

CT 96

CLERICAL INTEMPERANCE.

BY

T. P. KIRKMAN, M.A., F.R.S.

TO THE

REV. CANON BARDSLEY, M.A.

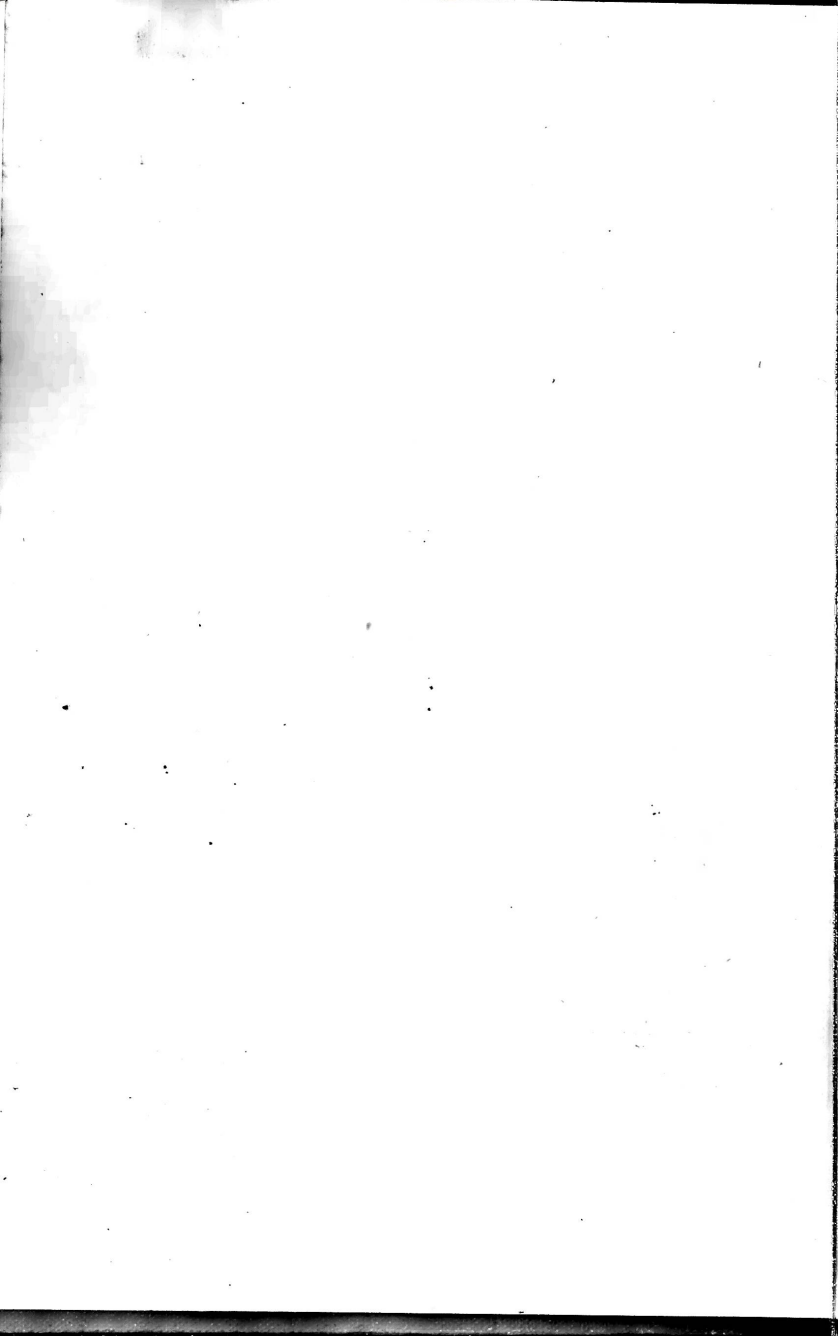
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Of course Mr. K. is practically
right; but whether the letter
will do much good or any, is
doubtful.

CLERICAL INTEMPERANCE.

REV. SIR,

YOU have requested me in the name of a Committee of Northern Convocation to answer a long list of queries under the title, 'Effects of Intemperance in Religion, Education, &c.' If the paper were issued to me by the command of my diocesan; or if it sprang from a Committee of earnest men of all denominations, or even a mixed Committee of Churchmen, lay and clerical, I should feel bound to attend to it. But, without expressing an opinion on the wisdom or usefulness of the inquiry, I prefer to lay aside a document proceeding from an antiquarian body so intensely sectarian and sacerdotal as Convocation. It occurred to me in reading the paper that there are two other questions about which Convocation might be more usefully employed. One is, not the effects of intemperance on religion and education, but the effects of what we divines call religion and education on intemperance. Many thinkers of the day are pondering this question, full of wonder that we clergy produce so small an impression on the ignorance and vice of the millions, and that the masses are more and more withdrawing themselves from our teaching and influence, while we appear more and more to prefer sectarian discord to wise and brotherly unity. Another question, perhaps more important,

