

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

FIRST GENERAL PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL

CONVENED AT EDINBURGH, JULY 1877.

WITH RELATIVE DOCUMENTS

BEARING ON THE AFFAIRS OF THE COUNCIL, AND THE STATE OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

Printed by Direction of the Council.

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EDINBURGH: THOMAS AND ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.

1877.

acquiesce in it, and to wink at it, and to let it go on ever increasing, and drawing a greater number within its withering embrace. Apart from the highest of all interests, there are also the loud claims of humanity, for the fact is attracting the notice of philanthropists and social reformers, that employés on the railways become prematurely old, and are subject to many forms of disease that shorten life.

The practical issue of much that has been said in this paper may now be stated in a few words. This General Council has it in its power to send a great moral influence over Christendom. Its representatives from many lands will carry home with them much of this influence to the spheres of their ministry. Let us identify ourselves as our Presbyterian fathers would have done with the cause of the Lord's Day as the priceless gift of Heaven to man, rich in blessings, alike for his body and for his soul. There are brethren who are seeking with a very agony of earnestness to restore to their country its lost Sabbath. Let us cheer them in their efforts of mingled religion and patriotism. There are Christian Churches in some countries, especially in some of our British colonies, which are nobly fighting the cause of the Sabbath at this very hour. The mammon spirit is trying to buy it up from needy workers, and to turn the men that would sell it into serfs. Let those earnest men who know how much the future prosperity of those young nations is dependent on their possession of a day that can neither be bought nor sold, and that should be wholly consecrated to religion, hear our cry from afar: "Hold fast that which thou hast received,—let no man take thy crown."

And let us who still retain our Sabbaths in no small portion of their integrity be on the watch against every hostile influence that would rifle us of the blessing by little and little, knowing that it is a thousand times more easy to preserve than it would be to recover it after it ceased to be interwoven with a nation's habits and institutions, and men had become reconciled to an evil because they had become familiar with it. Much else begins to pass away when our Sabbaths are lost. We begin to part with our opportunities of Christian worship and religious instruction, and gradually with religion itself, and when once the fountains of religion are dried up, how precarious is the morality that exists without it! And when our moral life is blighted, where are our national strength, our solidity, our order, our liberty, our

elements of greatness and power? It will require no visible judgments from heaven to insure such a nation's decadence. The secret of its ruin is working within it. And already has the finger of God inscribed on it, "Ichabod, the glory is departed!"

PROFESSOR J. R. W. SLOANE, D.D., Alleghany City, Pa., U. S. A., read the following Paper on

INTEMPERANCE IN THE UNITED STATES A HINDRANCE TO SPIRITUAL LIFE.

THE Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an aggressive power, an army marching under the banner of her king and head; her enemies are the principalities and powers of darkness; the conflict which she wages admits of neither truce nor compromise; there is no discharge in that war, she must go on conquering and to conquer until she brings forth battle unto victory. With weapons which are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, she antagonises every form of evil, and seeks to bring every thought and imagination of man's heart into subjection to the law of Christ. The Church is a divine organisation commissioned to oppose, overturn, and utterly destroy the kingdom of Satan, to set up that kingdom whose dominion is righteousness and peace, and thus secure to men of every kindred and tongue the blessings which the Son of God became incarnate and died upon Calvary to procure. She wages an irrepressible conflict, not only with the Protean forms of sceptical and atheistic unbelief, but with those insidious and pervasive social vices, which are eating as doth a canker into the very heart of society, and which are the Marah fountains whence flow the bitter waters of shame, crime, despair, and death. It is proper that some should sit apart and "reason high" upon those profound questions which relate to the very foundations of the Christian faith, but others must descend into the arena of tempted, sinning, suffering, dying men, and battle face to face, hand to hand, with those forms of evil which slay their tens of thousands, where mere intellectual error cannot number even its hundreds of victims. As a heinous sin against God, the foe of society, and the baleful enemy of pure and undefiled religion, an almost unanimous suffrage assigns the foremost place to the vice of intemperance. In our judgment, intemperance is not properly correlated with other social evils, inasmuch as it is the

