

Correspondence.

TOTAL ABSTINENCE AS A TERM OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

Has a church, or the session of a church, a right or power to refuse an applicant for church membership, on the ground that he uses intoxicating drinks as a beverage or trafficks in them?

Time was when such a question was easily answered by the almost universal voice of the Christian world in the affirmative. The wisdom of such a decision is now called in question, in this wide and desolating declension in the Temperance cause. It is admitted that churches and sessions should be very careful in guarding against the evils of intemperance, and to be very important to protect the youth against the indulgence of the intoxicating cup. But to prohibit tipplers and vendors from coming into the Christian church, would be applying a test of membership which is not authorized by the Constitution, and therefore not expedient. It is not to be one of the evidences against a man's piety that he either drinks or sells intoxicating drinks. He may be rejected because his faith on some non-essential point does not harmonize with the creed of the church. But if you require a man to say he will not use intoxicating drinks or deal in them, as qualifications for membership, the church or session transcends their powers.

Now, Mr. Editor, we enter our decided protest against such folly and such betrayal of the interests of Christ's cause. The same course of false expediency as marked the early temperance movements, is indicated in this opposition to ecclesiastical action. There were churches, ministers and laymen, who thus started technical objections to pledges by themselves and churches. But, in most cases, they yielded to the pressure of the conviction, that the church of God must first purify itself, and stand out boldly in defence of total abstinence from the use and the traffic. The minister or officer of the church, who withheld his name and influence, was ranked on the side of the tippler, though he might be a temperate man. We all know how painful to the lovers of humanity was the attitude of such a one, and how detrimental to the interests of piety of the churches. But, on the other hand, the churches who refused to admit members, who were of doubtful sobriety, or who amounted to the same thing, who would not give up their cups or who would sell to those neighbors, the poison, were mighty in their influence to put down intemperance in the community. They cut off members who violated their pledges or covenant to abstain, for it is simply a part of the covenant to which they assented in joining the church, added from the necessity of the times. The records of these churches went up to the Presbyteries. These records were reviewed and generally approved. These bodies of ministers and laymen did not pass sweeping censures upon the churches for their fidelity in this matter, but considered such action in accordance with a special mission, to watch over their spiritual interests. The Presbyterian form of Government authorizes the session in so many words, "to concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the congregation," subject to the jurisdiction of the higher courts, and yet having a discretionary power to devise measures adapted to their particular necessities.

Besides, these higher courts encouraged the churches in this action, by their own urgent measures in reference to the same subject. This will appear from a reference to the proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian church for a number of years. I will quote from the Minutes as I find them in the Digest. The first mention of the subject before General Assembly, was in the year 1811, when a committee was appointed "to devise measures to prevent some of the numerous and threatening mischiefs which are experienced throughout our country, by the excessive and intemperate use of spirituous liquors," and "report to the next Assembly." That report which was made the next year, recommended to "all ministers of the Presbyterian church in the United States, to deliver public discourses as often as circumstances may render it expedient on the sin and mischief of intemperate drinking, &c." The idea of total abstinence had not yet been entertained by the church or community. They further report "that it be enjoined on all church sessions, that they exercise a special vigilance and care over the conduct of all persons in the communion of their respective churches with regard to this sin, by private warning and remonstrance, and by public censure to purge the church of a sin so enormous, &c." "Ministers and other officers and members are requested to diffuse addresses, sermons, tracts and other printed compositions on the sub-

ject." Officers and members are "requested to take measures for reducing the number of taverns and other places of vending liquors by small measure." This action was taken fifty-two years ago.