is the effect of clerical intemperance on religion and education. I do not mean intemperance in the use of the bottle, although, from what I know of priests and preachers, I am inclined to believe that the average of their abstemiousness and self-denial, church-officers of all kinds included, is not much higher than that among the laity, taken all through. It may be that the daily self-indulgence of many of us is a good set-off against the Saturday excess of about the same proportion of the toilers. What I mean is the intemperance of our stiff-necked pharisaism, popery, and priestcraft—of our mutual intolerance, pride, and bitterness. Can you look without a pang at this ugly fact, more hideous, and I fear more hopeless, than that intemperance of the laity which we all deplore—that after eighteen centuries of pretended loyalty to him who sacrificed his spotless life in attacking the orthodoxy and priestcraft of his country's abominable church, whose dignified clergy shrieked out,—“Not this man, but Barabbas!”—doubtless a much sounder churchman than Jesus—we still exhibit to the sorrowing angels a spectacle a hundred times more guilty considering our light and learning than that wrangling and cursing of the hostile priests of Gerizim and Zion? I fear that the mutual anathemas and repulsions of the canting and conjuring zealots among the mock-Christian sects of this day are, in the sight of the Great Head in whom we all glory, far less pardonable than that old scorn and hatred between Jew and Samaritan. We ought to burn with shame as we pass each other in our white chokers in the sunshine; and it is a merciful world that does not pursue us everywhere with the finger of derision. The men of thought and action in other departments differ greatly and differ long; but they all appear to believe in truth, and manfully and hopefully do they debate to find it: at the long run they do find it, every life-time increasing the gold of

imperishable knowledge. But among us how many are there who care one straw for truth, or who have any fixed belief that it is attainable by patient inquiry for the common gain of themselves and of fair antagonists? The Jews appear to have wiped away from their Church the greatest part of the priestcraft and lies which Jesus and Paul assailed, and thousands of them are better disciples of those Masters than most of us; but we Christian divines continue century after century in our maze of mingled Judaism and Paganism, pelting each other with some old weed. Is not this evidence of drunken delirium more dreadful because more permanent than that which maddens the victims of alcohol?

The truth is within the reach of us all, if we only seek it in the love of it, such truth as is sufficient for salvation and Christian brotherhood; nay, it is actually in the possession of us all, both Jews and Christians. No need for more planting, or more building; all that is required is the removal of weeds and rubbish. It is not that we are, any of us, ignorant of that revealed truth of God, which should be to us the bond of love and hearty co-operation in Christ; but that most of us undervalue and disparage it, in comparison of our quibbles of sham science, our sectarian shibboleths, and our priestly dominations. All that is required in addition to the grand fundamentals of morality, in the way of symbol and common confession among believers in one God, and in a future life for man, was long ago delivered by an authority greater than Councils and Convocations. It was to Rome, the world's queen and centre, that Paul laid down, once for all the confession or creed necessary and sufficient to entitle every sincere believer to the fulness of Christian birthright and privilege. After a solemn protest against speculation about unsearchable mysteries above, or miracles inscrutable below, he says:—"The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth

and in thine heart, even the word of faith that we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Master Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Was that short creed savingly sufficient, then, for Christian discipleship and fraternity? Then I maintain that it is sufficient now. Whoso, in my hearing, makes that confession, and convinces me that he takes Jesus for the living Lord and Master of his life, be he white, black, or brown, baptized or unbaptized, I will give him the embrace of Christian love; and if he has gifts and graces fitting him to teach in the name and in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, I would, if the laws of the Chief Priests and Pharisees permitted me—however he might dissent from my opinions in a hundred questions of history and speculation—give him leave to teach from my pulpit. Such confidence do I feel in the truth of that solemn word of Paul. Hence I cannot, for my life, see what right Popes, or Convocations, or Parliaments have ever had to lengthen, by one syllable, that early catholic creed which the great apostle of the Gentiles delivered to the Roman world. Every article which has since been added to the Christian creed, has been, so far as required to be believed under pain of eternal damnation for denial or doubt of it, as much a pious fraud as the recent addition under the like anathema of the dogma of the Pope's infallibility; and I have no doubt that, if the history of such additions were exactly known, it would be evident that each was inserted for practical worldly ends, all of one value, in thrusting somebody up, and turning somebody out. But I am far from affirming the falsehood of such additions as mere propositions in theology. It may be a proposition quite true enough and clear enough for Romish theology to say that the Pope is infallible; but it seems hard for me to be damned for doubting it.

I may be in the wrong in my estimate of the clearness and authority of S. Paul's short creed, in Romans x. But they have no doctor in their Convocation or Conference, in their Synod or Assembly, nor even in their conclave of Cardinals, who would like to undertake, face to face, to prove me in the wrong, with that bright Pauline page open before me, along with our twentieth Article and the record of my Ordination vows, wherein I bound myself before God and man "to teach nothing as required of necessity for eternal salvation, but that which I shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture."

It may also be that I am not in the wrong. If I am in the right, what can there be, except reasons too mean to be confessed, which can prevent the Jews and Christians of this land, at least the non-Popish Christians—I suppose we must, yet long, despair of the Pagan pride of priesthood—from tearing down those blind partition walls which have hitherto been the ignominy of our Babledom and the bulwarks of infidelity?

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your obedient servant,

THOS. P. KIRKMAN.

Croft Rectory, Warrington,

July 10, 1871.