A SERMON

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TO YOUNG MEN:

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In the Presbyterian Church,

WILMINGTON N. C.,

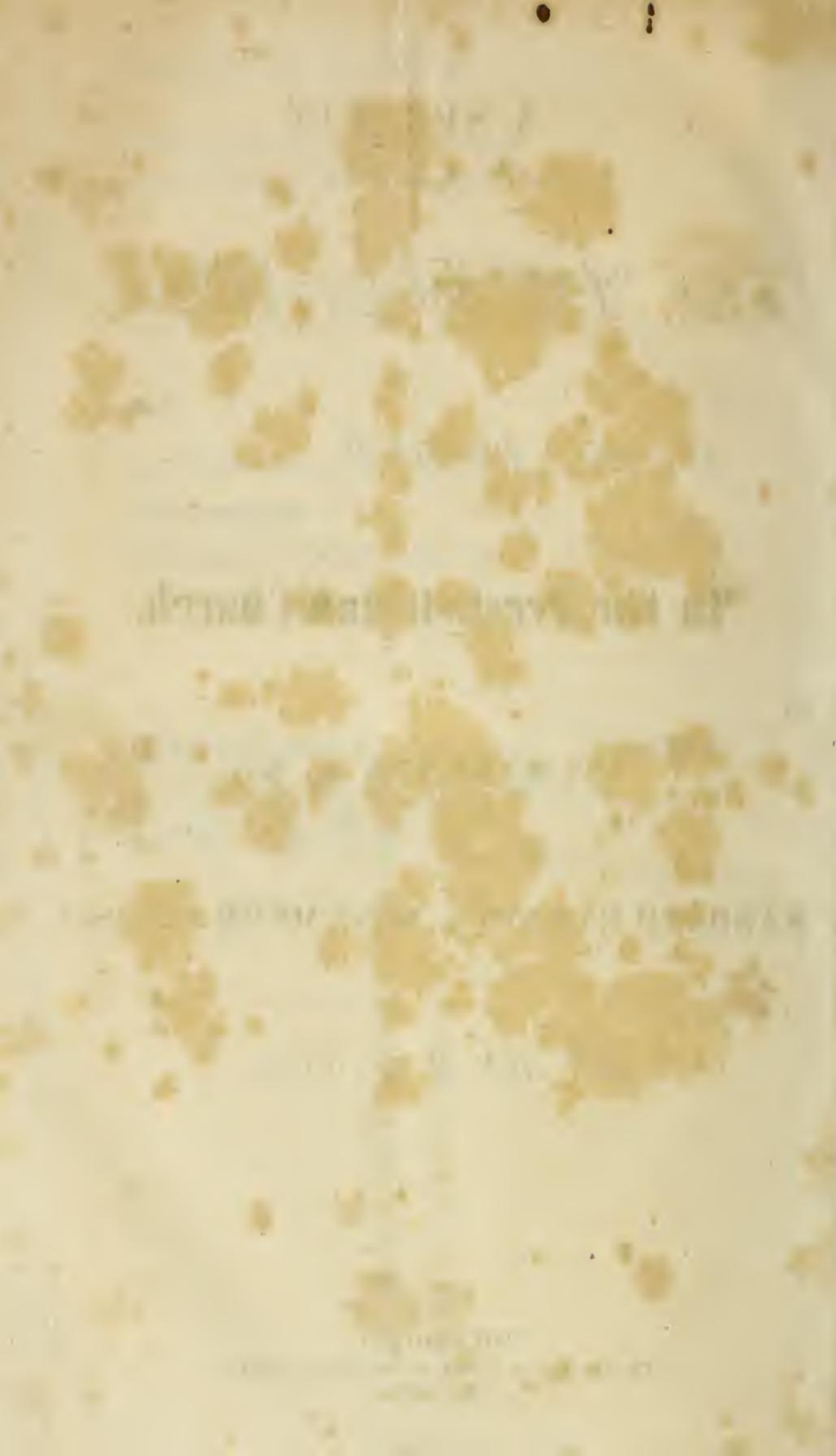
SABBATH EVENING, NOVEMBER 17th, 1854

BY REV. M. B. GRIER.