legitimate and prolific parent of all the others; it is not only a violation of the Divine law, but the cause of the breach of every precept of the Decalogue. With impious hand this gigantic criminal dashes both tables of the law to pieces, and tramples them beneath its feet. We do not exaggerate: intemperance leads the horrible train of all the vices, it marshals the armies of these aliens in their warfare against the Lord and his Anointed, and is the most powerful and the most dangerous enemy with which the Church is compelled to grapple. It is proper that this great Conference, designed to be, to some extent, the exponent of the moral and spiritual power of one of the grand divisions of Protestant Christianity, should assign it a place in its deliberations. I am to speak of intemperance in the United States as one of the hindrances of spiritual life. It is estimated that there are in that country one hundred and sixty thousand establishments for the sale of intoxicating drinks, that these are consumed to the value of five hundred million dollars, that there are not less than five hundred thousand drunkards, and that of these, at least fifty thousand annually go down to a drunkard's grave and a drunkard's doom. These figures are indeed appalling, yet they do not furnish the data for an adequate conception of the magnitude of the evil. Consider the loss of food in the consumption of the grain from which these intoxicating liquors are produced, of labour in those engaged in the manufacture and sale of them, and especially in those who use them to excess, the poverty, crime, disease, madness, and death which are the inseparable concomitants of indulgence in intoxicating drinks; and we have an aggregate of wickedness and misery impossible to estimate,—we become lost in the attempt to trace the thousand channels into which this river of death pours its floods of "torrent fire."

Especially do we find this colossal iniquity confronting the Church on every field which she enters, in every department of her beneficent labour, and more than any other single cause neutralising her self-denying labours on behalf of our sinful and suffering humanity. Those who are engaged, in any way, in the traffic in intoxicating liquors are to a great extent inaccessible to the gospel; they seem instinctively to feel that their pursuit is inconsistent with the life of a follower of Him who came to seek and save that which was lost; they repel that influence which would of necessity withdraw them from that

occupation by which they have their gain, and accordingly the traffic is to a very great extent in the hands of the ungodly.

Conversions from the ranks of those who use intoxicants to excess are painfully infrequent. "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God." It is the almost unanimous testimony of those ministers who have had experience in great cities that of all their labours they have had least fruit from that expended upon this class. Alcohol appears to be one of the most powerful agents in benumbing the moral faculties, and thereby carrying its victim beyond the reach of gracious influences. It withers with its scorching breath all the nobler propensities of the human soul, and quenches the Spirit, while it inflames and intensifies the lower and more debasing passions. "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess." Our Redeemer is mighty to save, nothing is too hard for God, nevertheless it is the testimony of the largest experience that there are but few conversions from habitual drinkers of any grade, and none from those who drink to excess, except where the habit is immediately and permanently abandoned. The connection between temperance and revivals of religion in the United States is close and inseparable. The first great temperance movement originated in connection with a season of special outpouring of the Spirit of God. Temperance revivals and revivals of religion have gone hand in hand from the times of Nettleton to those of Moody. To be filled with the Spirit is the very opposite of being drunk with wine. "The spiritual" and "the spirituous" are diametrically opposed. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." What shall we say of the thousands who are prevented from attendance on any form of religious instruction because of the indulgence of a father or a mother, or some one on whom they are dependent, in this vice? A few years ago investigation revealed the startling fact that a large proportion of the inmates of our jails and penitentiaries had enjoyed for a longer or shorter period the benefits of Sabbath-school instruction; further investigation explained the apparent mystery; intemperance had succeeded the Sabbath-school instruction, and in almost every instance had been the occasion of the criminal act. Much of the work of "Bible Societies," "Tract Societies," "Christian Associations," etc., is neutralised in the same way; the good seed too