"In 1818 the evils of intemperance are enlarged upon in the pastoral letter. The officers and members of our Church are urged to abstain even from the common use of ardent spirits." An 1828 Assembly commends the "American Society for the 'Promotion of Temperance.'" The same year, they appoint the fourth Thursday of January, 1829, a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, with special reference to this sin." How appropriate would be such a fast at the present time, in view of the fearful ravages of intemperance, more terrible in the sacrifice of human life, than the desolations of war now afflicting our country, beside the sacrifice of property. Then consider the moral ruin of the hundreds of thousands, who sink into a drunkard's grave and its unparalleled obstacles to the success of the Gospel; and who can say we ought not as a church and nation, to humble ourselves for our indifference and refusal as ministers and laymen, to put forth our energies in imitation of our fathers in this cause?

In 1829, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the following resolutions, which embraced for the first time, the doctrine of total abstinence from Ardent Spirits. The milder drinks were not excluded as yet:

That they cordially approve, and rejoice in the formation of temperance societies, on the principle of entire abstinence from the use of ardent spirits, that they deeply deplore the apathy manifested by many professing Christians towards the cause of temperance, and especially do they grieve and wonder that members of our churches, in view of an evil so desolating and so awful in its prospective bearings on all the interests of our country, should not only take no part in the exertions of their brethren and fellow-citizens against intemperance, but by using and trafficking in ardent spirits, be actively engaged in promoting it."

This same fact we are called to grieve over now in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The General Assembly also "earnestly recommends the forming of temperance societies in the congregations under their care; and that all members of the churches adopt the principle of entire abstinence from the use of ardent spirits." How would it look for the same Assembly after passing such an earnest recommendation, to say to these churches: "You must not require members to abstain, but receive them into your fellowship; form temperance societies on the principle of the total abstinence, out of the church, but not in it. If tipplers and vendors insist on coming into the church, you must admit them. To exclude them would be to require a special test, which our form of Government does not require, nor is it expedient."

The next year, 1830, the Assembly passed similar resolutions. In 1834, they expressed their views of the traffic in this resolution.

Resolved, That the traffic in ardent spirits, to be used as a drink by any people, is, in our judgment, morally wrong, and ought to be regarded as such, by the churches of Jesus Christ universally.

This is applying a new test. The meaning is, that the church should discipline any one who trafficked in ardent spirits; the advanced state of public opinion, and the enlightened judgment of the Christian church now demanding it. In 1832, the General Assembly says: "No church can shine as a light in the world, while she openly sanctions and sustains any practices which are so evidently destructive of the best interests of society." In 1840, the General Assembly endorses total abstinence from all that will intoxicate, and urges the members of churches to "evince "in their whole lives a standing and unvarying exemplification of the only true principle of temperance, total abstinence from everything that will intoxicate." In the years 1845 and '55, the General Assembly commends the efforts for prohibitory laws in all the States, and "earnestly recommends to the ministers and congregations in our connection, and to all others, to persevere in vigorous efforts, until laws shall be enacted in every State and Territory of our beloved country prohibiting entirely the traffic," &c.

This is sufficient to show that the Presbyterian Church has been speaking forth for many years, and urging her ministers and members to activity in arresting the evils of intemperance. And now shall the churches be put back and censured for doing the very thing which they have been urged to do, on the oft-refuted, technical, objection of making a new test, which we contend a church has a constitutional right to do, when such a sin as intemperance is desolating it? This right appears to be conceded in the action of large ec-

clesiastical bodies by their resolutions, recommendations and injunctions on various specific evils, General Assemblies of the Presbyterian church, especially, have from time to time, recommended and enjoined upon the churches to allow of no promiscuous dancing by their members; that it was a disciplinary offence. Slavery has been declared so with certain exceptions. Gambling, lotteries, betting, duelling, bigamy, Sabbath desecration and intemperance, are all subjects of special deliverances to the churches for their action and censures. And shall not the church, with the accumulated experience of half a century, protect herself against such a debasing sin, by so guarding the avenues to her portal, that no one who uses and trafficks in these drinks, shall enter, knowing full well that intemperance enters with such very generally? This subject demands the most serious attention. There should be no embarrassments thrown in the way of churches contending against this evil, without the best of reasons. Our judicatories should rather sympathize with and help them to purify Zion from this evil. R. D.

