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"They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD, in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten." Jer. 50: 5.

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THE NATURE AND GROUND OF POLITICAL DISSENT.

BY REV. D. M'ALLISTER.

HEB. II : 24-26. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season : esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt ; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

EMINENT among the illustrious examples of faith grouped together in this chapter, is that of Moses. His choice, of which the text speaks, exhibits in a remarkable manner the power of that principle before defined as "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Taken in infancy by the daughter of Pharaoh from the basket of flags that floated upon the Nile, he became her son. And whether it be true or not, that, as tradition affirms, the princess who adopted "the child of the water" was herself childless, and that her adopted son was heir to the throne of Egypt and all the accumulated treasures of a long line of kings, it is at least clear that as the recognized son of the daughter of a monarch who ruled over one of the richest and most civilized nations of antiquity, he had before him the prospect of such affluence and honor as few could hope to possess. And yet, when he reached maturity, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

It is unnecessary to suppose that there was some great public occasion when Moses, rather than perform an act amounting to a renunciation of the religion of his people,

surrendered formally the title he had worn and the honors connected with it. In the very nature of things the time had come for a decisive choice. On the one hand were Egyptian oppressors. On the other hand were the oppressed Hebrews. No one come to man's estate could remain on friendly terms with both parties. He must declare himself and act accordingly. Thus it was with the young Hebrew, as soon as "he was come to years." He made prompt decision. Casting off the proud title which he might have continued to wear, turning his back upon the pleasures of the most cultivated court of the age and the treasures of the land of riches, he cast in his lot with the afflicted people of God, and took upon himself the reproach of Christ, "for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

This choice of Moses illustrates a principle of conduct applicable in all circumstances of the Christian life—the life of faith. It may be employed, however, with special propriety, in illustration of the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in regard to unscripturally constituted civil governments. The members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, like their fathers and brothers of other lands, and like Moses of old, feel constrained to accept disadvantages and sufferings rather than become identified with the government under which they live. This position of political dissent from the United States government, which in circumstances of the most interesting and solemn kind we yesterday swore faithfully to maintain, has often been misstated, and still oftener misunderstood. By many, the reasons for occupying and maintaining it have not been

duly weighed. The aim in view to-night is to state and show good reason for our position of political dissent.

I. The position of political dissent stated and explained.

1. *It is not the exercise of the right of expatriation.* This right, or the right to quit one's native country and renounce allegiance to it, long denied by the most of the European governments, and controverted by many persons in our own country, is at length generally acknowledged. A considerable proportion of the members of our church have availed themselves of this right, quitting the land of their birth to come and settle here. But such renunciation of country, though it may have been occasioned by wrongs in the government of the country left, is not political dissent. The very idea of dissent from the action of a society implies connection with it. Political dissent from the government of a nation implies permanent residence in that nation. We may testify against evils in the government of a country with which we have no connection by birth or adoption, or from which we may have expatriated ourselves, but we cannot properly be said to dissent from its government. It is as American citizens—not members of the political society, indeed, but citizens in the broader and truer sense of the term—that Reformed Presbyterians in this land occupy their position of dissent. Expatriation, then, so far from corresponding to political dissent, is utterly at variance with it, as the former renders the latter in any particular case impracticable.

2. *It is not seclusion and separation from active participation in national affairs.* Man is a social being, and by

the principles of his nature has a place and duties in society. Even if the Christian were living under the worst of despotisms, if he were a captive in a strange land of tyranny and oppression, the divine command applicable to him, would be that addressed to the children of Judah, who sat and wept by the rivers of Babylon, and whose harps hung upon the willows: "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Let man be placed where he may in the world, he is still possessed of social faculties, and occupies social and civil relations. And whoever seeks to break his relations to other men, and cast off the responsibilities of such relations, fails in his duty to God, the author of society, as well as in his duties to his fellow men.

