

Sober Afterthoughts Concerning the Chicago Convention.

To persons accustomed to associate in their minds the Woman's Christian Temperance Union with the Christian graces which naturally cling about the name, the scenes witnessed at the recent Chicago Convention must be a source of surprise, perplexity and grief. That an organization of Women representing perhaps the largest membership of any known Woman's Association, gathered from the face of the whole country, banded together for no other but the avowed purpose of taking council how best to destroy the worst enemy of all mankind, Intemperence; bound together by the strong ties of common suffering and years of labor in the same cause, worshipping the same God and confessing the same Savior; that such an assembly should itself be so moved to Intemperence of speech, thought and feeling as to render possible the scenes witnessed by a wondering world in the Chicago Convention, is a most humiliating comment on Human Nature at its best estate.

These Conventions have not always shown this spirit. In the years that are passed these gatherings have been looked forward to by the members of the Union, and by the Christian world, as did the Jews of old to their solemn feasts. Some time was always necessarily given to the transaction of business, reports of departments, election of officers, &c., and questions arose on which differences of opinion existed; but the main objects of the Conventions were the studies pursued in the Schools of methods, the lectures on the departments, and the heavenly religious meetings. In those days their war cry as they went forth from these yearly meetings was, "In the name of our God we have set up our banners," and the refrain "For God and Home and Native Land." The spirit which animated all was that of a united determination to undermine and destroy the baleful effects of liquor and the liquor traffic on the world by all legitimate methods; by direct appeals to Almighty God in whose hand lay all power, by entreaties and persuasions with the drunkard, by all educational schemes for the young that they might not be taken unawares in the snare of the Spoiler, by efforts to arouse the churches to greater activity and a livelier sense of their responsibilities, by appeals to the makers and executors of the laws of the land, by steady and persistent work in the home, the Sabbath and the day school, all done in humble self forgetfulness, and in the spirit of love and humility which led them in all things to give God the glory

Thus guided and thus depending on a higher power than their own weakness, the growth of the Union was something marvelous. Called into existence as the sober after thought of the crusades, the leaders felt that though called of God, they had much to learn, and they walked before their flocks in fear and trembling. In nothing is the great change of spirit between that day and the present more apparent than in their appeals to the public through the press.

But there came a day when there entered into the heart of this noble and beautiful Association a feeling of pride in its strength. Politicians began to cast longing glances toward the band of wives, mothers and daughters who had shown such a bold front to the Enemy; and the thought came to them that such a force might be made, if only under proper control, to do great battle for many things besides the one cause of Temperance.

By that time the force of the Union had been weakened by the attempt to spread over too many departments, so that the direct Temperance work was in a measure lost sight of. For while all Correctional, Educational, Reformatory and Preventive measures are in a way the legitimate field of a Temperance Organization, it is a grave question whether this vast diffusion has not tended to cloud and obscure the main point of the cause and objects of the organization. So much time and money was of necessity absorbed in the complex machinery necessary to the handling of so broad a field that little was left for the direct Temperance work. I do not say that this was the case in all localities, but I do say that even the friends of the Union had long looked with apprehension upon the ambition manifested to cover *all* fields—even those properly belonging to and already occupied by the Church. The growth of this ambition has led to the mistaking of the work of the Legislative Department for a call to and a necessity for crowding the whole Association into politics. Woman Suffrage has been made to appear to be one of the necessities of the Temperance cause, and it has been made an adjunct of the Union, to the great detriment of both Temperance and Suffrage. Of many other departments it might be said in brief that their reference to and connection with the subject of Temperance is so exceedingly obscure and remote as to seem almost fanciful.

But in no action of the National Union was ever so grievous an error committed or so broad a divergence taken from the legitimate path marked out by the express words of the original founders, who declared its object and prescribed its work, as when it left the field of Christian Temperance work and stepped down into the arena of Politics. The deadly fruits of this most dreadful mistake have been apparent in an ever increasing ratio at each succeeding National Convention since that action was taken, until the full measure was harvested at Chicago in the form of hatred for love, bitterness for friendship, suspicion for confidence, dissensions and oppositions of purpose, wrangling, jealousies, backbiting, secret plotting and open scorn, mis-statements and mis-

representations, charges and counter charges, that make "the head sick and the heart faint" to remember.

