

Important Document.

Extracts from the Records of the Synod of Pittsburg, presented to the General Assembly (Old School), 1843.

The Committee to whom was referred Overture No. 3, presented to the last Synod, viz.: "Should a retailer of intoxicating drinks, knowing that they are used for the common purpose of beverage, be continued in the full privileges of the church, and certified as a member in good standing," present the following report:

When a person has been admitted to the sealing ordinances of Christ's house, he ought not to be excluded, but upon grounds, which are sanctioned by the word of God, and the discipline of the church. And where such exclusion takes place, it is always founded upon an alleged offence against the authority and laws which Christ has established in his house. Hence, one of the ends of discipline, as laid down in our standards, is the removal of offences from the church of Christ. In the very outset, then, it becomes necessary to ascertain what is an offence. In our book of discipline, it is defined to be "anything in the principles or practice of a church-member, which is contrary to the word of God, or which, if it be not in its own nature sinful, may tempt others to sin, or mar their spiritual edification." Chap. I. Sec. 3. That the practice of retailing intoxicating drinks, in the manner stated in the overture, is, "in its own nature, sinful," we do not affirm, and need not, therefore, consider it, in this sense, an offence against the laws of Christ's house.

But that it tempts others to sin, and mars their spiritual edification, is too obvious to require proof. The retailer is the proximate agent in tempting many to drink to drunkenness, and in forming in others the appetite for strong drink, which leads to brutal intoxication. In doing this, he offends against God's children, who are grieved at his conduct, which is productive of such injurious results both to the bodies and souls of men. On these grounds, therefore, he is guilty of "an offence" against the word of God, which is very explicit in setting its seal of condemnation on such conduct. In the 8th chap. 1st Cor., the Apostle has decided this point with great precision. In the church at Corinth, some thought it right to eat meat which had been offered to idols; others thought it wrong. The matter was submitted to the Apostle, who decided, that although the act was not in its own nature sinful, yet if it became the occasion of offence or injury to a weak brother, it ought not to be done. "But meat commendeth us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them, &c.—Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." According to this decision of the Apostle, therefore, men "sin against Christ" when they sin against the brethren, by doing that which, though not sinful in itself, becomes a stumbling-block to them and tempts them to the commission of sin. Against such a course, the Apostle guards professing Christians, and declares that he had made up his mind for ever to avoid it. His decision, in the case at Corinth, covers the case submitted in the overture before us. By retailing intoxicating drinks, in the manner specified, men "sin against the brethren," and "wound their weak consciences," and thus sin against Christ.—Hence, they are guilty of "an offence;" their conduct being contrary to the word of God.

Thus far, the question appears very plain. That a retailer of intoxicating drinks, as set forth in the overture, is guilty of an offence, proved to be such from Scripture, the foregoing remarks clearly demonstrate. But there is a farther question, and that is one which more directly meets the point embraced in the overture, viz. 'Is it such an offence as ought to exclude from the full privileges of the church?' In maintaining the affirmative of this question,

it is important to remark, that whatever would prevent the admission of a person to the sealing ordinances of the church, on his first application, ought, if found in connection with his character or conduct afterwards, to exclude him from her communion. This is so evident, as to require no proof. What then would be deemed a sufficient bar to the full enjoyment of the privileges of the church? To this we reply, that anything in the principles or practice of the applicant for admission, which greatly impaired or destroyed the credibility of his profession of faith in Christ, would be a sufficient ground for refusal. For the ground of admission as presented both in the word of God and the standards of the church, is a *credible profession* of faith in the son of God. In the case of the jailor—of the Ethiopian eunuch, and even of Simon Magus, who afterwards apostatized, a credible profession was required and exhibited, before they were admitted to the communion of the society of the faithful. The same principle is recognized in our standards.—"Those who are admitted to sealing ordinances shall be examined as to their *knowledge and piety*." (Direc. for Wor., ch. iv. sec. 3.) Again, in sec. 4 of the same chapter, "When unbaptized persons apply for admission into the church, they shall, in ordinary cases, after giving satisfaction with respect to their *knowledge and piety*, make a public profession," &c. From these passages, it is evident that such a profession as involves credible evidence of Christian character, in which *knowledge and piety* are essential elements, is required by our book, "of those who would be admitted to sealing ordinances." Such being the case, whatever essentially impairs or destroys this evidence, bars the way to their admission. Accordingly it is provided, that "such as are found *ignorant or scandalous*, notwithstanding their profession of the faith and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ has left in his church, until they receive instruction and manifest their reformation. (Larg. Cat. Ques. 173.) Ignorance and immorality of conduct are here indicated, as sufficient grounds on which to refuse an applicant admission to the table of the Lord. The reason is, that where either or both exist, there is a want of evidence of Christian character; and where this is wanting, the person ought not to be admitted. And on the same ground, a person who has been admitted to the privileges of the church, if he is afterwards found to be ignorant or scandalous, and thus destitute of the evidence of Christian character, ought to be excluded.

In the case submitted to the overture, we hold that the person in question does not give credible evidence in favor of his Christian profession. He does not give such satisfaction with respect to his "knowledge and piety" as is sufficient to entitle him to "continue in the full privileges of the church" as a member in good standing. For the man who, at the present time, is ignorant of the effect of the practice referred to, in tempting others to sin and marrying their spiritual edification, must be criminally regardless of what is going on around him. And he, who knowing this, perseveres in the practice, evinces a state of heart directly the reverse of that which is produced by "the grace of God that bringeth salvation," &c.

On the ground, therefore, that this profession of religion is destitute of the attributes which are necessary to render it *credible*, he ought not to be continued in the communion of the church, nor certified as a member in good standing.

We are aware that some object to this view of the subject, on the ground that it is establishing a *new term of communion*, not before known to the church. But upon the principles already laid down and established, it is not. We have seen that credible evidence of Christian character, involving the exhibition of "knowledge and piety," is the old term of communion, laid down in the word of God and the standards of the church.

It has also been made to appear that the practice of retailing intoxicating drinks, as a beverage, is a *sin against the*