

National Convention,

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

NATIONAL CONVENTION

TO SECURE THE

RELIGIOUS AMENDMENT

OF THE

CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

HELD IN

CINCINNATI, JAN. 31, AND FEB. 1, 1872.

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF

THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT.

PHILADELPHIA :

JAS. B. RODGERS CO., PRINTERS, 52 & 54 NORTH SIXTH STREET.

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The following Committees were then appointed by the Convention :

On Enrollment of Delegates.—The Rev. J. McCracken, of St. Louis; the Rev. William Harris, of Columbus; the Rev. H. P. McClurkin.

On the Permanent Organization of the Convention.—The Rev. W. H. French, of Cincinnati; William R. Hamilton, M. D., of Pittsburgh; the Rev. Dr. Davidson, of Hamilton; J. Chambers, Esq., of Bellefontaine, Ohio.

In pursuance of the arrangements of the Executive Committee, the Convention was then addressed by the Rev. D. McAllister, General Secretary of the National Association, on

THE AIMS AND METHODS OF THE MOVEMENT
TO SECURE THE RELIGIOUS AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE
UNITED STATES.

Every movement is liable to suffer from the misapprehension or mis-statement of its aims. It is not to be wondered at that the movement on behalf of which we are assembled to-day is no exception to the rule. Indeed, it is rather an exception the other way. It may well claim to be the "best abused" movement of the century. Very rarely has there been, in the history of any movement, such manifold and self-contradictory, yet persistent, misrepresentation of the purposes of its friends.

If the inherent strength and importance of a cause are to be judged by the measure of misrepresentation which it provokes, we have abundant reason to-day to congratulate each other. The opponents of a cause inherently weak have no need to resort to misrepresentations. It is only when a movement rests on a solid basis; when the avowed purposes of its friends are unassailable; when the clear and simple statement of its ground commands ready assent, that the call is sounded for misrepresentation to come in and do its distorting work.

In order, as far as possible, to counteract and guard against all misapprehensions and mis-statements, it has been thought best to have the discussions of this Convention open with a statement of the Aims and Methods of the friends of this movement. And while the speaker himself should of course be held personally responsible for the statement made, it shall be his endeavor to represent, as faithfully as he can, the Association for which he acts and speaks.

The name of the organization at whose call this Convention has met, places in clear view the objective point at which this movement aims. The organization is called, "the National Association to secure the Religious Amendment of the Constitution of the United States." The amendment proposed is such an addition, in substance, to the Preamble of the United States Constitution, as will suitably express our national acknowledgment of Almighty God as the author of the nation's existence and the source of its authority; of Jesus Christ as its ruler; and of the Bible as the fountain of its laws and the supreme rule of its conduct.

This is the great purpose of the National Association, based on the fundamental truth that a nation, as such, stands in clear and definite relations to God and his moral laws, and that in the Constitution, as well as the administration of its government, it is under obligations to acknowledge these relations. But while this duty has been long proclaimed in our country, and the dangers of the neglect

of this duty have been foreseen and pointed out, by a few of our citizens, it was not until the question became an eminently practical one that the National Association arose and began to put forth its efforts. It was the attack of enemies of our common Christianity upon the Christian features of our national life that struck the alarm, and sounded the rallying cry which has drawn together many of the best citizens of our land, and banded them in this Association. Laying down, in opposition to the principle that the nation, as such, sustains relations to God and his moral laws, the theory that it has nothing to do with religion—that is, that it must never refer to God or the Bible, or do or have, in its whole life and character, anything Christian or religious, or in other words, that it must be anti-Christian and irreligious, these combined foes of the religion of the American people struck at institutions interwoven in the very fabric of our existence as a nation from the first. This very city where we are met was the scene, not very long ago, of the most determined efforts to expel the Bible from our common schools, and more recently, to break down every legal safeguard of the sacredness of the Sabbath. We are here, then, mainly on the defensive. It is our aim, in our associated labors, to counteract the efforts made here in Cincinnati, and similar efforts made elsewhere, to obliterate those features which we believe to be the noblest of all in the heritage bequeathed to us by our fathers.

No thoughtful citizen can be ignorant of the assault made upon every religious act and observance in our national life. Avowed atheists and infidels, communists and papists, uniting like Herod and Pilate, have been plotting and working for years to expel religion from our schools, and turn our Sabbath into a holiday for revelry and parade. Shrewd, far-sighted men, who well know that state neutrality in religion is an utter impossibility, and who are determined to throw the influence of the nation squarely in favor of irreligion, have long and ever more loudly been demanding their "rights of conscience," as they are pleased to term them;—their "right" not to be insulted with religious ideas and usages in civil matters, their "right" not to have a Book which they hate read where their children go to be taught: their "right" not to have the government, with which they stand connected, in any way recognize a sacred day, a solemn oath, an exercise of prayer or anything of the kind, of which they do not approve. These attacks, begun long ago, have been assuming a more bitter and formidable character within the last few years. The demands made have been so readily complied with by time-serving politicians, that the aggressors have been encouraged to expect the speedy accomplishment of all they desire. Confident of success, they are redoubling their exertions, and waging relentless war upon every vestige of national religion yet left us.