PULPIT ELOQUENCE OF ITALY.

[TRANSLATED FROM A GERMAN RELIGIOUS PERIODICAL.] (CONCLUDED.)

The first part was designed to confute Luther's doctrine of justification. "Luther laid down the proposition, that man is justified by faith alone; and why? Because he himself had no pleasure in doing good works and because he sought popularity by tolerating all sorts of immorality. The Protestants need but to believe, and they can live as they list; the madder, the better. Behold Protestantism stripped of its disguise!" In the second part, he undertook to show that Christians must do good works. But under this head, he borrowed all his ideas from the very Protestantism which, in the first part, he had so scandalously abused. "Think not that praying Ave Marias and Pater-nosters, to give alms and to confess are such works as earn the reward in heaven. Alas! too many of you do no more than these external works and live as if you were Protestants. But the Scripture says: 'Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.' Only when your works proceed from faith will they have a reward." He closed the discourse with an appropriate anecdote. "And now should the Protestants approach you to convert you to their faith, give them the answer that a Catholic Englishman gave to a Protestant Frenchman: 'You have abolished the mass, confession and good works, now abolish hell too and I am your man.'" This preacher was exceedingly popular since he brought the entire force of the Italian eloquence to bear upon popular topics, such as: Covetousness, the Law of Forgiveness, Woman, Envy, Principal Errors in Education, &c. Often when he came from the chancel the people would kiss his hand and his cowl.

Besides, there was a marked difference noticeable between the ecclesiastical stiffness of the Romish preachers generally, and this Monk's lively and penetrating denunciation of the errors of Catholicism. In a sermon against selfishness, he said: "Should I tell you that you are possessed with selfishness, you would refuse to admit it and punish me for lying. And yet from the mountains to the valleys, from the throne of the king to the altar of God, everything is marked with this sin. Even in the heart of the priest who ministers at the altar lives this love of self." And picturing the earth under the image of a golden temple, he went on: "Methinks the earth a golden temple, and in it stands upon a golden altar a golden image, and before the image kneel in God-dishonoring worship, innumerable throngs of aged and young persons, men and women; and the image is mammon, the god of gold. But in the recesses of this temple, I hear weeping, complaining and mourning. What means this weeping, complaining and mourning? Oh! it is sorrowing daughters whom avaricious fathers have put into the cloister, that the poor deceived ones may mourn their beautiful youth stolen from them."

In Rome it would be impossible to utter such things. Farthest in his political opposition to Rome went an Augustine monk whom we heard in Naples on Emmanuel's birth-day. His subject was Italy; the three divisions were: (1) Italy has arisen, (2) Italy is awake, (3) Italy is. "Italy has arisen from long slumber, through the power of the genius which dwells in her—alive, that may be put to sleep, but not killed. To day we celebrate the birth-day of the re galanuomo, the hero of a hundred battles, who woke up Italy. Italy has indeed arisen, yet not entirely. The heart is yet wanting: Rome. There pulses a bad, confused life, inimical to the interests of the people; the arm is yet wanting: Venice. But it will not

be long ere heart and arm will be part of another body, and Italy will be free and united." The civil authorities protect such language; and there prevails among the lower orders of the clergy, who bear all the toil and privation, a great and lowering indignation at the pride and wealth of the higher prelates.

The examples thus given prove that this sort of preaching can rarely be to edify. The Italian pulpit eloquence of the Catholic Church of to-day, is with few exceptions, declamation; and if it does undertake at times to reprove immorality, the hearers are rather regaled than edified by the representation.

Preaching comes from faith; but faith comes from the Word of God. Herein lies the deepest reason for the absence of all true preaching from the pulpit eloquence of Italy.

HELP FOR THE FREEDMEN AND UNION REFUGEES.

St. Louis, March 23, 1864.

