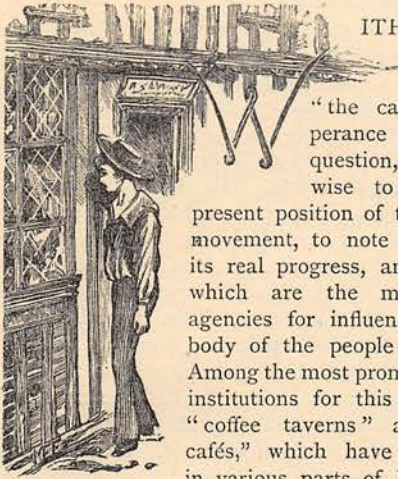


COFFEE TAVERNS AND THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT.



WITHOUT entering into any discussion on "the cause" of temperance as a political question, it would be wise to examine the present position of the temperance movement, to note what has been its real progress, and to estimate which are the most promising agencies for influencing the main body of the people in its favour. Among the most prominent of recent institutions for this object are the "coffee taverns" and "people's cafés," which have been opened in various parts of London. The

continued efforts to provide still more extensive establishments of this description by means of public companies, which profess to combine philanthropic effort with a certain degree of mercantile success, at least show that there is a pretty widely spread belief in the beneficial operation of such enterprises in poor and populous districts, where the temptation to indulge in strong drink has increased, because of the want of any other accommodation than that afforded by the public-house or gin palace to people who are obliged to take refreshment during the intervals of labour, or who seek abroad the recreation which they fail to find at home.

It would be well, perhaps, if in any further effort to establish temperance taverns this latter necessity were more fully recognised. Much has been said on the necessity for competition between the gin palace and the coffee palace by making the latter equally attractive, but in very few instances has the effort been successfully carried out, and in most cases it has scarcely been attempted. The adoption of the title "coffee palace" was perhaps a mistake, considering how little could possibly be done to rival the meretricious brilliancy of plate-glass, polished mahogany, gilded inscriptions, and costly accessories glittering in the glare of gas-jets from elaborate chandeliers; and the difference has not always been compensated in the vulgar eye by simple effective decorations, pictures, harmonious and striking colours, solid, comfortable furniture, orderly arrangement, and a sense of purity and refinement. It is necessary to speak plainly. The conditions which would alone justify a favourable comparison between the bright and pleasant adjuncts of the coffee tavern and the garish splendours of the palatial establishments for the sale of intoxicating drinks, are to be found in the few private enterprises not evidently intended for the poorer class of customers, and opened in neighbourhoods where they are more likely to attract supporters among those who at once appreciate the comfort and convenience of such resorts.

There is no need to refer to the attempts of promoters who are ready to "form a company" to their own interest for the provision of any and everything, and who take advantage of a truly philanthropic effort to enlist the sympathies of a number of well-meaning people, who cannot sufficiently investigate the proposals submitted to them. The worst mischief achieved by these adventurers is that they arrest public sympathy, and bring discredit upon the true and earnest work to which honest men and women are giving hearty attention. But the question whether the establishment of temperance taverns can be best secured by a public company is of the first importance, and involves many considerations. The first difficulty is, of course, that of determining whether the association is to be of a philanthropic or of a commercial character, or whether it is intended to combine both qualities. Associations formed on the latter ground usually succeed in proportion to the ability of their directors or managers to make them pay at least a reasonable interest on the investments of shareholders. Purely philanthropic efforts, except for the alleviation of some definite form of suffering, are mostly confined to particular circles of people in connection either with religious, municipal, or parochial communities; and it would appear, though it is by no means inevitable, that the truest ground of action in promoting the establishment of temperance taverns or coffee palaces would be that of reasonable mercantile profit, which yet need not advance to the dimensions of a temptingly large percentage on capital. And here it may be observed that an obvious element of failure in more than one of the attempts already made to provide coffee taverns for working people, is the too conspicuous desire to regard the customers as objects of charity or of benevolent effort. The people who are most likely to be friendly and habitual supporters of such institutions are repelled by the notion that the article they receive is only partly paid for by the price charged for it, and at once either suspect its quality or resent its presentation as a charitable dole; while the lowest class—only too ready to be pauperised—accept whatever advantage they may receive much as they accept parish relief, and perhaps feel aggrieved at having to pay anything at all.

