

AMONG THE METHODISTS.

The Work of the General Conference at Richmond.

Trying to Regulate the Appointments by Bishops.

(Cor. of the Charleston News-Courier.)

RICHMOND, Va., May 16.—The Conference, on Friday, discussed two measures of importance. The first, a resolution asking the Conference to give it, as its sense of the law, that the Bishops should make no appointments without first submitting them to the presiding elders. This elicited long and very animated discussion, in which a number of delegates, lay and clerical, participated; but when the vote was finally taken, the recommendation of the committee on episcopacy, to which it had been referred, was adopted; namely, that no legislation was deemed necessary; so the matter remains as it has been all along. The Bishops, of course, advise with the presiding elders in relation to the appointments; but every now and then there is some little friction—a presiding elder is thwarted in some pet project. Such things will happen, and resolutions like those just mentioned are the consequence. The Conference, however, is very conservative, and almost invariably "sits down" on the malcontents; lay or clerical.

PAYING THEIR OWN WAY.

The second measure that elicited debate was the report of the committee to whom had been given the duty of devising a plan for providing for the payment of the expenses of delegates to the General Conference. This, of course does not apply to the present session. Heretofore the traveling expense only, of delegates have been defrayed by their constituency. Hereafter, (beginning with the Conference of 1890,) both traveling expenses and maintenance (or board) are to be thus provided; and the larger and more wealthy Conferences will assist those that are unable to furnish their full quota toward this fund. There is a tendency now on the part of nearly all the larger religious bodies to adopt some scheme of this sort. The Southern Methodists, I think, have been a little ahead of other denominations in this matter, and one incidental advantage arising from the adoption of this measure is that the Conference can now go, without any hesitation, to any place where there are hotels or boarding houses, and need not be under the fear of overtaxing the hospitality of a community.

It is not yet known where the next General Conference is to be held. It has never sat in Charleston. Perhaps we may be favored. The sessions have been as follows: Convention in Louisville, Ky., in 1844; General Conference in Petersburg, Va., in 1846; St. Louis, 1850; Columbus, Ga., in 1854; in 1858 at Nashville; no session in 1862, because of the war; in New Orleans in 1866; in Memphis, Tenn., in 1870; in Louisville, Ky., in 1874; in Atlanta in 1878; in Nashville in 1882, and in 1886 in Richmond. There is some talk of selecting some one city or town where the General Conference is to meet every four years. I do not think, however, that this measure will be adopted at the present session. Montague, in East Tennessee, would be a suitable place for such a gathering.

THE BROTHER IN BLACK.

On Saturday Dr. Phillips was received and heard, as the fraternal delegate from the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church of America. The Rev. Dr. Phillips is a very black delegate. He read his address, and was frequently applauded. He was the colored offshoot from the Southern Methodist Church, a body of over 100,000 members. The General Conference is now in session in Augusta, Ga., where also is situated their chief educational establishment, the "Paine Institute," over which the Rev. G. W. Walker, of South Carolina, presides.

SAM JONES IN THE PULPIT.

Quite a stir was created in the Conference-room by the presence of Sam Jones and Sam Small, who had run over from Baltimore just for one day, to see their friends here. Mr. Jones looks very thin, weary and worn. I think he needs a rest. No public announcement has been made of his preaching here. It was mentioned just before the adjournment yesterday, when the "notices" were read out, about half-past 1 P. M., that Mr. S. P. Jones would preach in this (Centenary) church at half-past 3 P. M.; and so great was the desire to hear him that a number of persons remained in the church, and before 3 o'clock the house was packed, and large numbers were outside, vainly trying to get in. This eagerness to hear him is easily explained. He has had so much newspaper notoriety that almost everybody wants to hear him. He has never been here before, and there were also a large number of the members of the General Conference who had never heard him. All the circumstances thus combined to insure a large audience upon even the shortest notice.

REVISING THE HYMN BOOK.

The special committee on the Hymn Book, Dr. J. H. Carlisle, chairman, made their report yesterday. They recommend that the Bishops appoint a committee of five, to be composed of one Bishop, two ministers and two laymen, whose duty it shall be to revise the present Hymn Book of the Church.