But particularly should the Christian, when the land in which he lives is the land of his choice, or his heritage by birthright, pray and actively labor for its peace and welfare. As Reformed Presbyterians we should be the most patriotic, and every way the best of citizens. Our religion has no more sympathy with civil than with ecclesiastical monasticism. The mountain of our Zion is no retreat for the civil recluse. The standards of our faith know nothing but disapprobation for conduct like that of the devotee of literature, Henry D. Thoreau, who sought to seclude himself from his fellow beings in companionship with the irrational creation in the wilds of the forest, and divest himself of the responsibilities of social and civil life.

Fretted by contact with the selfishness of society, and disgusted with its meanness, we may longingly sigh—

“O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade!”

Grieved and sore-pained because of the voice of the enemy and the oppression of the wicked, we may cry out with David, “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.” Or worn with apparently fruitless efforts against wrong in high places, and hopeless as to the future of our country groaning under reigning iniquity, we may be ready, like Elijah, to abandon the field of conflict, and seek quiet and repose, if not in the solitudes of the desert, at least in the retirement of domestic life. But no! The place of difficulty and of labor is the post of duty. Social isolation is moral dereliction. As a church we most emphatically insist upon it that patriotism is a duty. And while we maintain a position of political dissent, we acknowledge ourselves, ministers and people, sacredly bound to pray and labor for the welfare of our country. No engrossment in business, no devotion to the family, no absorption even in the investigations of the study, the instructions of the pulpit, or the care of the pastorate, can excuse a want of interest in public affairs, or indifference to the obligations of social and civil relations.

3. Negatively, again, *political dissent is not a denial of the legitimacy of the government.* The nation, like the family, has its origin in the operation of the principles implanted by the Creator in man as a social being. Unlike the

church, it is not a supernatural institution, founded in grace, and intended to meet man's special wants as a self-ruined sinner. But like the family, it is a natural institution, founded in the essential principles of human nature, and designed for man's benefit in an unfallen, no less than in a fallen condition. Corresponding to the family in its origin, it corresponds to the family also in the source and conditions of the legitimacy of its authority. A man and a woman, joining together in wedlock, no matter what their religious belief may be, form a true family. Whether they are Christians or heathen, believers or infidels, the moral being formed by their union, the family, is precisely the same in its essential elements in every case. And in the one case as well as in the other, in that family formed there is lodged by the Creator a true and legitimate authority. Though the family formed by the union of unbelievers fail, as might be expected, to acknowledge God, its authority is not therefore invalidated. The rightfulness of the authority of parents in such a household over their children is unquestioned and unquestionable. *Their* family government, and it alone, is legitimate in that family. In like manner, when people are brought together in the providence of God, and by their union a nation is formed, authority is lodged by God himself in the being thus *born** into the family of nations. And this governing authority, as expressed by the majority of the people, is the only legitimate authority in that nation. No other body of people has any right to set up governmental

* The word NATION, from the Latin NASCOR, to be born, itself embodies the idea of providential superintendence in the origin of a nation.

authority in opposition or rivalry within the national domain. As the irreligion of a father does not make void his authority in the family in those matters that are just and right, so "infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him." The divine command to teachers of Christian people in a heathen country is, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." The reason is, as expressed in a similar connection, "for the powers that be are ordained of God." To Christians themselves the direct injunction is given, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." And the ground for this injunction is the truth that "there is no power but of God." There is no basis here for the doctrine of "the divine right of kings," nor is there any denial of the right of revolution. "For as the obedience is demanded because of God's appointment, then it is *not demanded* in matters *contrary* to God's appointment. When the civil power contradicts God's word and his voice in our conscience, then it contradicts and subverts its own authority."* But where there are no tyranny and oppression to justify revolution, then the authority as lodged in the people, taken collectively, whether the government be avowedly religious or not, is unquestionably legitimate, just as is the authority of a father, whether he

* Rev. M. B. Riddle, in note in Lange's Commentary on Romans, chap. xiii, 1.

be a believer or an infidel. Thus the existing government of this nation, be its religious character what it may, is acknowledged as the only human power having rightful civil authority over us, and obedience is cheerfully and conscientiously yielded to all its commands which do not conflict with the supreme law of God.

