

Ordered at meeting of Dec. 13, 1905

Inter-Church Conference
on Marriage and
Divorce

THIRD ADDRESS AND APPEAL TO
THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC

WITH THE ACTION OF
THE CHURCHES

INTER-CHURCH CONFERENCE ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

Churches represented:

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE U. S.,	THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES,
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.,	THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCHES,
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,	THE UNITARIAN CHURCHES,
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH SOUTH,	THE REFORMED PRESB. CHURCHES,
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA,	THE CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
REFORMED CHURCH IN THE U. S.,	THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. (SOUTH).
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,	THE CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM,
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH,	THE ALLIANCE OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES HOLDING THE PRESBY- TERIAN SYSTEM.
THE BAPTIST CHURCHES,	

The Inter-Church Conference on Marriage and Divorce at its recent meeting in New York City ordered the preparation and publication of a third appeal to the people of the United States on the subject with which the Conference has to deal.

There is no new argument to present. The Conference is committed to enforce by repetition, and to emphasize by reiteration, the great truth of the sacredness of marriage as not a contract lightly formed and easily broken, but an *estate* of life, first among the institutions of God for man, and foremost among the sanctities of human life. It needs guarding against the profanation of thoughtlessness, of mere passion, of worldly advantage or social advancement, of mercenary or any other low motives. It needs the protection of wise laws, of sound public opinion, and of religious sanction. The scandal of frequent and facile divorce, with the remarriage separation, is really a by-word and reproach to our country; and the radical cure can only be reached by going to the root and cause, namely, the non-realization of the religious element in matrimony.

First of all, then, the Conference urges the recognition of the true intent and meaning of the marriage bond, "the union of one man with one woman for life." This the Clergy ought to teach, "in season and out of season"; own consciences, and to teach their children and their children's children, until the truth shall pervade society and prevail over the loose and low sentiments so common to-day. To this end a resolution was adopted by the Conference at its last meeting declaring that it was "the sense of the Conference that the Scriptural and most effectual way to meet and overcome the divorce evil is by education, with a view to elevating the moral sentiments of the people."

Meanwhile the Conference is encouraged by its own growth in membership; duly elected representatives from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (South), and the Church of the New Jerusalem, having been present at its last meeting. Still more, both by its influence and by the increasing public conviction of the evil of divorce, the atmosphere seems to be clearing. This is noticeable in the public press, in the outspokenness of many clergymen, in the utterances of influential laymen, and in the serious

consideration which the question is now receiving from members of the Bar. The action of the American Bar Association has been already acknowledged and in part adopted by the Conference. At the January meeting of the New York State Bar Association two papers were read dealing with the whole question in very strong language and along very sound lines. And the drift in the better popular literature of the day marks an advance in thinking, and assures an advantage in the impression made upon that large number of people whose reading is confined to books that deal, in less serious ways, with life.

The assembling in Washington in February of this year of representatives from many States, to consider the question of uniform laws of divorce, at once indicates the growth of feeling in the right direction and promises great results. So that while not abating in the least degree the purpose of continued effort the Conference takes new heart for the future, and appeals with the courage and earnestness of strong convictions and better hopes to the Christian people of America to push on the campaign with unabated vigor. Its appeal is to the sober, second thought of men and women. Once aroused to the horrible consequences of broken homes and blighted lives, the collusion between the parties to divorce, and the confusion among their children, there will be an uprising of righteous indignation which will lift society up to the higher standards and holier ideals of marriage. Important as legislation is, and needful as is the earnest and incessant preaching of the truth, the power to purify the atmosphere lies in the correction and uplift of public opinion. To mould this, to give it sound convictions and the courage of their holding and their expression, should be the aim and object of intelligent and incessant effort.