DEAR BRO. MEARS.—Please give a place in your columns, and call the attention of your readers, to the accompanying circular. You will see that it presents a new feature of the great Fair movement, which cannot fail to interest many of your readers. I know that they have been appealed to again and again, but I am sure that if they could see the necessities of these sufferers, they would still wish to do more for them. No previous fair has embraced in its objects, these classes of sufferers. The cordial assent of our managers to give this Department a place, seems to me to mark a gratifying advance of public opinion in the right direction. The Western Sanitary Commission care alike for white and colored troops, and now they seek to provide alike for white and colored refugees—for whites made homeless, and impoverished, because they would not be rebels, and for blacks made free, but homeless by the war which is to utterly abolish slavery.

It is matter of regret that we did not secure this department earlier, so as to give our friends more time. But it is matter of gratitude that we have it secured, and efficiently organized. Will not our friends help us make it a decided success?

You are to have a Fair soon in Philadelphia, I do not forget—but notwithstanding that, cannot your citizens send something for this peculiar department? I am happy to be able to say, that the executive committee have adopted the advice of the Western Sanitary Commission, to have no raffling, but to dispose of all goods, in ordinary commercial methods, at fair market values. The Fair is to commence May 17, and continue two weeks.

Fraternally, H. A. NELSON.

St. Louis, Mo., March 17th, 1864.

FREEDMEN'S AND UNION REFUGEES' DEPARTMENT OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY SANITARY FAIR.—Circular.—The war for the Union has shaken the prison of slavery to its foundations, and is to demolish it utterly. Many thousands of slaves are liberated. The nation has accepted the able-bodied men among them as soldiers, and they are surpassing all expectations by their good conduct. The families of these accepted defenders of the Republic are homeless; are unused to the responsibilities of freedom; are destitute of all things. They must be fed; they must be protected, instructed; and as rapidly as possible taught the methods, the moralities, and the happiness of virtuous homes. For the time being, large sums of money and much benevolent labor are needful for these ends. Voluntary associations have been organized and have earnestly and harmoniously co-operated in this work. Such are the Freedmen's Aid Society of St. Louis; (at first called the Contraband Relief Society), the Freedmen's Aid Society of Cincinnati, and similar associations at the east.

The Western Sanitary Commission, in the prosecution of its noble work for the army and navy, has been brought in direct contact with the multitude of freed people who have taken refuge within our army lines, and has providentially found itself able to act most efficiently and comprehensively in co-operation with the Government and with the voluntary associations, for the benefit of these poor people. The President of that Commission, James E. Yeatman, Esq., has lately made investigations, and has aided the officers of Government in the improvement of its methods for employing, protecting and elevating the freed people, which are engaging the interested attention of the benevolent in all the land.

There are also thousands of homeless whites, made so by the rebellion. These Union refugees are in great numbers, and in utter destitution, at different places within our army lines, especially in St. Louis. They have come from Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, and many of them have endured hardships almost incredible, in escaping from the homes out of which they have been driven because they hated treason and were hated by traitors. Great numbers of this unfortunate class of loyal citizens have been clothed, fed, sheltered, and forwarded to their friends in the loyal States, or returned to their homes as our military lines have been extended. In this work the Commission have acted partly as agents of the Government, and partly with funds entrusted to them for

such uses. The demand for aid to the Union Refugees will be necessarily of short duration; and if the freed people are but treated with justice, generosity will not long be needed. But for the current year, during the transition period, there is more than enough to do, and all the funds that the largest philanthropy can spare will find profitable employment. In elevating four millions of slaves to the condition of freemen, all the zeal and liberality of a Christian community will find room to work. These statements are made to show that this special department of relief has a legitimate place in the Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair.

By unanimous vote of its Executive Committee, a special Department has been assigned to the interests of Freedmen and Union Refugees, and a committee has been appointed to take charge of this Department, in the reception and disposal of goods; and for all other purposes connected with it, in the conduct of the Fair. Contributions of money, of articles for sale in the Fair, and of such as can be directly used, are most earnestly solicited.

