



SECOND
GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

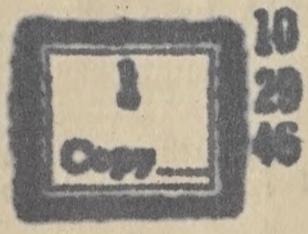
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May God help us to examine carefully, as ministers and men, our individual responsibility, and to resolve to do all in our power to oppose the progress of *the evil* which more than all others stands in the way of the success of the gospel and the revival of the Holy Spirit throughout our land.

And now, dear friends, in conclusion, let me ask if the time has not come for a more determined, active stand on the part of the Presbyterian Church in the United States? Has not the temperance work done good in the past? and has not the whole result of the drinking customs been evil, and only evil, continually?

I feel no hesitation in saying that the baneful influence exerted on others by the knowledge that a minister of the gospel uses wine at home; or partakes of it at the table of others, is doing more to hinder the temperance reformation than the opposition or example of many outside the church; and how can they peril the souls of their weak members in view of the injunctions: "Do good to all men as you have opportunity;" and "Put no stumbling-block or occasion to fall in your brother's way;" "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Are they not encouraging others to tread the path of danger?

As active workers in the temperance cause, we do ask that, if you as ministers of the gospel are not ready to work with us, you will, at least, withdraw your powerful influence and example from the other side.

Can you refuse to do this without feeling that your action is not in harmony with your Christian duty?

To all our devoted Christian ministers and elders who are pledged to the cause of total abstinence let me appeal for greater diligence, with the full confidence that your labor will not be in vain in the Lord.

The REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D., of Brooklyn, N. Y., read the following paper on

POPULAR AMUSEMENTS.

The law of the Church is the law of Christ. The chief end of the Church is to do Christ's will and to advance Christ's kingdom. We shall discuss the much-contested question of Popular Amusements simply in their relation to the Church, and seek to ascertain their bearings upon Christian liberty and the Christian life. A Christian is Christ's freedman; and he is quite too free to have any demand or desire for many things which the children of this world lust after. He who has sat at the King's table need not stoop to the husks. Conformity to Christ means *non-conformity* to the world. Let this dying world "bury its dead;" our orders are to go and follow the Master. In keeping his commandments there is great delight; at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

For let it be understood at the outset, that the law of Christianity is not an iron-clad asceticism. God never made man to be a monk, or this bright world to be a monastery. If life has its times to weep, so hath it times to laugh. Our blessed Lord more than once shed tears: but may he not have sometimes smiled, or even indulged in the good old Christian liberty of laughter? Holiness signifies wholeness—wholth—health; and health breeds innocent mirth. If mirth may be innocent, recreation is not only innocent—it is *indispensable*. Martin Luther relieves his stern studies and polemics with the Pope by cheerful songs at the fireside and by decorating Christmas-trees for the children. Old Lyman Beecher lets off the steam, after an evening's work at revival preaching, by capering to the music of his own violin, until his prudent spouse protests against his saltatory exercises lest he wear out his stockings; Gladstone, the king of living statesmen, recreates with his axe; Spurgeon, the king of living preachers, with his game of bowls; the saintly McCheyne, with his gymnastic poles and bars. All these men were *men*—not angels. God has ordained that man should play as well as work; the friction of toil and care requires this lubrication. Childhood is a type of wholesome piety, both from its fund of faith and its fund of innocent playfulness. It is a true saying, that “no creature lives which *must* not work and *may* not play.”

What is recreation? We reply, everything that *re-creates* what is lost by friction or fatigue—everything that reanimates our exhausted powers. Whatever makes the body healthier, the mind clearer and happier, and the immortal powers more vigorous, is *Christian recreation*. To deny ourselves such wholesome recreations may be hazardous folly, but to restrain others from it is an infringement on Christian liberty. The rights of Christian conscience are sacred here as elsewhere; but conscience requires solid principles of truth for its guidance.

We lay down, then, this principle, that whatever play or pleasure tends to improve the body, mind, or spirit, is right; whatever endangers the moral health and inflames the evil passions, is wrong. The one strengthens; the other only stimulates and often poisons. The one refreshes; the other ruins.