WILMINGTON:

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1854



THE FLOWERS COLLECTION

WILMINGTON, N. C., 2d Dec., 1854.

DEAR SIR:—Having been appointed a Committee, in behalf of quite a respectable number of the Young Men of this town, to make known unto you the pleasure experienced by them in listening to the very able and instructive Sermon on the subject of Temperance, which you delivered on Sunday Evening the 19th ultimo, and to request of you a copy of the same for publication; we most earnestly hope that you will not deny us the gratification that we all anticipate in its perusal.

Permit us to add our personal solicitations to those of the Gentlemen whom we represent.

With much respect, we are

Very Respectfully yours,

J. H. FLANNER,
E. MURRAY,
K. M. MURCHISON,
THOS. B. CARR,
W. P. ELLIOTT,
SAML. A. SWANN,
WM. A. WALKER,
JNO. L. CANTWELL,

} Committee.

To REV. M. B. GRIER,

WILMINGTON, N. C., December 9th, 1854.

GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE:—With many thanks for your expressions of kindness, I place at your disposal a copy of the Sermon you have asked for publication. I assure you that I will always be ready to lend my aid to any scheme which will promote the happiness, or strengthen the virtuous purposes of young Men.

Yours most truly,

M. B. GRIER.

To Messrs. FLANNER, MURRAY, MURCHISON and others of the Committee.

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SERMON.

Look not then upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright :

At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Proverbs, 23d ch., 31st and 32d v's.

The man who reaches to the point in life where the upward step ceases, and the downward step begins—the line midway between the beginning and the close of the three score years and ten which are our allotted portion on the earth, must have his reflections and his memories much shaded by melancholy—by a sadness which comes with every season of serious thought.—This springs sometimes from the startling conviction that our life like a vapour, is stealing silently but surely away ; or that the great and noble purposes which we set before ourselves in the ardour of early youth, have met with but scanty fulfilment in the deeds of our manhood ; or that the world is fixing its stain more deeply upon our character, and hardening hearts that were once tender and unselfish. Often, perhaps, it springs from the fact that the hours we recall and the scenes we review, are associated with those who are gone forever from the earth. It is the thought that there are hands which we once clasped, which we shall clasp no more—that there are lips which once responded to our words of cheer and good will which are now mute—that companionships once dear are forever dissolved, and friendships buried in the church yard's dust, that tinges with a melancholy hue, all our recollections of those who entered with us upon the dusty and beaten paths of life. One thing more must sometimes be added, throwing still darker shadows around the picture, and deepening the sadness in our hearts. It is the fact that not unfrequently our youthful companions made disastrous shipwreck of character ; sullied quickly their fresh fame ; gave their high hopes and generous purposes to the winds ; enslaved themselves to some vicious and destructive habit, and carried down, it may be, a wasted body to the darkness and dishonour of a drunkard's grave.

I recall as I speak, the mournful history of one who for a time promised well, and describe his end as a lesson and a warning, disclosing his frailties only so far as to make the lesson impressive and useful. He was my youthful companion—my college classmate—my associate in many pleasant scenes. The youngest of the class, save myself, we drew closely together, and for many years he sat upon my right hand at all recitations and lectures. I remember him now as a youth of fair countenance,

and slight but active form, with an eye beaming with intelligence—a high spirited, ardent, generous young man. Fluent in speech, and singularly graceful in attitude and gesture, he was acknowledged to be the best speaker of the class, and seemed destined to play the Orator upon the broader stage of Public Life.