The book thus to be revised and superseded is the only regular standard Hymn Book the M. E. Church, South, has ever had. It was prepared principally in Charleston, S. C., in 1846 by a sub-committee, composed of the Rev. Thomas O. Summers, the Rev. W. M. Wightman and the Rev. Whiteford Smith, all resided in Charleston. The last named is now the only survivor of the committee. Dr. Summers was the chief editor, and those who knew him will acknowledge that he was eminently fitted for the post. This committee was engaged in arduous labor for one entire year in preparing this compilation, and their work met with the entire approval and cordial appreciation on the part of the entire Church. It was a collection carefully made of the best hymns for public and social worship, selected from a number of the most approved evangelical writers of hymns. Charles Wesley, the poet laureate of Methodism, furnishes the largest number. Next to him comes Dr. Isaac Watts, whose hymns adorn every collection in the English language. Dr. Philip Doddridge, John Newton and the poet Cowper come

next. John Wesley contributes a number of elegant translations from Latin, French and German hymns. Then we have selections from Addison, Thomas Moore, Montgomery, Sir Walter Scott, Milton, Noe, Müllersberg, Steele, Hammond, Stoddard, Cennick, E. Jones, Hart, Lyte and others. This book has stood the test of forty years, and is as good to-day as ever. Then why change? This is a pertinent question. The answer is that the modern development of Sunday-schools has brought into popular use a class of religious song and tune books which have captivated the ear of the younger people by the sprightly music. These have been reinforced by the Sankeys and Towners, and their numerous predecessors, who have introduced books of spiritual songs, which have in many places superseded the regular Hymn Book of the Church. Memorials have come up from many parts of the connection asking consideration of these facts, and such action as the Conference may deem best under the circumstances. The Conference has not yet acted on the report, but I presume it will be adopted without any material change.

THE COMMITTEE ON COMITY.

From the report made yesterday of the committee of "comity," &c., who were to arrange matters under dispute, with a like committee to be appointed by the Northern Methodist Church, I infer that nothing will be done in this direction at this session. I predicted this result. The time has not yet come. Fraternal professions are very nice, though somewhat empty, but this is all we can get just yet. Substantials will doubtless follow in due time. Had the war not supervened, the forty years' wandering in the wilderness ("until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host," Deut. ii, 14.) would now be up. The split in the Methodist Church took place in 1844. But the gap was greatly widened and deepened by the war. So I suppose we shall have to wait until the year of our Lord 1905 before we shall see inaugurated an era of peace and cordial relations working in actual and practical reality between these two branches of the Methodist Church in the United States. If it were lawful to quote Latin I should be tempted to say: "Tanquam animis coelestibus ire," which in English means; "Can such anger dwell in heavenly minds."

HOW TO PROMOTE TEMPERANCE.

What The New York Journal of Commerce Thinks of it.

Those who oppose from principle the enactment of laws prohibiting the sale, or the manufacture even, of any form of intoxicating drinks, are often charged with indifference to the evils of intemperance. There is no foundation whatever for this charge, as many of them have done excellent work in restraining the immoderate use of alcoholic beverages by the only methods that have ever proved to be of practical utility. Even if drunkenness could be lessened by statutes of the character described, we have always believed that such legislation, although advocated often from the best of motives, would be a blow at popular liberty far more dangerous to the well-being of society than the evil it seeks to cure. But all experience shows the futility of such legal restraints, and the prohibitory law when enacted is powerless for good, and only pregnant with evil. It debauches the reverence for law by setting the example of every freeman against both its letter and spirit. It leads to rebellion and does nothing in the way of reformation.

Temperance is a virtue and therefore comes only from planting and culture. There is a great deal of sneering at doctrine of original sin, but it needs no divine revelation to establish the fact that human nature is in any country or generation, tends always to the practice of that which is vicious and degrading. Ill weeds will monopolize the soil that is left uncared for, and intemperance not only in drinking but in the indulgence of all the animal appetites and passions will follow as naturally and inevitably such neglect in the training of the race.

Temperance must be taught at home, and habits of self-restraint must be built up in the child, and not afterwards in the life. Some believe that total abstinence from every taste of intoxicating drinks is the best training for the young. We have no quarrel with those who urge and practice this theory for themselves, but all our observation has proved to us the inadequacy of this system as a remedy for the prevalent intemperance. There is a better discipline of self-denial perhaps in such abstinence, but where nothing has been tasted from childhood up, it does not establish a habit of self-restraint in the presence of temptation or trial. Abstinence is not temperance, and the appetite has never felt the curb and learned submission to it.

If those who have totally abstained from wine and spirits from their youth are not to be broken over the rule, they are safe enough; but they have not learned to practice restraint under the pressure of trial, and a negative as a safeguard, can never take the place of a positive habit. If all indulgence of the appetites was wholly evil, then total abstinence would be the perfection of virtue; but they are poorly fitted for the great conflicts of life who have not learned by early habits of self-restraint, the value of moderation.