To drink pure water or milk satisfies lawful appetite and promotes health. To drink an alcoholic beverage inflames a morbid appetite, and promotes disease. In the one case the drinker seeks a re-creation for the bodily man; in the other case the drinker seeks fiery stimulation, and the brain is poisoned, and the “whole course of nature is set on fire of hell.” The Creator wrote the demand for water on every human frame; he also wrote there a prohibitory law against every beverage which inflames the passions and poisons the immortal spirit. The water saves; the alcoholic fire destroys.

Now to the tribunal of this simple test, we bring every amusement, whether of a personal or social character: Does the amusement recreate the body and mind, or does it minister to the evil passions? If

it recruits my physical and moral nature, it is *right*; but if it stimulates any fleshly lust, if it weakens conscience, if it unfits me for the pure and holy service of my God, and defaces my spiritual nature, then is it a forbidden amusement. I cannot take my Lord and Master with me into it, or ask his blessing upon it. *Wherever a Christian cannot take Christ with him, he has no right to go.*

Every popular amusement which invites God's people, must submit to the tests which a Bible-conscience imposes. For example, the theatre constantly bids for the suffrages and support of Christian people—and of late there has been an increasing tendency among church-members to be drawn within its glittering and, too often, its godless walls. The advocates of the modern stage are careful to choose their own ground—they defend an *ideal* theatre; but we recognize an ideal stage no more than we do an ideal church or an ideal drinking-saloon. A theatre whose plays should contain no line in violation of Christian morality, whose performers should be men and women of unchallenged virtue, whose audiences should be composed of the purest people, a theatre which should ostracise every immodest costume, look, or gesture from its boards, and bar its doors against every licentious temptation, would certainly be entitled to respectful treatment from the Christian church; but every man of common sense knows that the average American theatre is no more like this ideal play-house, than the average politician is like Abraham Lincoln, or the average Pope is like St. Peter. And if our average theatre should attempt to conform itself to such a puritanic ideal, it would be deserted by the vast majority of play-goers in twenty-four hours. As the Church came in, the thirsters for sensual stimulations would go out. As the chaste matron entered, the "strange woman" would withdraw. An ideal puritanic stage would go into bankruptcy as speedily as the dram-shop which should furnish nothing but pure, cold water. And for the very sufficient reason that the great mass of theatre-supporters visit the play-house for strong passional excitements, they go there for the very purposes which make it dangerous to a conscientious servant of Jesus Christ. They go there to stimulate and gratify what is thoroughly "carnal" in their natures, and not to elevate the spiritual nature or fit them better for life's grandest end—to glorify God.

Let it be understood distinctly that we do not affirm that every popular play is immoral, or that every actor and actress is impure, and every attendant upon a play-house is "on the scent" for sensualities. But we do affirm most unreservedly, that the whole trend of the popular stage is hostile to holiness, and the Christian who discards holiness discards Christ. We affirm that it ignores God, and too often tramples on his commandments. We affirm that if the theatre be a school of morals, it must be judged by its pupils and graduates; and we know that an institution which *unsexes* womanhood by sometimes putting her in male attire, and often "putting her to open shame," is an anti-Christian abomination! The accomplished Mrs. Kemble, in her maturer years, condemned the stage.

One of the most eminent living actresses declares that she only enters the theatre to enact her part, and keeps no company with her profession. A converted actor said to me, while passing a theatre in which he had often performed, "behind those curtains lies—SODOM!"

The American theatre, be it observed, is a great concrete institution, to be judged as a totality; and it is responsible for what it tolerates and shelters. We therefore hold it responsible for whatever of impurity, whatever of sensual temptation, whatever of irreligion, as well as whatever of occasional and "sporadic" benefit there may be bound up in its organic life. Instead of helping Christ's kingdom, it hinders; instead of saving souls, it corrupts, and, in unnumbered cases, destroys! We pastors know too well that when our church-members are enticed within its walls, they do not find there re-creation of body and soul for a more vigorous service of their Lord. Their spiritual garment is not always brought away "unspotted by the flesh." They have given their public and pecuniary support to an institution whose doors open *downward*, and not upward towards a Christian HOME in the heavens. Can a servant of Christ take coals of fire in his bosom without being burned? The average theatre is gilded nastiness. Can we handle pitch, and not be defiled? And what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness—what concord hath Christ with Belial? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