Very soon our paths in life diverged, and we parted to meet no more on earth. Of the various professions which lie before the young man, he chose to be a soldier, and when I next heard of him he was a cadet in the National Military Academy. A faint rumour came also that an insidious habit was weaving its chains around my young friend—a rumour I was very willing to disbelieve. A few years more, and I read his name among the list of the subordinate officers who led our Army in its march from Vera Cruz to the city of Mexico. In that march, and in all the sanguinary battles which were fought during its course, he approved himself, as at once, a skilful officer, and a gallant soldier. Never suspected of want of courage, he had never been guilty of the idle bravado, which some seem to consider the sign of courage, and it was with amazement that his brother officers beheld him, in one of the battles fought before the capital was reached, darting from his place, and spurring his horse right between the contending hosts, ride to and fro, as if courting death, or defying it. A thousand voices involuntarily shouted to him to come back, but ere the shout reached his ear, the horse and his rider bit the dust. His companions in arms heard his last faint groan as they swept past him to the victorious assault, but it was not until they returned to gather up the dead, that they discerned the reason of his useless courage. The half-emptied flask in the dead man's pocket told the tale. His very daring was thus shown to be the daring of the fool. The bravery which he seemed to make manifest, was seen to be, not the courage of the collected, self controlled man, but bravery born of the brandy bottle—the courage, not of one prepared to meet death, but of one insanely reckless of life. They gathered up the cold remains, and brought them back to his native land for burial. And when his friend, and his father's friends, stood around the grave which they opened for him in the soil which his youthful feet had often pressed, their hearts, sad because of his early death, were burdened with a deeper sadness because the grave of the soldier, was, as they well knew, the grave of the drunkard too.

But this case, alas! is not singular. You must all have similar histories which you can now recall, some it may be, more dark and sad than this. I believe that I may safely appeal to you all, especially to those of mature years, to confirm my words, when I say that one of the chief perils of the young man is the wine cup. I say, the wine cup, because this is usually the beginning of a course in which more powerful and more destructive

draughts are the sad and fatal conclusion. I know, too, that your best wishes will go with me while I warn young men of the imminent peril; and exhort them, in words which are not of man, but of God, to "look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." For you know full well, from the histories we have asked you to recall from the wrecks you have seen floating upon the great sea of life, as well as from the word of the omniscient one, that "at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

The text, as you will observe, my hearers, is an exhortation, with a reason annexed. It seems to concede the seductiveness of the wine cup. It does not deny that it is pleasant to the eye, and pleasant to the taste. Even when the exhortation to beware of it, is most direct and urgent, the language it uses is significant of its seductive qualities. It is when it giveth its colour to the cup: when its sparkle and hue are most attractive: when it moveth itself aright—then we are bidden to turn away from it, to look not upon it. And the reason annexed is no ascetick's reason. It is not the denial of its present pleasantness, or of its exhilarating influence. The reason is simply the end to which it leads, and which it produces. From the present we are commanded to look to the future. It is just as if the author of the Proverbs had written—Young Man, if there is a rosy hue within the cup—if there is joy and mirthfulness there—if there is exhilaration in the draught, and a pleasant forgetfulness of sadness and pain there, remember the end. Be assured that "at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder."

We intend simply to illustrate and enforce the thought of the text. We believe that it teaches what daily experience confirms, that the habit of drinking is to every man who forms the habit, in the end, injurious: to many, positively destructive.

Most of you who listen to me this evening, are either already men of business, or preparing to become so. We affirm that the text is true of such men, and to prove it, we will trace out one imaginary history, leaving you to determine whether it has ever its counterpart in real life.

A Young Man starts in the world, we will assume, with a fair character; with habits of industry; with a sufficient amount of energy, and with a competent knowledge of the rules and mysteries of trade. He solicits men's confidence, and, pointing to an unspotted name, and to industrious habits, claims their trust and aid. And men answer his claim by giving him their confidence, and by placing important interests in his hands. Thus he enters, with purposes that are all honest, and thoughts which are tainted by nothing dishonourable or base, upon a life of active business.