Nothing that has ever occurred in the history of the progress of Woman has so astonished her friends and delighted her enemies as this exhibition of evil temper, narrowness, unwisdom and illiberality. No other event has so set back the hands on the dial plate of her progress as this ten day's exhibition of incapacity for self government. For it counts for very little that all things were done before the Convention by parliamentary rule. The true Christian spirit of self government was painfully conspicuous by its absence. In no other way can one account for the bitter unchristian conversation about the tables of the hotels and dining halls where the delegates congregated, and where they indulged their tongues in the utmost freedom of speech concerning one another and the affairs of the Association, regardless of the presence of strangers or those ignorant of their affairs. In no other way can one account for the noisy and disgraceful scenes of that last night when the Iowa Delegation withdrew amidst a storm of derision and insult. A Convention of Christian Women has reached very nearly to the level of an ordinary Ward Caucus when one of its members cannot speak her honest sentiments and beliefs, couched in proper and respectful language, without being met by a chorus of hisses and jeers. And that presiding officer who allows such demonstrations to pass unheeded and unrebuked has certainly, to put it on no higher ground, woefully lost sight of the plain parliamentary rule which defines the duties of a her office.

Justly and rightly a tree is known by its fruits. The fruits of this fair tree of Christian Effort known as the W. C. T. U. were at the first the "Peacable Fruits of Righteousness," love, joy, peace, etc., so that the world in looking on thought the dawning of the morning could plainly be seen that should usher in the Millennium by the destruction of the liquor traffic through the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The growth of the Union was commensurate with its worth. It reached everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land, and if it could have remained humble and pure and sweet, and if its work could have been kept concentrated upon its original object what a power might it have become and remained. But oh! the pity of it, *the pity of it!* One graft, one little bud of an alien plant, and how it has poisoned the juices of the whole tree. And now what are its fruits? Heart burnings, jealousies, strife, dissension, division.

It seems impossible that there can linger in the mind of any a doubt as to the true cause of this change in the ruling spirit of the National and State Conventions of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. For nine years the work went on in peace and harmony, making a growth as an organization almost unparalleled. Through all those years of work department after department was added, some more wisely than others, but in none was found cause for any ruffling of the spirit of peace and love. But in the tenth year arose this little cloud "no bigger than a man's hand" which has spread over the horizon 'till the whole

heavens are black above the heads of the Organization, and from many a side, dart the fierce tongues of fire, and roll the angry answering mutterings of the thunders. Shall any say, while all the world sees the lightning and hears the thunderings, *that there is no storm?* Yet these women say that there was no storm at the Chicago Convention.

All in vain while the cloud has been rising and rolling together its black masses of disaffection and discontent over the arbitrary rulings of the National, which has pledged whole States to a political party of which they had no knowledge, with which they had locally no affiliations and without their consent, a party not of their choice or the choice of the husband, fathers and brothers to whom they looked for council and advice—all in vain, I say, have been the warnings from the religious and secular press—all in vain the protests of many of those in their own ranks against the bargain, sale and delivery of the wealth, influence and good name of the Association to any political party—all in vain the warnings sounded by the dropping by thousands of the numbers from the membership rolls—they still have gone on, binding anew at each Convention the cords and chains of this most disastrous party alliance, and saying "there is no cloud, there is no discontent."

In the face of that solemn protest solemnly presented by the great State of Iowa, which melted casual listeners to tears by its pathos, and the withdrawal of its representative Delegates from the Convention, they have said "It is nought, it is nought," and have gone on with cheers and songs and clapping of hands to fill the places thus vacated with any material that would be used, whether members of the Union or not. And still they say "there was no storm." "Whom the Gods would destroy they first make mad." What blindness of madness has come upon the leaders of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union that they cannot or will not see the destruction that has been wrought by this lowering of the standard which was set up "In the name of our God," to the confession made by their President that "The great need of the Temperance Cause is a Political Party!" and in place of the refrain "For God and Home and Native Land," has posted on its walls "*God's Curses upon High License!*"

HARRIET G. WALKER.

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