In behalf of the Conference:

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WM. PARET,
WM. N. McVICKAR,
DAVID H. GREER,
JOHN FULTON,
J. H. ECCLESTON,
RANDOLPH H. MCKIM,
EDWIN B. NIVER,
FRANCIS LYNDE STETSON,
E. G. BRADFORD,
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S. J. NICCOLLS,
WM. J. MCCAUGHAN,
J. W. McILVAIN,
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JOHN E. PARSONS,
JOHN W. FOSTER,
WM. M. LANNING,
EDWARD G. ANDREWS,
R. W. JOPLING,
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GILES COOK,
WILLIAM V. KELLEY,
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JOHN S. CANDLER,
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EDWARD P. JOHNSON,
A. R. MERRIAM,
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CHARLES E. JEFFERSON,
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J. D. STEELE,
HENRY G. WESTON,
J. F. ELDER,
J. H. LAUGHLIN,
FRANCIS G. PEABODY,
WM. L. WORCESTER,
WM. H. ROBERTS.

XV. ACTION OF CHURCHES.

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE U. S.

"No Minister, knowingly after due inquiry, shall solemnize the marriage of any person who has been or is the husband or the wife of any other person then living, from whom he or she has been divorced for any cause arising after marriage. But this Canon shall not be held to apply to the innocent party in a divorce for adultery; *provided*, that before the application for such remarriage a period of not less than one year shall have elapsed, after the granting of such

divorce; and that satisfactory evidence touching the facts in the case, including a copy of the Court's Decree, and Record, if practicable, with proof that the defendant was personally served or appeared in the action, be laid before the Ecclesiastical Authority, and such Ecclesiastical Authority, having taken legal advice thereon, shall have declared in writing that in his judgment the case of the applicant conforms to the requirements of this Canon; and *provided*, further, that it shall be within the discretion of any Minister to decline to solemnize any marriage.

"If any Minister of this Church shall have reasonable cause to doubt whether a person desirous of being admitted to Holy Baptism, or to Confirmation, or to the Holy Communion, has been married otherwise than as the Word of God and discipline of this Church allow, such Minister, before receiving such person to these ordinances, shall refer the case to the Bishop for his godly judgment thereupon: *provided*, however, that no Minister shall in any case refuse these ordinances to a penitent person in imminent danger of death." [Canon No. 38.]

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

1. "The General Assembly again enjoins all ministers under its care and authority to refuse to perform the marriage ceremony in the cases of divorced persons, except as such persons have been divorced upon grounds and for causes recognized as scriptural in the Standards of our Church.*

2. "That, recognizing the comity which exists between Churches represented in the International Conference, acknowledging, as they do, the law of Christ alone as supreme, we advise each minister under the authority of this Assembly to refuse to unite in marriage any member of any such Church whose marriage is known to such minister to be prohibited by the laws of the Church in which such persons hold membership, unless such minister believes that in the peculiar circumstances of a given case his refusal would do injustice to an innocent person who has been divorced for scriptural reasons. [General Assembly, 1904.]

"Resolved, 1. That this Assembly repeats the action taken last year at Buffalo, and enjoins its Presbyteries, its ministers, elders and members, to adhere strictly to our Standards regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage.

"Resolved, 2. That we approve the action of the Inter-Church Conference, and recommend 'that ministers should refuse to marry divorced persons, except the innocent party in a case where the divorce has been granted on scriptural grounds, nor then until assured that a period of one year has elapsed from the date of the decision allowing the divorce.'

"Resolved, 3. That this Assembly rejoices in the commendable action of the President, of Congress, and of Judges, Federal and State, who strive to execute the best existing laws, and to secure the best conditions.

"Resolved, 4. That the appeal of the Inter-Church Conference is approved and commended." [General Assembly, 1905.]

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (South).

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (South), at its meeting at Fort Worth, Texas, May, 1905, answered in the affirmative an overture from the Presbytery of Montgomery, requesting among other things the Assembly to urge upon all ministers

* "In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead."

"Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or Civil Magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case." [Westminster Confession, Chapter XXIV.]