Let us pass over a few years. The young man has grown more dexterous in his calling. He is better prepared to conduct a large

and extensive trade. He has a wider acquaintance with men and things, and his standing as a merchant has been definitely ascertained and settled. All these things claim for him increased confidence, and should strengthen and multiply his business relations. But a rumour has slowly been gaining currency—a rumour which men reluctantly breathe to each other, but which grows more distinct as it passes from mouth to mouth—a rumour that the young merchant loves the bar room better than his counting room; that the wine party has taken time which should have been given to his Ledger, and that important interests have suffered because he was away at the revel. It does not destroy his business at once, but it shakes its stability, and stops its rapid growth. He is not stranded yet, but the breakers whiten the shore along which he is skirting.

Pass over another series of years. The faint rumor has become a well known and saddening certainty. The end foreseen and foretold, has been reached. The habits which seemed, at first, like the filaments of the spiders web, woven around a strong man, have now become fetters of iron, clasped around unresisting weakness. Failure has been predicted, and has come.—Distrust succeeded to confidence. Gradually business diminished, until the very men who helped him downward—who drank and revelled with him—withdraw in fear, and leave him to stand if he can, or to sink if he must. From the place of the principal, he descends to that of a subordinate. Here awakened suspicion follows him, and he is soon found unfit to be a trusty subordinate. He is thrown forth upon the community which once trusted him, and of which he was then, an honoured and useful member, and catches despairingly at the smallest and the meanest occupations, to give him bread, or to procure the accursed poison which has made him what he is. Pitied by all good men: wept over by those who stand near to him: helped only by those whose hopes concerning him are not altogether gone, he is honoured, trusted and employed by none. The remembrance of what he once was, and the perpetual contrast with what he now is, which in his better moments he cannot refrain from making—the keen sense of degradation, which can be blunted only by deeper draughts from his cups, conjoin to make life a burden, which he resolves to cast away as fast and as soon as he can. He has reached the end, my hearers—the end of which the sparkling wine cup was the beginning. He has made the grand experiment, and he has found, that though it was pleasant to “look upon the wine when it was red”—pleasant to drain the goblet amidst the gaiety of the feast—pleasant to meet with boon companions, and chase the weary hours of night away with song and mirth, yet, “at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

Take, as another illustration, the educated Young Man, and let us view the effect of this habit upon his intellect.

He comes from the place of his pupilage with his mind awakened, quickened, and trained. Perhaps the honours of the University are resting upon him, and the pride of his parents hearts has been stirred by the news that their boy was first among his youthful fellows—the finest scholar or the most promising speaker of his class. He chooses his profession and sits down to its laborious study. Dreaming of greatness, or, in the more practical spirit of our age, anticipating the golden rewards which accompany, and to many, constitute success, he works, for a time, ardently and well. The difficulties which surrounded the mastery of the elementary principles of his science begin to disappear; and its complete and harmonious proportions to rise upon his view. His preceptor prognosticates his future eminence, and looks forward to the time when his old age shall be brightened by the reflection of his pupils fame.

Soon, however, the companions of early youth, from whom he has been, for a time, separated, gather again around the Young Man. Some have fallen: others are falling; all are ignorant of the blandishments of vice and the perils of life. With them he meets occasionally, at the wine party, or the luxurious supper. His cultivated mind makes him, without purpose on his part or theirs, their leader, and the wine cup stimulates the wit, which is repaired by ready applause. And thus the way downward is opened—a way smooth and easy, and surrounded at first by the tones of music and the fragrance of flowers, by melody and laughter and good cheer.

He may be years, my hearers, in making the gradual descent. He may enter upon the duties of his profession. He may not be seemingly injured as to his prospects. He may make for himself something of a reputation. But if he walk on in the course which he has begun, his potations will just as surely ruin his intellect, as they will destroy his body, and damn his soul. His mind will come at last to work only under the influence of strong drink, and then with a diseased and unregulated force. His quick and keen perceptions will be blunted; his memory refuse to do its office; his imagination lose its vividness and brilliancy, and even his speech become thick and ungovernable. Business will leave him for more sober and diligent men, and the poor man linger around the place which might have been the scene of his successes, only to see others preferred and triumphant.—Descending from thence he may become the oracle of some bar room, or the leader of a band of noisy politicians. In such places and among such men, you will now find the young man who was once of brilliant promise—who once aspired to greatness and seemed destined to reach it. The brilliancy alas! is clouded. His fine wit has all degenerated into vulgar obscenity.