often falls upon a soil hardened by indulgence in alcoholic stimulants, and brings forth no fruit. Would that we could stop here, but no! this serpent enters the sanctuary, and coils its polluting folds about the very altar of God. It takes its victims both from the ministry and membership of the Church. The fact that so large a proportion of both of these classes in the United States are total abstainers lessens to a considerable extent its ravages in the fold of Christ; nevertheless it is even there the greatest trouble of Israel, the occasion of many stumbling and falling; "many through strong drink are out of the way." It is estimated that intemperance furnishes two-thirds of all the cases of discipline, and occasions manifold disturbances which do not come within the range of ecclesiastical law; besides, it has a powerful tendency to dry up and turn into other channels those streams of beneficence which should fill the treasury of the Lord's house. Money which should be directly employed in bringing the truth to bear on the hearts of men must be expended in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and ministering to the sick who have been deprived of the necessaries of life through indulgence in this vice. If the resources yearly wasted in various ways by this foul destroyer of the souls and bodies of men could be employed in Christ's cause, the Church would be in possession of abundant means for carrying forward all the work in which she is engaged. What shall we say of the gambling, the strife, the licentiousness, the Sabbath profanation, the blasphemy,—in fine, of the whole dark catalogue of violations of the divine law which are the legitimate fruits of this deadly upas? The more closely we scrutinise this iniquity the greater are the abominations disclosed, as in some awful "Inferno" each descending circle is more revolting and horrible than the last.

The Presbyterian, in common with the other Churches of the United States, realises that it has a weighty responsibility in this matter, an obligation that must be met and discharged. The most encouraging feature of the present great uprising in the temperance movement in the United States is the deepening conviction in the mind of the Church that she, and she alone, is endued with the power from on high necessary and adequate to the utter extinction of this fearful curse. The impression grows stronger that the time has come when the Church must

assume a most aggressive attitude towards intemperance in all its forms and occasions. In the meantime, however, she is neither idle nor indifferent.

I. The great majority of the ministry of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States, and we believe the same to be true of those of sister denominations, are total abstainers. They find, like the eloquent Guthrie, that "they must give up the hope of being Christ's ministers to lost souls" unless they take up the principle of total abstinence. The prevalent sentiment of these Churches condemns the use of intoxicants of any kind as inconsistent with the sacred office of a Christian minister. So prevalent is this sentiment, in at least some of these Churches, that any one who should practise differently would find his influence and usefulness greatly impaired, if not utterly destroyed. This sentiment we believe to be rapidly increasing throughout the entire Presbyterian family.

II. The truth of God's Word is boldly and effectively proclaimed from the pulpit, while large and rapidly increasing numbers of the ministry are earnest workers in the temperance cause; temperance societies are encouraged; these are, in many instances, largely composed of Church members, and draw their vitality from a congregation with which they are more or less closely connected.

III. The two most remarkable recent temperance movements, viz., "The Women's Crusade," in which bands of earnest women passed through the streets of towns, villages, and cities, visiting drinking "saloons," talking, and when permitted praying, with the keepers, a movement which was the means of rescuing many thousands, and the present so-called "Murphy" movement, from the name of the man who has been most conspicuous as a worker in it, have been eminently religious in their characters. The means employed have been praise, prayer, and earnest appeals to the religious nature; the power on which they have relied has been the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. These movements have derived their chief strength and support from members of the evangelical churches.

IV. The Presbyterian Churches of the United States have from time to time taken decided action on the subject of intemperance. The "General Assembly" has in repeated declarative Acts condemned in strong language the manufacture, sale, and use of intoxicating bever-

ages as a sin against God, and wholly inconsistent with a Christian profession. The "United Presbyterian Church" condemns these practices in equally emphatic terms; her official deliverance is in these words—"The use, manufacture, and sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage is inconsistent with membership in the Church of Christ." The Reformed Presbyterian Church not only condemns the use, manufacture, and sale of these beverages, but considers perseverance in these practices a bar to membership in her communion.