The man who banishes wine, beer and distilled spirits from his house and has only taught his children never to touch them, has not guarded them against intemperance half as securely, in our judgment, as he who gives them the opportunity to taste those beverages and early trains them to self-restraint in their presence. We have often seen one who never knew in his boyhood at home the flavor of any such beverage, who yielded to the first temptation when he found the cup outside, and having no habit of temperance became the slave of his unbridled appetite before he suspected the danger. The French woman who quenched her thirst with a glass of water and declared that it would be delightful if it was only wicked to drink it, illustrated a profound truth. There is always a severe craving for forbidden things, and simple prohibition does not provide the shield against excess in the hour of temptation. But there is a double motive, it

seems to us, in the method of training we have suggested. Many persons as they grow up will have stimulating drinks, and it is important that they shall have a taste cultivated, if they use any, for that which is comparatively innocuous. The boy who is accustomed to see light wines or beer on his father's table, is offered them if he wishes to have them, but is taught that he does not need them, and that proper self-restraint requires at all times a very sparing use of them, will be indifferent to them, will never have occasion to obtain them surreptitiously and will acquire a habit of leaving them untouched while he has access to them. As he grows older he will feel no temptation to indulge in them to excess, and if he uses any stimulant at all, will out of custom resort to such as are of a mild character and cannot injure him by their temperate use.

The child brought up in the constant presence of light wines or beer, which are not denied to him, is less likely to become a drunkard than one who is wholly restrained from all sight or taste of any such stimulants. In countries where all children can have such wines or beer if they desire them, drunkenness is a rare exception. In American families this is true. We asserted it in a spirited discussion on this theme about thirty-five years ago, establishing it by incontrovertible evidence; and our later observation has ever since fully justified and confirmed all that we then insisted upon as the best safeguard against intemperance. We know there are many worthy people who cannot accept this theory chiefly because they believe that any use of such stimulants is a concession to the Evil One. It nevertheless remains true that an established habit of temperance is the best bulwark against drunkenness, and that a simple practice of total abstinence does not sufficiently confirm the habit of self-restraint.

The child who is told that any taste of such beverages is sinful, and that he must never touch them, does not believe the one and is not likely long to obey the other; and when he does plunge into indulgence will select the most potent forms of intoxicants, with no positive habits of self-restraint. We know that many believe in the ascetic doctrine of becoming virtuous by shutting the door on the world and its temptations, but trials will come even into a cloister; and a character built up by patient self-denial and restraint amid the surges of the world's temptations is the only one that will achieve the final victory.

But whichever theory is adopted, it will be found that temperance is not a matter of legal restraint but of an inward curb on the appetites whose excessive indulgence is the cause of so much human misery. While so many people drink to excess dram-shops cannot be suppressed. All attempts to do this by legislation have utterly and signally failed. It seems to us that the wisest thing is the high license system, which brings the liquor selling out of the cellar, greatly lessens the number of the shops where liquor is sold, and makes every one who has paid his high price for the license a detective to aid in putting down the illicit traffic. Beyond this we would have drunkenness punished as a crime not only in the theory of legal enactment, but in its treatment by society. The mistaken sentimentality that makes the drunkard a helpless victim, sinned against by the rum-seller, and only needing a prohibitory law to cure him, is directly in the way of his redemption. Drunkenness is not a disease, but a crime against the laws of God and man; and if the offender was pitied less and treated as his offense deserved, he would be greatly aided in his efforts to break the chains of an evil habit. The cure is in his will and not in a crusade against the distillery. By the very effort to keep the liquor away from him, toward which all the energies of a large class of reformers are directed, he is made to believe that his only chance of safety lies in such prohibition. He should be taken in hand as a sinner, to be reformed from within, a form of reformation which is the only hope of the world.

ASTRONOMICAL EVENTS FOR 1886.

The principal astronomical event of 1886 will be the total eclipse of the sun on the 29th of August. The line of totality in this eclipse will cross the Atlantic Ocean, traversing land in the West Indies, and across the equator in Southern Africa toward sunset. On the coast of Venezuela the total phase lasts nearly five minutes, and at Grenada, in the West Indies, the duration will be nearly four minutes. It seems probable that in the latter part of April and first part of May we are to have the unusual spectacle of two fine comets visible at the same time. Barnard's comet is increasing in brightness. Another comet was discovered by Fabry at the Paris Observatory, December 1, and this will finally surpass Barnard's in brilliancy. It will be seen in the North, and its position will be very similar to that of the brilliant comet of 1881. For a short time it will not set at all in our latitude, but will remain visible throughout the night. The comet is now visible in a moderate-sized telescope, and is increasing slowly in brightness. About April 1, the increase will become more rapid, and by the middle or latter part of that month it will undoubtedly become visible to the naked eye. Its maximum brightness, over 600 times as bright as when it was discovered, will be reached about May 1, when it will be situated in the sky not far from Barnard's comet; and by the end of May it will have passed South of the equator, becoming again a telescopic object. Another favorable circumstance is noted in the fact that when the comet is at its brightest there will be no moon to detract from its splendor. Dr. Weiss points out the possibility that on April 26 or 27 the comet may be between us and the sun, and may consequently be projected on the sun's disk.

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