We have briefly reviewed the claims of the average American stage to the countenance and support of conscientious Christians. Let us also apply the principles already laid down to another popular amusement—the *promiscuous dance*. This form of social diversion—or rather of social dissipation—is increasingly persistent in its demands for the sanction of Christ's Church. Its advocates have an innocent ideal of domestic dancing which they always push to the front, and against which people of common sense would no more wage warfare than against a game of croquet or the juvenile romp of "blind man's buff." We shall not waste any ammunition upon this form of domestic diversion in the sacred privacy of the home. We are dealing now with the attitude of Christians toward popular amusements; and we not only admit, but maintain, the inherent rights of Christian parents to the regulation of their own domestic occupations and recreations. We also affirm, that if the only dancing that is known were simply the chaste and decent movements of a household or its intimate guests in a private parlor, under the parental eye, then the whole subject of dancing would never have entered into the domain of ethical controversy. It might have offended no Christian conscience, and called forth no "deliverances" from any Christian Church. With no innocent domestic pastime is it the province of pulpit or Church to intermeddle.

But there is a popular amusement which involves the promiscuous contacts and caressings of the sexes in the public assembly and in the ball-room, and which is fraught with terrible peril to personal purity and to Christian character. It is in no sense a wholesome recreation to body, or mind, or immortal soul. This popular and promiscuous dance has in it all the elements of intense and absorbing excitement, with the inevitable stimulation of the most inflammable passions. It permits undue familiarities between the sexes. It often tolerates unchaste movements and contacts to which the daughters of Christ's household, the "handmaidens of the Lord," should never be exposed. It kindles salacious thoughts; it is associated with extravagance in dress, extravagance of late hours, with temptations to pride, self-display, envy, jealousy, and "fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Instead of being a recreation, it is a "revelling," which God's word forbids. That divine guide teaches the young women to be sober; but how shall sobriety be cultivated amid the passion-kindling whirl of the ball-room? And what a tormenting discordance is there between the divine description of woman's true "adorning, not with gay apparel, but with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," and the flashing flaunt of the assembly-room! Is the dancing-hall a department in the school of Christ? Shall our Christian daughters cease to emulate the examples of Ruth and Dorcas and Lydia, and learn to enact the part of the daughter of Herodias? Surely the household of faith is not so bankrupt of pure and innocent recreations that it needs to steal from Satan a sensual pleasure which even heathen Rome in the best days of the Republic would not permit.

The popish archbishop of Quebec has prohibited his flock from engaging in "*round dances*"—a form of the dance which is said to be especially "possessed with a devil." Shall popish morality exceed Presbyterian? If promiscuous dancing shall, like the theatre, be regarded as a totality, then let us make a clean sweep of the whole business.

We have now subjected two of the most popular amusements to the test between Christian recreation and unchristian stimulations. The principles applied to them should be applied to every form of amusement. Every recreation which makes the body stronger and the mind more alert for duty is positively beneficial. Against such there is no law. A healthy conscience, enlightened from above, will judge rightly on these points. It may also be affirmed that no follower of Christ should ever engage in any social entertainment or public amusement from which he could not return with a clean conscience to his Bible and his closet. No follower of Christ should ever frequent any place which the Master would eschew if he were personally on earth; nor should a Christian be ever found in places of amusement so questionable in character that irreligious people would be startled to find him there. The Master's command is to "abstain from all form of evil."

The word of God draws a sharp, clean dividing-line between the

pursuits and pleasures of the world and the pursuits and pleasures of Christ's flock. Where our Lord is honored is the right side ; where he is dishonored, or even ignored, is the wrong side. Over that dividing-line lies the tempting path to *self-indulgence*, which is to-day the besetting sin and peril of the Church. Over that line lie sensual allurements, extravagance, frivolity, and slavery to the world. Over that line Christian character is sacrificed, for no man can "walk in the Spirit" and at the same time "fulfil the lusts of the flesh." Over that line Christ is wounded in the house of his friends. Over that line into perilous amusements the follower of Jesus has no moral right to go. If he goes to participate, he offends his Master ; if he goes to protest, he offends and disgusts the votaries of sinful pleasure.