The fires of appetite have burned into his bright and cultivated intellect, and physically, mentally, professionally, he is a wreck. A daily deepening obscurity hides him from the busy world, but as he sinks into it, Oh! think you not, that if there ever come moments of sobriety—moments when he can bear to compare the past and the present, that he feels, and feels most keenly, that if the wine cup was enchanting at the first, “at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

Is it needful now that we speak of the effect of this evil habit upon the moral part of the man? For is not this the part of the man on which the habit of constant drinking does its most destructive work? When business habits are preserved sufficiently at the least, to retain the confidence of the customer—when the intellect works with vigour enough to meet the demands upon it, and sometimes with a fitful energy, astonishing to those who know how much has been done to weaken its power and dim its brilliancy, does not the moral power of the man constantly diminish? Is he not every day less ready to do good, and more ready to do evil? Is he not less prepared to serve his fellow men? Will you trust the drunkards word as readily as the word of a sober man? Will you commit your property to him with as firm a reliance upon his honesty as upon the honesty of a sober man? Will you put him without reluctance, into offices of profit and trust? Does not every one feel, that while there may have been no past great moral delinquency, yet in regard to the man upon whom this evil habit of drinking is fastening itself, there can be nothing felt but dread, and that to lean upon him is to lean upon a broken reed? Does not every one stand in inward fear, lest the defences weakened by long indulgence, should suddenly give way, and a strong temptation sweep the poor man away from his anchorage—to float for a little while upon the sea of Life, a helpless and hopeless wreck, and sink at last in the dark and troubled waters?

But some one of you may say to us, that all these instances of the destructive effects of the wine cup are merely sketches drawn by the imagination, and have few counterparts in real life. We would that this were so, and that our illustrations had no existence out of the imagination which conceived them. We would that all of you, reviewing past scenes, and recalling past associations, could discern no history as sad as those we have pictured forth. But suffer us to justify ourselves to those who still doubt by one example—one illustration borrowed from the history of our own times.

It is a good maxim, or at least a charitable one to say nothing of the dead save that which is good. But some names (as we have elsewhere said) must be lifted up as a beacon. The moral world must have its light houses. Thousands of young men are running down upon the same rocks, on which brilliant men, and

men of renown were cast away. If the light of their genius then has made them conspicuous, let us use their conspicuity, and throw a ray from them, as from a beacon, far out upon the dim and perilous sea.

"There were two men," says Macauley, in one of his most admired essays, "who lived in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, who, before the time when men are usually completing their education, had reached each in his own department, the summit of human glory. The one died at Longwood, the other at Missolonghi." Those of you who have read any thing of the history of your own times, will remember that one of these was Bonaparte, the other Byron. Of the latter, it is now well known that in his voluntary exile, he shattered his splendid intellect (to borrow the words of the essayist) by midnight draughts of ardent spirits and Rhenish wines. There is much of his later poetry which smacks rather of the inspiration of gin, than of the inspiration of genius. But what we wish you specially to observe, is how literally the text was fulfilled in the history of that great but unhappy man. He "looked upon the wine when it was red," "when it gave his colour in the cup." He used his wonderful genius to throw fascination around the intoxicating bowl. Hear but two strains of one of his Bachanalian songs, written ere he had seen or felt aught but the pleasures of wine.

"Fill the goblet again : for I never before
Felt the glow which now gladdens my heart to its core.
Let us drink—who would not ? since through life's varied round,
In the goblet alone no deception is found."

"In the days of my youth, when the heart's in its spring
And dreams that affection can never take wing,
I Had friends, who has not ? but what tongue will avow
That friends, rosy wine, are so faithful as thou."

But ere you quote those words, Young Man, as true—ere you believe them, turn over the leaves of the volume to the last page. Read the poem, dated at Missolonghi, three months before his untimely death. We select again two verses.

