

Great Evangelists and Temperance

By VICTORIA GRIGG, M.A.

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JOHN WESLEY

We would all do well to follow the valuable advice given to John Wesley by his mother in a letter she wrote to him in June, 1735. "Take this rule: **whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself. And so on the contrary.**" The great evangelist owed much to the instruction in spiritual matters which he received as a child from his mother.

John Wesley was not only a total abstainer himself, was also a prohibitionist. By the "General Rules" framed by his brother Charles and himself in 1743, the members of the society of Methodists were required to "abstain from drunkenness, buying and selling spirituous liquors or drinking them unless in cases of extreme necessity"; and the first rules for the organisation within the Church, known as "Band Societies," directed the members "to taste no spirituous liquors, no dram of any kind unless prescribed by a physician." Wesley's travels through the British Isles gave him the opportunity of first-hand observation of the evils of drink and made him very definite in his condemnation. In looking through his Journal, I found two interesting extracts which are worth quoting. The first was written on Tuesday, April 19th, 1743.

"While I was speaking, a gentleman rode up very drunk, and after many unseemly and bitter words, laboured much to ride over some of the people. I was surprised to hear that he was a neighbouring clergyman. And this, too, is a man zealous for the Church. Ah, poor Church, if it stood in need of such defenders."

The second extract shows the power of the Holy Spirit through Wesley's preaching, used to convert a drunkard. It was written on Thursday, April 11th, 1751.

"The barber who shaved me said: 'Sir, I praise God on your behalf. When you were at Bolton last, I was one of the most eminent drunkards in all the town. But I came to listen at the window, and God struck me to the heart. I then earnestly prayed for power against drinking and God gave me more than I asked. He took away the very desire for it. Yet I felt myself worse and worse, till on the 5th of April last I could hold out no longer. I knew I must drop into hell that moment unless God appeared to save me; and He did appear. I knew He loved me, and felt sweet peace. Yet I did not dare to say I had faith till yesterday was twelve-month.



God gave me faith and His love has ever since filled my heart."

In 1773, corn was very expensive in England, and Wesley attributed this to the immense amount used in distilling. He estimated that **nearly half the wheat produced by Britain was, as he said, "consumed not by so harmless a way as throwing of it into the sea, but by converting it into a deadly poison: poison that naturally destroys not only the strength and life, but also the morals of our countrymen."**

We pride ourselves on our progress as a people, but it seems that in these matters we cannot, and will not, learn any lessons from the past. To-day the position as regards food is truly desperate for millions of people, yet we go on in the same old way, turning God's wholesome grain into poisonous liquor. As I pen these words, I have before me to-day's newspaper, which states that according to an article in the Medical Journal of Australia, "Australia is second in the list of countries as far as convictions for drunkenness are concerned." Australian police claim that drink causes 80% of the offences they are called upon to investigate. We know how tremendous is our drink bill in New Zealand. God has given our people many opportunities of saying "We refuse to have drink sold here any longer," and the majority of the people answer, "We

want to keep drink for our pleasure, with all its attendant evils." May God help our country and nation in their blindness and selfishness.

In a "Sermon on the Use of Money," John Wesley was very forthright when he said: "Neither may we gain by hurting our neighbour in his body. Therefore we may not sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is evidently all the liquid fire commonly called drams, or spirituous liquors. It is true these may have a place in medicine, they may be of some use in bodily disorders, although there would rarely be occasion for them, were it not for the unskillfulness of the practitioner. Therefore, such as prepare and sell them only for this end may keep their conscience clear. But who are they? Who prepare them for this end? Do you know ten such distillers in England? Then excuse these. But all who sell them in the common way to any that will buy, are poisoners general. They murder His Majesty's subjects wholesale, neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is it not the blood of these men? Who then would envy them their large estates and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them; the curse of God cleaves to the stones, the timber, the furniture of

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