These facts may serve to show the general attitude of Presbyterianism toward the evil of intemperance, and accepted as earnest of future progress in the same direction. Much has been done, much more remains to be done; there is yet much land to be possessed.

Our limits will permit us to emphasise but a few points.

I. It would seem to be a duty incumbent upon the Church to determine, by a careful study of God's Word, what is its teaching upon the subject of temperance. Every proposed reform must stand or fall in proportion as it is conformed to that unerring standard which God has given us. If they speak not according to this Word there is no truth in them. To this rule the temperance reform furnishes no exception; the Bible is a perfect rule, both of faith and practice.

There is surely clear and definite teaching upon this subject, and the Church is the agent to define what that teaching is, and proclaim it to a suffering world. A scholarly, critical examination of those passages which bear upon this question will furnish the necessary data; from these the rule that God has given may be generalised, and, as on other subjects, a firm foundation reached. The Word of God is the ultimate standard of appeal, and on its teachings the final decision must rest.

II. The Church may, on purely practical grounds if on no other, utter her protest against the prevalent drinking usages of society. That these are evil, and only evil, and that continually, no one who has not closed his eyes and stopped his ears can for a moment deny. As the waters of our great lakes gathered in one united stream are poured in thunder into the awful abyss at Niagara, so from out of these diffused drinking customs of society comes this horrid host of inebriates, who each year stagger downwards with frenzied curses, wails, and lamentations into

the abyss of everlasting perdition. Questions of exegesis apart, here is an awful result; the cause is not hidden, the need of action is immediate and urgent, and the Church, as it seems to us, cannot, without incurring guilt, delay to put forth her wisest and most effective efforts. The example of him who gave himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world, the whole spirit of the gospel which he came to proclaim, every consideration of love and mercy to the weak, the erring, the falling, and the fallen, urge us to throw the entire weight of our example and influence against these pernicious customs. May the Lord hasten the day when from all the pulpits of Christendom shall go up a united protest, loud as the sound of many waters, and of mighty thunderings, against these usages, which are the source of such appalling misery.

III. The Church has a great work before her in educating the people in the true nature of civil government as an ordinance of God, a divinely appointed institution for the promotion not only of the physical but of the moral well-being of all the citizens. False and unscriptural ideas of the functions of the State imported from materialistic sources, and the out-growth of an infidel philosophy, are widely disseminated, and withstand all efforts to make the laws of men conform to the law of God. False conceptions of personal liberty, such as we find inculcated in the school of Mill, stand in the path of the temperance reformation. These can only be removed by the persistent inculcation of true Christian ethics. We may not hope for the highest degree of success until we have laid the foundations of "the Christian State" in an acknowledgment of God as the supreme source of all legitimate civil authority, and the Bible as the "fountain of all moral principles for both Church and State." It is true the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, but it is both in and over this world; to him every knee must bow and every tongue confess; all power has been given to him; in this grant civil government is included; the leaven of the gospel must pervade all departments of human society; and hence no law that contravenes the law of Christ is of any permanent obligation, or can bind the conscience. Few have as yet realised the vast influence of the State as an educator of the public mind. Large numbers accept the laws as their standard of right and wrong to them; that is right which the State legalises, and that is wrong only which it forbids; hence the inestim-

able value of righteous laws as a teacher of the public conscience. "He is a blind observer of the forces that govern in human life, who does not see the moral power of penal law, even when extensively violated, in teaching virtue and in restraining vice." The advocates of temperance in the United States are rapidly coming to the conviction that all laws licensing the drink traffic are in their very nature wrong, and that absolute prohibition is the only attitude which the State can assume toward this evil without incurring guilt. The Church must educate the public mind up to that high moral standard which is necessary both for the enactment and enforcement of such laws as shall the most effectually restrain this evil.

