

GREAT EVANGELISTS AND TEMPERANCE

5.—BILLY BRAY

By VICTORIA GRIGG, M.A.

There was a great difference between Billy Bray and the other evangelists such as Beecher, Finney, and Wesley, of whom I wrote in my previous articles. Billy Bray did not start with the educational advantages of the others, but he could speak from very personal experience—which they could not do—of the awful effects of drink. He had experienced the degradation of being a drunkard himself, and knew to the full the joys of release through the power of the Holy Spirit, from the terrible craving for strong drink.

He was born at Twelvetrees, a tin-mining village near Truro, Cornwall, in 1794. His mother's father had helped to build the first Methodist Chapel there, for he had joined the Methodists when Wesley first visited Cornwall. Billy's father died when he was quite young, and he lived with his grandfather in a good Christian home till he was seventeen; when he went to Devonshire. It was not long before he became addicted to drink, and was dismissed from his work, eventually going to live at a beer shop, the worst possible lodging for him at this time. "There," he says, "with other drunkards, I drank all night long. But I had a sore head and a sick stomach, and worse than all, horrors of a kind no tongue can tell. I used to dread going to sleep for fear of waking up in hell, and, though I made many promises to the Lord, I was soon as bad, or worse than ever. After being absent from my native county seven years, I returned a drunkard.

When he returned to Cornwall, his wife had to fetch him home night after night from the beer shop, and a great part of his wages went in drink. A friend said that he was the wildest, most daring and reckless of all the reckless daring men; and on one occasion, so fearful was his blasphemy that his wicked comrades declared his oaths must come from hell, for they smelt of sulphur. All this time his conscience tormented him and it is interesting to note that his conversion was brought about through his reading of a book written by one who had been a blaspheming tinker. The book was "Visions of Heaven and Hell," and its author was John Bunyan.

After his conversion he went to hear a Mr. Teare lecture on Temperance, and thought that while he would hear what the speaker had to say, he would not sign the pledge, for he was not then convinced of the necessity for total abstinence, but thought, as so many people in our churches to-day, that so long as a man did not take too much, he could still drink. "But as I listened to what Mr. Teare said,"

he states, "the darkness was removed from my mind, and I thought I would sign the Pledge, and before Mr. Teare had finished speaking, I shouted out to friend Tregaskis, 'Thomas, put down my name.'"

From that time, he was not only a staunch teetotaler, but an earnest advocate of the cause of Temperance. The first pay-day that he came home sober for many years, his wife had said, "How is it that you are home so early to-night?" Billy replied, "You will never see me drunk again, by the help of God." He did this before his conversion, but realised at the Temperance meeting, that to keep this resolve he must not lay himself open to the temptation by taking even a little strong drink. He used to say that if ever Satan caught him, it would be with the ale-pot, and in his picturesque speech, said: "Men set lime-sticks to catch birds, and Satan sets wine-bottles and ale-pots to catch fools, but I will not touch a drop, then I shall never get drunk." Billy's plain commonsense on this subject could do with more attention from us to-day. After all, the public house you **can** close is the one beneath your nose, and I believe we should lay great emphasis on pledge-signing in our Bible Classes. I know of so many cases where it has been signed in Band of Hope and broken. It seems more important to obtain the promise at the time of adolescence, when the mind is more developed. I do not say "Eliminate Pledge-signing from our Bands of Hope," but let us pay more attention and lay more emphasis on it at the Bible Class age. Total abstinence for the individual is a weapon before which every brewer quails.

At a Temperance meeting, speaking of Moderation, Billy Bray said, "Ye might as well hang an old woman's apron in the gap of a potato field to prevent the old sow with young pigs from going in as expect a drunkard to be cured with moderation. Satan knows that so he sets the little pot to catch him again." Public Houses he describes as "**hell houses**; indeed they are! For they are places where people are prepared for **hell**; and they **help** people on their way." As a contrast, he said that Chapels were Heaven-Houses, for there people are converted and prepared for heaven.

As I write this article I cannot help thinking of the very depressing conditions reported of the Chatham Islands which has been given by the resident doctor, and has just appeared in our local papers. In some cases more than fifty per cent. of a man's income goes in alcohol. He estimated that perhaps £100 per week was spent

on liquor in the two hotels. Think of that spent by a population of just over 400. A wedding or tangi was made the occasion for at least three days' debauchery. Small children were brought into the atmosphere of drunkenness, smoking and immorality at the earliest ages. Chatham Islands are administered by our own New Zealand Government. Why does it permit these two hotel-keepers to grow rich at the cost of the degradation of these people who are God's children?

The evils of drink are always the same everywhere—the same in New Zealand and its dependencies as in Cornwall in Billy Bray's lifetime. Many were the drunkards who were saved through the Holy Spirit by Billy's appeals at his Temperance meetings. The fact that he had been saved from the drunkard's chains himself helped many to see that they could also get the victory through Christ. His Temperance Crusade went hand in hand with his great evangelistic work.

He loved to tell others that he was the son of a King, and when, a few hours before his death, he was asked if he had any fear of death or of being lost, he replied: "What? me fear death? me lost? Why, my-Saviour conquered death. If I were to go down to hell I would shout, 'Glory, glory to my blessed Jesus,' till I made the bottomless pit ring again, and the miserable old Satan would say, 'Billy, Billy, this is no place for thee; get thee back.' Then up to Heaven I would go, shouting 'Glory, glory, Praise the Lord.'"



GRAPE DAY

The W.C.T.U. was well to the fore in the Brisbane streets on Friday, 1st March. For the first time for some years "Grape Day" was held as a "street day." The stalls were well stocked with grapes in every form, fresh, dried, in jars, jellies and cordials. The educational value should be very great. The Posters were well displayed and created much interest. Mrs. Teasdale did good business with her pure grape juice drink, 81 glasses being sold at 6d. per glass. The Educational Committee are to try and purchase the JUICE CONTAINER which was in use that day. All the cartage was done with our own Canteen by the new caretaker, Mr. Andrews, to whom we are grateful.—"Australian Temperance Advocate," April, 1946.