

Abstinence Work of the Protestant Established Churches and of the National and Free Churches.

It is a matter of course that the Protestant Churches as messengers of the word of God, must protest against the vice of alcohol consumption. The fact that alcohol consumption is an evil disturbing the sanctification, was acknowledged already by old Israel. But especially the peoples of the western countries had to suffer severely from dipsomania.

Already Luther had raised his voice against the vice of drinking. The fight against the improper use of alcohol has later on become a matter of conscience for the Protestant Churches. In his appeal to the public to fight against the alcohol Dr. B. Rush rightly calls up the conscience of the Christian Churches. But some time previously already, in the first half of the 18. century, the Rev. Mathers had started an organization of 22 clergymen in America in order to fight for the abstinence cause. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist community, continued this fight with fiery enthusiasm. As a consequence of this work about 2 million people in America renounced the alcohol in 1835.

In England the anti-alcohol work began about the year 1829. The ministers took the lead in this fight.

In Sweden, at the head of the abstinence work was the Dean Dr. Wieselgren, who, in 1819, founded an abstinence league to which soon branch associations were added; the number of members rose to 500.000 in 10 years.

Sweden was followed in this work by Norway and Finland. In Germany the abstinence work of the Church began about the year 1837; it soon became a popular matter; already in the course of 7 years one counted about 500.000 members of the abstinence leagues. In 1848, the year of the revolution, this work soon came

to an end. The Lutheran Churches of Lettonia and Estonia were doing abstinence work with great enthusiasm since 1832. In their sermons the ministers appealed to the people with great success in order that they should renounce the alcohol; the abstinence now was made by many, in some parishes by all (Marienburg). In the Estonian part of the country, owing to this work, the wedding-and christening feasts were celebrated almost entirely without alcoholic liquors. Also for these churches the year 1848 has proved to be fatal as to the fight against alcohol. Other cares of the Church superseded this work from the order of the day.

What has to be on principle the standpoint of the Church to the alcohol-question? Is abstinence necessary or would it be sufficient to be temperent? The Holy Scripture condemns intemperance most severely; this condemnation might not be applied to temperate consumption of wine. But the alcoholic question is not to be solved by the letter of the Holy Writ; we must come to a decision which corresponds to the spirit of Jesus Christ, starting from the knowledge that alcohol as a poison destroys life and morality. The love of our brethren must force us to become antagonists of the alcohol; for only abstinence and not temperance makes us able to fight against the ruinous dipsomania. Stimulated by this spirit of Jesus Christ, the Churches could not agree to a cessation of their work against alcohol in the middle of last century.

In America the work was resumed again with the greatest zeal since the foundation of the Anti-Saloon-League by Dr. Russel in Ohio, in 1893. The Churches became the true agitators for the work of the temperance question; temperance organizations of the Church were called into existence; prohibition literature was distributed among the people; in the sermon and in Sunday-schools propaganda was made against alcohol; several Church-parties, among them the Methodists with 22 million adherents had pledged their members to abstinence and even for the Holy Communion had taken into use the non-alcoholic wine.

In England and Wales the Church-communities have united their work under a temperance councillor. The Archbishop of Canterbury and York is President of the temperance organizations; in all dioceses temperance secretaries are working. The yearly income for the work through collections is estimated at £ 50.000.

In Sweden the clergyman Östlund, a man of merit, has done much for the matter of the Christian abstinence work of the Church; in 1922 he founded a United Christian abstinence organization. The annual income of this work is estimated at 150.000 Swedish crowns.

In Norway the Christian anti-alcohol organization of the Church was founded in 1925.

In Estonia the organized abstinence work of the Christian Associations of the Church was founded in 1924. The Lutheran Church, by resolution of the synod, has declared the abstinence work to be a matter of conscience. One Sunday each year is devoted to abstinence work in all churches. Apart from clergymen, Christian laymen are also delivering enlightening anti-alcohol speeches in the churches. In many parishes temperance committees are called into life. Means of sustenance for the work are procured through church-collections; on the other hand collections are made by means of cards which the payers have to sign pledging themselves to monthly shares. In order to come to a prosperous progress of the work, it is necessary that the dignitaries of the Church themselves should be abstinent.

There are still to be mentioned 2 organizations which, without doing temperance work of the Church, have worked in close connection with Christian religious life for the cause of abstinence attended with great blessing. The first organization is the independent Order of the Good-Templars which constituted itself in the State of New-York, in the year 1857, established itself also in Europe; in 1900 it counted about 600.000 members; the second organization is that of the Blue Cross which was founded in Geneva, in 1877.

The mania for drinking is a moral evil which is spreading all over the world. Drinking customs and dipsomania must be overcome. The means of the state legislation are not sufficient for it. In order to fight successfully against this vice, a co-operation of all moral and religious elements and of all Christian Churches is needed. Such a co-operation must not be founded on accidental occurrences but presupposes an organization which combines all above mentioned factors in the whole world in the fight against the alcohol danger. May it be granted to this World Congress to call into existence such an organization.

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