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone,
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone."

"The fire that on my bosom preys,
Is lone as some volcanic isle,
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile."

Was there no deception in the "goblet?" Were there no friends to that unhappy man so true as the "rosy wine?" Did he not feel—feel with a bitterness which few could realize, be-

cause fear could feel so intensely—that the fruit which outwardly looked so fair, was inwardly ashes and dust, and, that however tempting the wine cup might be at the first—however seductively it might give its ruby colour through the goblet then, “at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

Now here is a peril to which all are exposed. To some it is an imminent peril—to others, it may be, a peril not so near or so threatening. But to all, especially to all young men, there is always, danger from this quarter. This danger can be certainly avoided only by obedience to the exhortation of the text.—If you would escape, wholly and surely, “look not upon the wine when it is red.” I do not say that one draught will work your ruin, or that one glass will seal your fate. We preach no extravagances upon this subject. We simply say that there is no absolute safety for you this side the most entire abstinence—no deliverance certainly to be counted on, but in implicit obedience to the command of God, which enjoins us, “to *look not* upon the wine when it is red.”

Or if your standing, my youthful hearer, is so secure, that you may venture somewhat, and yet not fall—if your hand is so strong, and your eye so steady, and your heart so brave, that you may let your bark drift carelessly down the rapids sure that you can, at your will, save it from the fearful plunge over the cataract—oh remember those who are weaker and more sorely tempted. If you need not act for yourself, act for others. In the spirit of a large benevolence, deny yourself the tempting cup that others may be strengthened by your example, to resist also. If custom bids you drink, break in upon the custom. If fashion orders it, defy her power. If it gleams from the crystal bottles upon your fathers dining table, resist its fascination. If the drinking usages of society continue to be, as they now are, the young man’s greatest tempters, cast off their trammels, and pass far away from you the Circean cup. So doing, you may save yourself, perhaps a brother, from that which “at the last, biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

You will not, we hope consider it as out of place, if we add, in conclusion, that in addition to personal abstinence, there does seem to be a call upon every good man to stand in his place, and endeavor to stem the flood of Intemperance which threatens to sweep over the land, and to sweep away from us the brightest and best of its sons. I would that this call might ring clearly and loudly upon the ear of every young man. For I do most firmly believe, that if those who in the course of the next ten years shall pass from the age of twenty to the age of thirty, would only bind themselves together in a solemn league and covenant against the mighty evil, the crisis which now impends would be past, and victory be with the cause of temperance and goodness. I care not about the form in which the war might