IV. If, as we have seen the highest ecclesiastical judicatories have declared, the manufacture, sale, and use of intoxicants be a sin against God, and inconsistent with a Christian profession, these practices must come in some form within the cognisance of the Church courts. How far the weight of ecclesiastical authority shall be brought to bear against them is a serious question, to be thoughtfully considered by those upon whom this responsibility rests. We may, however, without overstepping the proprieties of the occasion, be permitted to suggest that the testimony of the Church against any evil must be greatly weakened so long as it is tolerated in any form within her pale. If Christians are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, then it is difficult to see how this not *unfruitful* but very *fruitful* work of darkness can be longer permitted to derive any support from the Church of Christ. Has not the time come for the Church to rise in her might, and throw the whole weight of her moral and spiritual power against this "gigantic crime of crimes"?

But in conclusion, whatever may be the diversity of views upon this subject, the greatness of the evil is a point on which we must surely be entirely agreed. Let us then lift up our prayer to that God who giveth liberally, that he would so endow us with the spirit of wisdom that we may be directed to the best means for the accomplishment of the end which we all earnestly desire, the extinction of intemperance and of every other evil that opposes pure and undefiled religion, the final and full establishment of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The subject of Spiritual Life was then taken up by the following speakers:—

REV. DR. WELCH, U.S.A., said that there were two things which it was of infinite importance to know—(1.) What we are by nature and practice; and (2.) What we must become by grace. Pointing out that we were all sinners and lost, and that we must be saved by the grace of God, he proceeded to refer to the nature, characteristics, aims, and evidences of spiritual life.

REV. DR. KNOX, Belfast, asked them to realise the grand object of their coming together. He took it that it was not merely to bear witness to their numbers as perhaps the largest Protestant Church in the world, or to exhibit their unity, or to show to the world how faithful they had been to the great principles of the glorious Reformation. If he understood the object aright, it was to diffuse their principles over the world, to lodge them in the hearts of every human being. When he spoke of principles he did not mean Presbyterianism as a form of government, or a form of worship, or a theological creed, but he meant the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was the main element of their system. In inquiring how this was to be accomplished, he pointed out the need for an outpouring of the Spirit, and for every member of the Church taking part in the work. He concluded by warning the Council against the spirit of self-congratulation and self-glorification to which they might be tempted by their number, strength, and orthodoxy.

REV. DR. MARSHALL LANG, Glasgow, said that the one thing that stood in the way of all their work was that dreadful thing—drunkenness. This week Glasgow was holding its "high jinks," it being the Fair holidays, and he hoped no foreign friend would sail upon the beautiful Firth of Clyde this week, for he was afraid he would not gain a more exalted opinion of their city. He was not charging this against the peasantry alone, or against his own city alone; it belonged to every class, it had to be charged against every part of the island. It was said by a previous speaker that they had 160,000 drinking houses in America. We had 150,000 drinking houses in the United Kingdom. That speaker referred to the dollars which represented the yearly bill of America; our drinking bill last year was represented by £148,000,000 sterling. He noticed in a report about Edinburgh that while the population had increased six per cent. within the past year, the committals for drunkenness had increased 3 per cent. He had seen from a report recently received that a lady had devoted a large part of her fortune to the establishment of a home for women of all conditions in London who had fallen victims of intemperance. She provided accommodation for thirty women, thinking that it would be scarcely possible to fill even that space, but within nine months there were 500 applications, and of these, 42 were from ladies of rank in this country. It was in view of these facts that one of our leading papers some time ago used the expression that "this nation was drinking itself to death." Although such a statement was exaggerated, there was surely enough to prove that there was a hamorrhage going on which was draining some of the life-blood of our land. He then referred to the cries which were raised when steps were proposed with a view to coping with the drinking traffic, such as education, sanitary reform, and better house accommodation. These, he said, would do much, but it would not do all. The temperance movement was not going to supersede the gospel, as it was at times alleged. It was intemperance that was superseding the gospel. The public-house was beating our