

## INTERCHURCH CONFERENCE ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

### Churches represented :

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN  
THE U. S.,  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE  
U. S. A.,  
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,  
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
SOUTH,  
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA,  
REFORMED CHURCH IN THE U. S.,  
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH,  
THE BAPTIST CHURCHES,  
THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES,  
THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCHES,  
THE UNITARIAN CHURCHES,  
THE REFORMED PRESB. CHURCH,  
THE CUMBERLAND PRESB. CHURCH,  
THE ALLIANCE OF THE REFORMED  
CHURCHES HOLDING THE PRESBY-  
TERIAN SYSTEM.

### ADDRESS AND APPEAL TO THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC.

On behalf of the representatives of the fourteen Churches composing the Interchurch Conference, which, during the past two years, has held frequent meetings for the consideration of the important subject of Marriage and Divorce, we have been instructed to issue this first general address and appeal.

It is proposed to issue other appeals, as occasion may require, in the hope that the influence of this representative Conference may be brought to bear effectively upon ecclesiastical and civil courts and legislative bodies, for the securing of better conditions and for the deliverance of the Church and the State from impending evils.

Before any civil legislation can be enacted which will be operative, and quite apart from the accord which we are seeking to secure in the marriage regulations of the Christian Churches, must come the leavening of the minds of men and women which shall lift them toward a recognition of the noblest dignities of life.

First of all we plead for the cultivation of the grace of purity ; for the careful guarding of children within the atmosphere of home by parents ; and for the realization of the dignity of our physical nature lifted to such high honor by the Incarnation.

We plead for a recognition of the sanctity of marriage. We are facing a condition in our country to-day which threatens danger to the most sacred things. The very sanctuary of human life and of human love is assaulted and profaned. Manhood, womanhood and childhood, the home and the family, are involved ; and neither civil legislation nor ecclesiastical discipline can save them, until and unless the conscience of Christian humanity is reached. Behind the monster of polygamy, behind the spectre of the lax divorce Court, with its collusions, its corruptions and its contagion, stands the sad fact of the low ideal of marriage. It is true that the element of mutual consent and the element of legal contract enter into it ; but underneath and behind these, as the sure foundation, stands the reve-



lation of God's Holy Word. God at first "brought" a woman to a man, *one* woman to *one* man, to whom he shall cleave, so that in God's purpose and God's sight they are one flesh. The primal marriage was followed by centuries of hardened hearts and laws lowered or lost, until at last Christianity was connected by the voice of the Divine Law Giver with the old law which He laid down at the creation: "Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning, made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and *they twain shall be one flesh.*'"

Marriage is a holy thing. Marriage is the institution of God Himself and is sanctified under the solemnities of the old sanction by our blessed Lord. This is the root of the matter. Reformation must begin here. Children must be taught it. Young men and young women must be made to feel it. Protected in purity, boy and girl, man and woman alike, must be trained to look with reverent eyes upon the holiness of this estate; upon its mysteriousness as something higher and deeper and larger than can be measured or reached by the low ideas of convenience, of worldly advantage, of the gratification of passion, or by the light and easy estimate of the consent of the passing personal fancy and the mutual recognition of the civil contract.

The hope of curing and crushing the horrible tendencies to facile and frequent divorce rests, we believe, upon impressing and inculcating such an intense conviction of what marriage is, and of what marriage means, that it will cease to be entered into "unadvisedly or lightly": that the festivity which accompanies it shall be sobered and consecrated by the conscious presence of Him "Who adorned and beautified the marriage at Cana in Galilee by His presence and first miracle that He wrought": that neither man nor woman shall dare to enter the precincts of betrothal without the tested certainty of love; without the full recognition of the mutual duty of service, forbearance and faithfulness which it involves.

What words can we find to express the abhorrence which ought to rise in righteous indignation against the present possibilities and the existing facts of the divorce habit in America! Just now polygamous Utah looms large and ugly in our minds. But we must look nearer home to realize the true condition of things. The proportion of divorces to marriages in 1902 in eight States reporting statistics is as follows: In Maine, 1 to 6; in New Hampshire, 1 to 8.3; in Vermont, 1 to 10; in Massachusetts, 1 to 16; in Rhode Island, 1 to 8; in Ohio, 1 to 8.8; in Indiana, 1 to 7.6; in Michigan, 1 to 11. In these States, there has been a steady and rapid increase in divorces during the decade, and this increase is believed to be true of the country at large.

We are setting ourselves earnestly to study what best methods the Churches can adopt and what wise measures should be asked in civil legislation to abate this disgrace. The results of our study we hope to present in subsequent statements and appeals. But this appeal is to the conscience of Christian people to cleanse and purify the atmosphere of public opinion and social recognition. The fear of legalized polygamy in one State is enhanced by the fact of unholy divorce in many States. The faces of Christian people must be set against this. The voices of Christian people must be lifted against this, not only to secure civil legislation, not only to enforce Church discipline, but to correct the tendency, to control the inclination and to condemn the fact. We are pleading for the home, for the family, for the children born and to be born, for the protection of society, and for the preservation of the State. We ask you to unite with

us in earnest effort, so that more and more the manhood, the womanhood and the childhood of America may make itself heard and felt, in the determined purpose to stem the currents which are sapping the foundations of all that is best and holiest and dearest in human life. Let us strive unitedly for the things which are pure and true, for the sanctity of marriage, for the permanence of the family, for the preservation of the home, and for the perpetuity of the State.

In behalf of the Interchurch Conference,

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