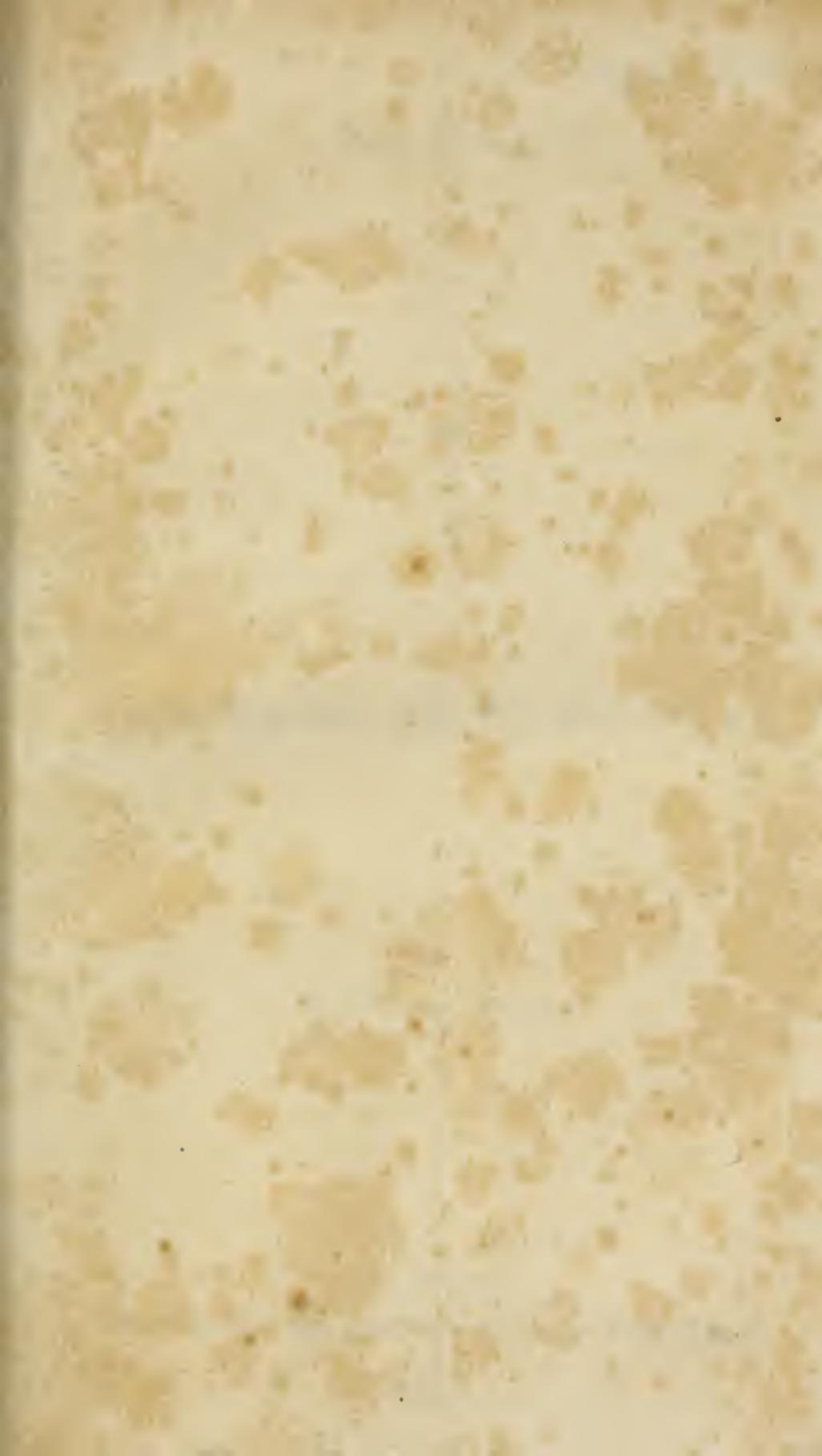
be carried on. You may employ your "Maine laws," or your "Carson leagues" if you please, or better weapons if you can devise them. But what we mainly want is effort, the effort of many banded hearts and hands—the energy supplied by the hopefulness, the activity, the irrepressible ardour of the young man.

Nor do we suppose that when you have done all, this vice will no more be seen, and the drunkards die altogether out of the land. We look for no such result until the millenium begins to dawn upon the earth. But your determined energy, and wise, well tempered zeal may banish the temptation from our wharves and public places, back to the obscurity in which it ought to dwell. You may force it from the daylight, into corners where the drunkard will find it hard to get, and still the constable, we hope, find it easy to seize. You may drive it out into secret places, where its flaunting signs, will be hid from the sight of the young and the unwary, and where none who values reputation or respects himself will go to hunt it. At the very least, you may place what has now the protection of the Law, under its ban.

To this, young men, many voices call us. Our own possible dangers—the positive, actual dangers of others—call loudly and urgently. The mother calls us, beseeching us, that her child may not be cast away upon these frightful reefs and sand banks. The fair bride calls us, lest, in our inactivity, she may become the sorrowing widow. Our country calls us, trembling for the fate of many of her sons. Yea Heaven above us, bids us be up, and be brave, and active, in this great contest between the Right and the Wrong.

"For deeper than thunder of summers loud showers,
On the dome of the sky, God is striking the hour
Shall we falter before what we've prayed for so long
When the Wrong is so weak, and the Right is so strong."







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