In order successfully to repel these assaults, the assailants must be met on their own ground. They claim their so-called "rights" under the ægis of the National Constitution. The potent weapon with which they strive to smite down the religious observances and institutions of the country, is the United States Constitution. When communists would defy all local Sabbath laws, and disturb Christian worshippers by noisy processions on the sacred day of rest, they claim their right to do so under the Constitution. To this instrument the Mormon, the free-lover, *et id omne genus*, betake themselves, as at once a refuge from laws based on Christianity, and a weapon with which to let the life out of all such enactments, and lay them as dead letters upon dusty legal shelves. They must be deprived of their refuge. Their weapon must be wrenched from their grasp. The National Constitution which is made for the nation, and which

ought to conserve and uphold everything that is best in our Christian civilization, must be made to speak out, and to speak so unequivocally that it can never again be made the shield and sword of irreligion, communism, atheism, and infidelity. The fruit of Christian civilization as the Constitution itself, in its many most admirable features is, implying though it may, as many claim it does, the very Christian features against which it is employed—the time has now come when it must distinctly declare itself to be Christian, or else the claim of our opponents must be conceded. Grant that what this association aims to have clearly expressed has always been impliedly in the Constitution. Any such implication is now most emphatically denied. Effectually to meet those who firmly plant themselves on this denial, we aim to have the nation avow itself, in its fundamental law, to be a Christian nation, and there register its purpose to govern itself accordingly.

Not only does the duty of the nation, as a being in relation to God and his moral laws, require such an avowal; not only does a course of honesty and candor to all citizens and subjects now living under existing institutions demand such an avowal; but the acknowledged principles of constitutional law enforce the demand. It is a principle clearly stated by the best writers on political science, that in a nation where there is a written Constitution, that instrument should take its character from the nation for which it is framed. A written Constitution is simply a translation into legal language, as Judge Jameson has well said, of the facts actually evolved by the social forces of the nation. Now, the greatest social force of this nation is Christianity; and hence the most important and most essential facts evolved in the progress of this nation are the distinctively Christian features of its penal and reformatory institutions, its social usages, and especially its system of public education. The written Constitution of the United States does not translate these Christian facts into legal language. It does not authenticate them. As we have already seen, it is persistently and every year more powerfully employed against them. There is a manifest want of harmony here. Something must be done. The high authority already quoted declares that in any such instance of inconsistency or want of harmony the written Constitution must be amended to conform to the facts as they have actually been evolved. If this be not done, the Constitution will in time conform everything to itself. The facts, the usages, the legislative and judicial actions, everything, in a word, that is out of harmony with the written instrument, will give way before its moulding and controlling influence, and disappear.

What shall be done in the case before us? This is the momentous question now up before the American people for settlement. It will not down. It must be met. We may desire to defer its settlement to some far off future time. But the enemy will not permit that. One of two things must be done, and that very soon. Which, fellow citizens, let me appeal to you, which shall it be? Shall we abolish chaplaincies in the army and navy, and hush the voice of prayer in legislative halls, and overthrow every legal restraint against the desecration of the Sabbath, and silence all appeals to God as Witness and Judge in courts of justice, and cast out the Bible from our schools, and thus make all our national life conform to our written Constitution, in which there is no acknowledgment of God or of Christianity? Or, shall we insert an acknowledgment of God and Christianity in the written instrument, and make it conform to what is best and dearest in the nation itself? Which is true statesmanship? We have no difficulty in deciding. Our course, as patriotic citizens, is clear. Others may be

ready to sacrifice the nation, rather than lay what they believe to be a sacrilegious hand upon the Constitution. Let it be known that it is our aim, with a genuine conservatism, to hold fast the integrity of the nation itself, under the development of its form in the Religious Amendment of its Constitution.