It should be borne in mind that the temperance tavern is intended as an attractive rival to the public-house, and that while one of its obvious claims to support may be to assist frugality as well as to wean its customers from strong drink, it is organised primarily for those who now spend their money in that which pauperises before it kills. Such places are not for the habitual drunkard, though they may eventually help to attract him to join the ranks of the abstainers; nor are they for the penniless, who without pence can find no admission to the drunkard's paradise, even if they desire to enter it. For these, other efforts must be made, either by the stern enactments of the law or,

preferably, by the gentle ministrations of the gospel. What is needed is to provide a natural, a pleasant, and a competitive alternative between the fatal temptations to indulge in strong drink, and the depressing influences of monotonous occupations, dreary neighbourhoods, dwellings unworthy of the name of homes. Here it may be, perhaps, worth while to notice that the success of a temperance tavern may be retarded by making its prominent character appear restrictive. Is it not wise to omit what may be almost called aggressive reference to the fact that no intoxicating liquors are to be obtained there? The object of such an institution is not to challenge the publican, nor to defy his customers, neither is it to provide a refuge for abstainers, but rather for those who desire to abstain—not totally, perhaps; that may come afterwards—but usually. Let it be remembered that the publicans themselves in many neighbourhoods have already been influenced by the signs of the times (some of them have recognised them for years past), and provide tea and coffee, while in a number of private thriving shops—particularly those of Italians who have opened small cafés in several of our main thoroughfares—no intoxicating drinks are sold, the only difference between them and temperance taverns being that a customer may send out for liquor if he pleases—an option which is comparatively seldom exercised.

But the mention of certain neighbourhoods recalls another, and perhaps one of the most imperative inquiries, which should be made by the promoters of the coffee tavern movement. In what localities may such institutions be made successful? It is perhaps not too much to say that an obviously *unsuccessful* enterprise of this sort, whether its failure be from want of attractiveness in itself, or in the refreshments provided, or in the manner in which they are served, or from the fact that the locality will not, until it has been educated, supply enough customers, is a direct and serious injury to the cause of temperance. Let there be a few undoubtedly successful establishments of the kind—handsome, bright, clean, cheerful, and with good food and drink—and there will soon be room for more; but every half-hearted attempt to make temperance attractive in a place where the dingy tables scarcely contrast with the dingy walls, where the scraps of food look coarse and uninviting, where the appliances are sordid, the cookery coarse and smeary, the attendants indifferent and unwashed, the whole place wearing the appearance of disappointment and neglect, will only help to repaint the publican's sign-board.

It is by no means easy at first sight to determine in what locality temperance taverns may best be established, and at the same time there are some places where it is at once apparent that they would not only be useful, but might be made commercially remunerative: close to our large markets, for instance, near some of which, private coffee taverns on this principle are already more or less humbly established. There is nothing new in such a provision, for the "market house," the tavern primarily dedicated to the supply of intoxicating drinks, has for half a century

had its breakfasts, where tea and coffee, eggs, bacon, cold meat, are ready for salesmen and others who recognise the wisdom of deferring their stronger potations till the morning's work is over. More than a quarter of a century ago, too, the first real coffee tavern was established on St. Dunstan's Hill, near Billingsgate, by a man who had years before that time kept a market coffee stall, or rather a perambulatory repository for the supply to the market people of hot tea and coffee, bread-and-butter, and some other readily consumed refectations. His stand, drawn by a trim pony, was of a pagoda pattern, highly painted, the coffee-boiler and urn burnished as golden shields, his cups and saucers scrupulously clean, bread-and-butter in substantial slices, cut with appetising neatness, and arranged with nicest care. That perambulatory temple was the first coffee palace in London; and the well-earned profits enabled the proprietor to take a shop, where he soon showed he had the cause of temperance at heart, not as a profitable speculation only, but as an earnest moral principle. He began by trusting his customers not to injure his property, and though, as he stood there in clean white apron and sleeves, he may have had now and then to give a significant reproof to an unruly market boy, who wanted to sharpen a knife on the edge of one of the marble tables, he found that such distractions became rarer every day, especially as the culprits were often practically rebuked by being suddenly ejected from the shop by more orderly and appreciative companions. For many of these rough folks, this shop had really something palatial in it, though it was of no great size. The counters were marble, and the square symmetrical loaves of bread were kept in marble bins, the seats were French-polished, the cups and plates spotless, the knives without a smear. Any one taking in a herring or a rasher could have it cooked free of charge, bread-and-butter was sold for a halfpenny a slice, a cup of tea or coffee for a penny. The business prospered, and what was still better, the genial influence of the man himself, and the compliment which the provision of such a place implied, wrought an influence among the rough market folk, which lasted long after his death and may survive to welcome with legendary appreciation the coffee palace of to-day.

It is very satisfactory to know that private enterprise has likewise succeeded in a plainly-furnished but clean and wholesome-looking "Coffee Tavern" opposite the Meat Market, and near Charterhouse Square. Plain and unpretentious as it is, there is an evident appreciation of the wants of the class of customers to which it is devoted, and its provisions take a wide and suggestive range, from the halfpenny slice of bread-and-jam, or bread-and-butter, the penny glass of new milk, the sausage and bread, or the rasher of bacon for twopence, to the hot dinners and the announcement that chops and steaks will be grilled on the shortest notice, and that waiters are expressly kept for carrying refreshments into the market. All this, with a varied price-list, is published in a neat and respectful circular printed in plain type, so that he who runs may read, and ending with: "Your

patronage and recommendation is respectfully solicited;" so that this may well serve as an example of a coffee tavern conducted upon sound business principles.