It is not by going over to the world that we can save its votaries. If the Church is to impress the world, it must live above it in an atmosphere of Christ's making. If the Church would save dying sinners, it must, like its Lord, be "separate from sinners." When Lot voluntarily pitched his tent in the cities of the plain, he made no converts, and was burned out like the rest of his neighbors. And if the follower of Christ essays to enter the doorway to sensual amusements, he must meet the sentinel of conscience, armed with the bayonet of this injunction : "Be ye not conformed to the world ; for whosoever would be the servant of this world is the enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This whole subject of Popular Amusements is one of prodigious practical import. The spiritual health and life of myriads of our youth depends largely upon the character of the recreations which they seek and the social pleasures in which they indulge. They must have, and will have, recreations. It is the bounden duty of conscientious parents not simply to denounce sinful amusements, but to provide innocent, healthful recreations for their families. The employer who wishes to keep his clerk or employé from the haunt of temptation must provide some substitute for Satan's advertisements. No wiser service can be rendered by Christian philanthropy than the organization and opening to the masses of wholesome resorts for recreation, which shall be the antidotes of the beer-garden, the play-house, the gaming-room, and the drinking-saloon.

To every true Christian the law of Christ is the law of his pleasures. Whether he eats or drinks, whether he toils or plays he must do all to the glory of God. Walking in the Spirit, he does not stoop to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Free to choose his pleasures, he is too free to want the sinful ones. As when we listen to a well-trained orchestra, the music of the horn mingles with the rich swell of the bugle and the finer notes of the delicate viols, so a true Christian life should be a full heaven-tuned harmony, in which pleasure shall blend with toil, in which work shall soften into play, and recreation shall rise into that strain of holy or heroic activities which impart to life both its sweetness and its sinew. Existence on earth is too short to be wasted in play ; but it must not be made shorter by the wear of unremitting toil.

Let me give you in one line the conclusion of the whole matter : " Whatsoever ye do, do *all* for the glory of God." This rule permits liberty and prohibits license. This rule padlocks the door to every sinful amusement, but it swings open a gateway through which life may become a procession of holy enjoyments until it swells into the raptures of heaven. Blessed Saviour, let thy service be our unending recreation, thy presence our everlasting delight !

DR. WITHERSPOON asked and obtained leave to make a personal explanation to the effect that it was not his purpose to represent the criticisms of Canon Farrar, to which he referred in his paper on Tuesday, as those of Professor Gildersleeve, and thus make that gentleman, without his knowledge or consent, a party to a theological controversy ; but only to refer to him as authority for a single grammatical construction, that of *pro* with the genitive ; and the legitimacy of its application to the passages of Scripture in dispute.

The Council adjourned, after devotional exercises, until tomorrow morning at 9.30 o'clock, in Horticultural Hall.

A large overflow meeting was held this evening in Horticultural Hall, at which the foregoing papers were repeated. There were also other addresses. Both the Academy and the Hall were crowded.

SEVENTH DAY'S SESSION.

THURSDAY, *September 30th*, 1880.

The Council was called to order at 9.30 o'clock, by the REV. ROBERT WATTS, D. D., of Belfast, President.

After the usual devotional exercises, the minutes of yesterday were read and approved.

DR. SCHAFF reported that, in connection with the Alliance, a public meeting had been held in the Young Men's Christian Association, on the evening of September 28th, and that the following persons had taken part, delivering addresses in the German language : Dr. Schaff, Chairman ; Rev. Mr. Richelson, of Philadelphia ; Rev. Dr. Porter, of New York ; Rev. Dr. Seibert, of Bloomfield ; Rev. Dr. Pfeiderer, of Karmthal ; Rev. Inspector Erdmann, of Elberfeld ; Rev. Fritz Fliedner, of Spain ; and that