

ONE HUNDRED YEARS
OF
TEMPERANCE.

A MEMORIAL VOLUME
OF THE
CENTENNIAL TEMPERANCE CONFERENCE

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THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BY THE REV. T. P. STEVENSON.

THE Church which I have the honor to represent, though planted for more than a century upon American soil, is the lineal descendant of the Covenanters of Scotland. Of their struggles in that land for civil and religious liberty, the world reaps the benefit to-day. In those struggles they gained for themselves and their posterity a certain uncompromising spirit which has moulded all their action in dealing with the evils of modern society. Eighty years ago, in 1805, her supreme court decided that slaveholding was a crime, and appointed a commission to give effect to this decision in her congregations in the Southern States. To their honor it is recorded that all her members who had acquired property in slaves set them at liberty at this behest, and emigrated, in the course of time, to the Northern States. In something of the same spirit she has dealt with the evil of intemperance.

Her position was determined, further, by the decisive action of some of her early leaders in the ministry. The Rev. James Milligan, D.D., of Vermont, who was also an educated physician, and whose medical diploma, given in this city, bore the signature of Dr. Benjamin Rush, organized, more than fifty years ago, the first pledged total abstinence society in New England. Through some years of constant agitation the society consisted of himself and his precentor, as President and Secretary; but, as it gradually gained ground, a neighboring minister came at last to one of its meetings, which was largely attended, and pleaded earnestly against total abstinence and in favor of moderation. At the close of the meeting the congratulations of the drunkards, who were present in force, convinced him that he was wrong, and he joined the society. Dr. Milligan had been taught the duty of total abstinence by his mother in Scotland. The Rev. James R. Willson, D.D., Chaplain at one time of the New York Legislature, then in the zenith of his influence as one of the foremost orators of his day, threw himself into the total abstinence movement from its inception with the energy of an ardent nature and the power of a logical and scholarly mind.

In 1836 the Reformed Presbyterian Synod unanimously resolved that "as the traffic in ardent spirits is seldom or never carried on by any without contributing to the destruction of both the souls and the bodies of their

fellow-men, we recommend to our people to abstain totally from that traffic."

In 1841 it was resolved that "members of this church be, and hereby are, prohibited from engaging or continuing in the liquor-traffic; and that, wherever individuals are employed in this traffic, sessions are hereby directed to deal with them immediately in such a way that this evil may be removed from the church in the best and speediest manner."

In 1857 it was resolved that "the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage is, at this day, an offence deserving of church discipline, and that sessions be directed to act accordingly."

In 1874 the Synod recommended that "intoxicating wines be not used in the administration of the Lord's Supper."

In 1884 these deliverances, which had been of the nature of statute law, were embalmed in the fundamental law of the Church by the incorporation into her testimony, in the constitutional manner, of the following declaration: "That individuals may be saved from the ruin wrought by intemperance, and that a testimony may be borne against this sin, and against the temptations thereto, the followers of Christ should totally abstain from the manufacture, sale, and use of intoxicants as a beverage."

In this present Centennial year the Synod declared that the Temperance issue has come to the hour for its final and decisive struggle, "when the facts are fully known; when all expedients have utterly failed; and when enlightened and matured public sentiment seeks to crystallize, in the form of law, for the absolute and complete suppression of the evil." The Church, it was declared, is not, in such conflicts, "a mere pulsometer to measure moral forces; she is a living organism, to originate and sustain them. The fact that the question has assumed a political and legislative aspect does not carry it out of the sphere of the Church's action. The theory that as soon as a moral issue becomes a political one the Church has nothing more to do with it, is political atheism. It is the theory that God and His law have no relation to the State. This is the hour of the Church's high opportunity and grave responsibility. The Christian ministry and the religious press can not keep silent on a false plea of non-partisanship, while Christian men administer wicked license laws and sustain parties that are in alliance with the liquor-traffic." The whole license system was denounced "as wrong in principle and most pernicious in practice, involving the nation in the guilt and shame of the liquor-traffic to which it gives its consent, as ineffectual for the restraint or suppression of the evil, and an utter violation of the high trust God has committed to civil government as His ordinance." All the women of the Church were recommended "to co-operate with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in its noble work of faith and labor of love."

On the related subject of the use of Tobacco, the Synod of 1879 declared that it is:

1. An injury to physical health;
2. An offence to good manners;
3. An unnecessary expenditure of money;
4. It is associated with much vice;

5. It exerts a demoralizing influence upon the youth ;

6. It is inconsistent with moral and spiritual purity. It was therefore

Resolved, 1. That this Synod condemn all indulgence in the use of tobacco.

Resolved, 2. That we urge our people to abstain from it in every form except as prescribed by competent medical authority, and to use all lawful and wise means to eradicate this evil from society.

Resolved, 3. That Presbyteries be hereby advised to license no one to preach the gospel who indulges in the use of tobacco ; and sessions be advised not to ordain any officers in the church who practice this habit for mere carnal gratification.

Resolved, 4. That this Synod condemn the cultivation, manufacture, and sale of tobacco.