Not that this is the only example of the kind; there are doubtless others, some of them private enterprises, others the establishment of which has been aided by philanthropic contributions, and the success of which appears to be pretty well assured. One by Drury Lane is perhaps a good specimen of what may be suited to such a neighbourhood. There is a French air about its well-lighted windows, and a certain touch of Continental brightness in its otherwise inexpensive belongings; but one would think there might be ample opportunity for a more decided attempt to introduce a genuine temperance tavern, on an ample scale, closer to Covent Garden Market. For it is to the markets that we should look for the best beginnings of such institutions—to the markets and the vicinities of large factories and works where a number of people are employed. Surely much good might be done by providing large and not very elaborate, but still clean and properly fitted, coffee taverns near the large factories in London and its nearer suburbs. There should be separate dining-rooms for boys and girls, strict rules for preserving order (the denial of admission to the unruly would, perhaps, soon be sufficient), and provision of good but low-priced food—sound bread, tea, coffee; clear, bright, filtered water; and small wholesome relishes, such as might make more palatable the coarse food which these poor children would bring with them.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the good that such an institution might be made instrumental in effecting among a neglected class, from which much of the depravity and misery that infest our streets is developed. There is a great deal of both to be seen down Whitechapel way, and yet one cannot but feel that even there private enterprise is doing something in the way of promoting temperance. Here, beneath a kind of fancy cave or open grotto, into which an ample shop has been converted, is an emporium for iced drinks, dispensed by a young lady, part of whose business it is to compound a famous beverage reputed to be both nutritious and refreshing, as it consists of a mixture of ginger beer, iced new milk, and fresh eggs.

Unhappily there is even now, as ever, a business doing at each one of the long succession of public-houses from Aldgate to Mile End, and all of these have their adherents clustered in front of the bar; and on each side of the Cambridge Road, still known by its old name of "The Dog Row," there is business doing in strong drink; till we come to the two sets of almshouses—those of the Corporation of the Trinity House, which were founded for the widows of poor mariners by Captain Mudd, and the curiously ruddy rows of cottages belonging to the Vintners' Company, and then to the once famous coffee palace, which was converted from a public-house, and still retains the sign of the "Dublin Castle." This institution is

a part of the organisation which Dr. Barnardo and his friends have carried on in the district, and it includes a reading-room, where newspapers and periodicals are provided; a small smoking-room; and a good-sized club-room above, where papers, chess, and draughts are furnished in the evening to those who pay a penny for admission, or a small weekly subscription. There is doubtless a very useful influence about the place, but we need more and other enterprises with the object of attracting, not only the poorer class—the profits of whose custom need to be supplemented by subscriptions for establishing such a centre—but of securing the support of workmen and their wives who can afford to pay for temperance what they now spend with the publican.

It may be hoped that such a result will be achieved, for it is to be feared that in this, as in almost every other movement where it aims at bringing self-maintenance out of continuous eleemosynary provisions for the poor, the class which it is very desirable to benefit will be repelled, and those who are least certain of being influenced will give it but a faint support, even while they are obtaining its advantages. With regard to this particular phase of the temperance movement, the question of the comparative mercantile success being the true measure of the moral and social influence of the establishments themselves will have to be definitely settled. The first start, the building and its fittings, might perhaps be well contributed by philanthropic aid, but even this would greatly depend on the locality and the particular class of customers for whom the temperance tavern is intended. To judge from the present developments of these institutions, such a start would only be necessary in peculiar cases. So widely have the benefits of such enterprises been recognised, that there has just been issued a prospectus of the Sydney Coffee Palace and Temperance Hotel Company, New South Wales. The scheme is favoured by a good list of directors, and though it is intended for the provision of a higher class of supporters than those of the London "coffee public-houses," from which the idea is said to be derived, it is an evidence that this mode of promoting the temperance cause is spreading in places where it is greatly needed. The Sydney Coffee Palace is intended to supply the comfort and recreation of an hotel as well as those of a restaurant. The latter will be for City folks, and meals will be served up in a cleanly and attractive form for regular boarders and travellers. It is obvious that this will be a business enterprise, assimilating more closely to some of the English and more particularly to the Scottish temperance hotels than to the London coffee palace or temperance tavern; but it has also elements to be found in some of the better class of private enterprises which have lately multiplied in London for the provision of food and drink to people who do not require alcoholic stimulants. Of the remarkable influence which appears to have grown out of them in relation to a large section of the community, we may speak on another occasion.