All packages must be specially directed to "The Freedmen's and Union Refugees' Department of the Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair," and donors will be careful to designate clearly, whether their contributions are "for Freedmen," or "for Refugees," or for both at the discretion of the Western Sanitary Commission. All contributions will be sacredly appropriated to the object indicated.

Committee:—Rev. H. A. Nelson, D. D., Rev. Henry Cox, Rev. Wm. G. Elliott, D. D., Rev. W. H. Corkhill, Rev. T. M. Post, D. D., Rev. G. Anderson, Wyllis King, A. J. Conant, Jas. E. Yeatman, Brig. Gen. W. A. Pile, Hon. F. A. Dick, Lucien Eaton, W. C. Wilcox, J. H. Parker.

Note.—All goods and packages, of whatever kind, should be distinctly marked with the name of the donor and place from which sent, and directed James E. Yeatman, St. Louis, Mo., (For M. V. S. Fair, F. & U. R. Dept.) And bill of lading or other proper notice should at the same time be sent by mail to Major Alfred Mackay, Corresponding Secretary, &c., St. Louis, Mo. Committee rooms, No. 10 Lindell Hotel.

Donations of money are specially solicited, and should be sent by mail or express to Samuel Copp, Jr., Treasurer, &c., St. Louis, with specific directions for F. & U. R. Department.

A SECLAR PAPER ON EXCITEMENT IN RELIGIOUS AWAKENINGS.

The Springfield Republican, of Massachusetts, has an editorial from the pen of Dr. Holland ("Timothy Titcomb,") on revivals; suggested by the work of grace in that city; and the criticisms of conservative Christian people. It rebukes pointedly the timid and, it seems to us, unscriptural spirit not unfrequently seen in the statement respecting a revival, that "it was free from all excitement." Surely, this would have been a singular note to the apostolic account of the day of Pentecost.

The Republican says:

"It is a very pretty thing for fine religious people to sit in their parlors and protest against excitement in religion. To them religion is a delicate flower, whose fragrance is to be inhaled in secret and whose beauty is never to be exposed. But the world is never to be moved and saved from its sins in this way. The world is wicked. The world is selfish and proud and thoughtless and vain, and dilettanteism in religion will do nothing for it. * * *

"It would be well for those who are fearful of the results of religious excitement to look around over this city of Springfield, and see the condition of things that exist here. There was probably never so much vice and dissipation here as at present. Hundreds, if not thousands of young men are going as directly toward wreck and ruin as the coarsest vice can lead them. Grog-shops are everywhere. The woman whose steps take hold on hell walks the streets and pursues her vocation without hindrance. Gambling holes abound; and while, externally, things appear to be moving along in the old, respectable way, it is known that, under cover, the city reeks with vice. Now, will those who are afraid of religious excitements inform us how this tide of vice can be arrested by anything less than a religious excitement? Suppose the excitement was so great and so general that it should turn the whole city into an inquiry meeting—what then? Would the city be greatly damaged by the change? It would seem to us a very desirable state of things, compared with the present, even if half or two-thirds only should remain religious after the excitement had passed by. In Heaven's name let us have anything that will turn men's minds to many things, away from beastly things, if it be only for a time."

DEATH OF AN ELDER.

The church at Reesville has experienced a severe loss in the death of the first elder elected by the newly organized church, Mr. Richard Dill Mathews. This brother belonged to a godly line in connection with the Presbyterian church of Ireland, his father and grandfather having been elders in the church of which the father of the late Dr. Richard Dill was pastor. Mr. Mathews was a very valuable member of our little church, a faithful teacher in our Sunday school and an example of unobtrusive, consistent, intelligent piety, in our community. After a painful illness of several months, he fell asleep on the morning of the Sabbath, April 3d, in the thirty-seventh year of his age. J. M.

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