"(a) To endeavor, by special preaching of the Word, to create and maintain an elevated and healthy public sentiment on the subject of the sanctity of marriage and the sin of divorce, except where obtained on grounds allowed by the Scriptures.

"(b) To exercise the utmost caution in the matter of the remarriage of divorced persons, and to refuse to officiate at the remarriage of any and all such persons, except such as have been divorced upon grounds allowed by our Church to be scriptural, and then only in the case of the innocent party." [General Assembly, 1905.]

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA.

"Resolved, 1. That this General Assembly reaffirm the action of last year.

"2. That we approve the action of the Inter-Church Conference, and recommend 'that ministers refuse to marry divorced persons, except the innocent party in a case where divorce has been granted on scriptural grounds, nor then until assured that a period of one year has elapsed from the date of the decision allowing the divorce.' " [General Assembly, 1905.]

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

"WHEREAS, The Protestant Churches of the United States are making a united effort, through an Inter-Church Conference, to rouse the religious and moral sentiment of the land in defense of the purity and stability of the marriage relation:

"Resolved, That the Board of Bishops be requested to appoint a Commission to represent the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Inter-Church Conference of Protestant denominations now consulting together upon the urgently important question of divorce and remarriage.

"Resolved, That we call special attention of all our ministers to our law contained in par. 39* (now par. 66) of the Discipline relating to marrying divorced persons, and earnestly insist upon the necessity for strict obedience to the law of the Church upon this matter." [General Conference, 1904.]

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH SOUTH.

"The ministers of our Church shall be prohibited from solemnizing the rites of matrimony between divorced persons, except in case of innocent parties who have been divorced for the one scriptural cause." [Discipline, par. 39.]

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

"1. We view with serious misgiving the alarming increase in divorces and the consequent deplorable results in domestic and social life.

"We regard the purity and unity of the family as cornerstones of Christian homes and Christian civilization.

"2. We do not question the propriety of solemnizing the marriage of a party who has been shown to be innocent in divorce proceedings, but we urge upon the ministers the duty of withholding sanction from those whose divorce has been secured on other than scriptural grounds."

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA.

"Resolved, That the General Synod hereby enjoins upon the Ministers of the Reformed Church not to remarry divorced persons excepting the innocent party in a divorce obtained for the cause of adultery." [General Synod, 1904.]

* Paragraph 39: "No divorce except for adultery shall be regarded by the Church as lawful: and no minister shall solemnize marriage in any case where there is a divorced wife or husband living: but this rule shall not be applied to the innocent party to a divorce for the cause of adultery, nor to divorced parties seeking to be reunited in marriage."

"Resolved, That the General Synod, in compliance with the recommendation of the 'Inter-Church Conference on Marriage and Divorce,' hereby earnestly enjoins all ministers under its care and authority to refuse to marry any divorced persons, except the innocent party in a case where the divorce has been granted on scriptural grounds; nor then until assured that a period of one year has elapsed from the date of the decision allowing the divorce.

"Resolved, That we heartily approve the 'Act' recommended by the American Bar Association of 1900, seeking a uniform and radical reform in divorce laws throughout the United States; urging, however, the amendment of the sixth section of the 'Act,' so as to provide that 'if action is to be taken on the subject of remarriage the innocent party shall not marry again within a year from the date of the decision allowing the divorce; and that a just discrimination shall be made between the innocent and guilty party.'

"Resolved, also, That the Reformed Church in America will heartily co-operate with the other churches associated in the work of the 'Inter-Church Conference on Marriage and Divorce,' through duly appointed delegates, and in all suitable ways, in endeavoring to obtain such ecclesiastical unity, and in state and national legislation, as may shield both Church and State from existing and impending perils." [General Synod, 1905.]

INTERCHURCH CONFERENCE ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

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Rev. E. J. Wolf, D.D.,	Rev. W. H. Roberts, D.D.,
Rev. E. P. Johnson, D.D.,	Bishop A. W. Wilson.

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