This is the simple, definite, and frankly avowed aim of this movement. The statement is itself a sufficient answer to those who either ignorantly or designedly misrepresent our purpose. From what has been said, it is manifest that we are here, not as members of any denomination, but as loyal citizens, some of us members of no church, uniting harmoniously in a common aim, which, from the very nature of the case, cannot be sectarian, nor even ecclesiastical. We are here, not to seek the patronage of the State in behalf of Christianity. The religion of Jesus Christ will move steadily onward to its final triumph, let States oppose it or disregard it as they may. Whatever sets itself against the stone cut out of the mountain without hands will eventually be ground to powder. Our nation must be for or against the kingdom represented by this stone. For the nation's own sake we would have it avow itself to be for Christianity, and thus secure what is essential to its own welfare. We would have our nation to be wise, and to be instructed, and not allow itself to be utterly removed from the old foundations on which the Christian fathers first placed it, but to take its stand, in this day of conflict, openly for Christ, lest He be angry, and it "perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." We have no purpose to tack on to the Constitution visionary theories or irrelevant truths, but to incorporate into that ever operative and educating instrument those clear and definite fundamental principles of national conduct which are determined by a nation's relations to God, and which have always been acknowledged in much of the actual administration of our national affairs. Our movement has no tendency toward setting up a religious despotism, under which all who entertain dissenting opinions shall be deprived of their rights; but, on the other hand, its aim is to establish those very principles, and save from being swept away those very features of our civilization, which have made this nation conspicuous for its civil and religious liberty, and which have given to the men that seek to strike them down, the very rights and privileges which they now enjoy, and of which in their blindness they would rob both themselves and us.

Such is the aim of our opponents, and such the aims of this counteracting movement. In the very nature of things the conflict had to come, unless the American people hold themselves ready to concede every demand of the aggressive irreligious party, and wipe out everything of a Christian or even moral character, 'until our whole political page should become a pure, unbelieving, irreligious, Christless, Godless blank.' It is too late to deprecate the agitation of the controversy. The demand has been made, and most emphatically repeated. It is resisted. And the question is now raised. The issue is joined. The crisis is fast approaching. The advance guards of the opposing forces have met. There is no attempt to conceal or deny the fact that it is irreligion on the one side, and Christianity on the other. These are the respective rallying points. And the conflict thus begun must soon become general. There can be no indifference or neutrality here. A large portion of the American people yet look on with but little concern, it is true, but the logic of events will soon compel them to choose and take their stand on the one side or the other. Nor is it to be wondered at, if, in the bustle of preparation, and the confusion and misapprehension of the first encounters, some good Christians should be found on the wrong side. As the conflict progresses such will infallibly learn their mistake. They cannot

stand out long against a movement which those with whom they stand candidly declare to have the logic of Christianity behind it. They cannot continue to oppose a cause which their fellow opponents frankly admit to be but the practical application of the principles of Christianity to civil government, and which, if they were Christians, they acknowledge they could not help supporting.

The method, then, for the accomplishment of our aims cannot be mistaken. The truth in the case must be made known. Just in proportion as the Christian people of the country clearly perceive and understand the issue joined, and comprehend the aim of this movement, will the number of its friends increase. During the last two years much was done. Petitions to Congress, seeking the proposed amendment, were widely circulated, numerous signed, and duly presented. Large numbers of tracts, and copies of the *Christian Statesman*, a journal devoted especially to the furtherance of the movement, were scattered over the country. Many local meetings, and two large national conventions, similar to this, were held. And in no cause has effort ever been more amply repaid. But amazing as the progress of the movement has been, rapidly as it has grown in volume and power, the work has only fairly begun. It is a difficult matter, and properly so, to secure any amendment to the Constitution. Particularly will this hold true in regard to the proposed Religious Amendment. That can never, from this time on, whatever might have been in our earlier history, become a part of our National Constitution, until the pending question of the true nature and functions of civil government—the question of the relation of the State to religion, is thoroughly discussed among our entire people. Nor does any friend of this movement desire to see the written acknowledgment now, however desirable it might have been when the Constitution was framed, until the words of the written instrument shall be the vital embodiment of the conviction of the American people.

Our work to-day is to arouse our fellow-citizens to the realization of the crisis that is hastening on. From the pulpit, on the platform, through the press, in conversation, the subject must be discussed. Discussion must be promoted by the organization of the friends of the movement in every locality into auxiliary associations, and by constant and systematic work in holding meetings, circulating petitions for signatures, and distributing documents. We want no misrepresentation, no abuse, much less any resort to force and violence. We submit to the tribunal of Revelation, Reason, and Experience. If our cause cannot maintain itself in the arena of fair and full debate, let it go down forever. Believing, however, that it rests upon God's eternal truth, we ask simply to have it thoroughly presented before the intelligence and conscience of the nation, in the perfect confidence that the American people acting peaceably and orderly under their Constitution, unless wantonly attacked, but peaceably or otherwise, will finally settle the question of the relation of their government to Christianity by the Religious Amendment of their fundamental law.

Pending the reports of the Committees, the Rev. A. M. Milligan and the Rev. James Duncan were called out by the Convention and made brief speeches.

PERMANENT ORGANIZATION.

The Committee on Enrollment presented a partial report showing the presence of more than two hundred members in the Convention.