4. We are now prepared to state positively that *political dissent is a refusal to incorporate with the political society of the nation*. The word "citizen" is sometimes used in a limited sense, as equivalent in meaning to the phrase, "member of the political society." When used in this sense it should be qualified by the word "voting." Voting citizens, or legally qualified electors, are the governing body of the nation in the last resort. In every nation only a fraction of the citizens form this governing body or political society. In this country, women, minors, and some other classes, constituting in all about four-fifths or over of the whole population, are excluded. The remaining one-fifth are not only citizens, and sustain not only civil relations, but are also creators of the constitution, and ratifiers of the compact by which the nation is to be governed, and sustain political relations, peculiar to themselves. Political dissent is a refusal to enter into this political society or governing body of the nation.

In our own country, the members of the political society are bound together by a specific and definite compact or covenant, the written constitution of the United States, according to the provisions and stipulations of which they most solemnly agree to govern the nation. Such a compact or written constitution of government there ought to be. At least it has many advantages over

an unwritten constitution. There should also be a solemn engagement by oath, on the part of the members of the political society, either directly and personally when becoming qualified as electors, or indirectly, yet really, through their representative agents in the actual administration of the government, to govern the nation in strict accordance with the written compact.

In taking our position of political dissent, we object not to having a definite written compact, nor to an oath to support it, but to the essential character of the political covenant as it now stands. Being such as it is, we cannot bind ourselves to take part in governing the nation according to it. We are constrained conscientiously to stand apart, and refuse to become identified with the governing body of the nation. Such a position of dissent and separation should certainly not be taken except on good ground and for sufficient reason. And as we yesterday renewed our covenant with God and with each other to maintain this position, it is now a suitable time to state the reasons why it is taken and held.

II. Reasons for political dissent.

1. *The compact by which the political society is bound fails to acknowledge the relations of the nation to God.* That the nation, as such, has relations to God, is a clear truth of philosophy and history as well as of revelation. The nation is not an agglomeration of component parts, which, like those of a cup full of sand, are held together in mere contact by external pressure. It is a body, the parts of which cohere by the internal law of its own life. It is an organism, perpetuating its life from generation to generation, amid the constant flow and change of its constituent

elements. Besides, it is not an organism in the physical world, but in the sphere of morals. It is capable of having moral aims, and of being influenced by moral motives. It has a moral accountability distinct from that which rests upon its members individually. In other words, it is a moral organism, or a moral person, under moral law, and in direct relations with the supreme moral Lawgiver, God himself. Business corporations, or "artificial persons," as Blackstone calls them, have no such relations to God. The state gives them existence for material and purely secular ends, and God holds the state responsible for their character and conduct. But as his Word proves, by its promises and threatenings addressed directly to nations, as history, both inspired and uninspired, also proves, by the record of the fulfilment of those promises and threatenings in the actual experience of the nations of the earth, God deals directly with nations as moral beings in immediate relations with himself.

If it be urged that the moral law, under which the nation, as a moral being, is held bound, is the law of nature, God's law written on the heart of man, this will be readily conceded as correct, so far. But the law given in the Bible is a revelation of the same divine will revealed in nature. And if the law of nature, as the will of God, has any binding force on nations, it binds them to obedience to every further revelation of the will of the same Lawgiver in regard to themselves. The law of the Bible, as a further and fuller revelation of the same divine will, asserts its claims over nations most explicitly and fully. It deals very largely with nations as such. Passages akin to the 2d Psalm, and

the 13th chapter of Romans, are too numerous to be quoted or even specified. Repeatedly does the Bible ascribe to him who is made Head over all things such titles as "King of kings and Lord of lords," and "Prince of the kings of the earth."

The relations of the nation to God and his moral laws are thus seen to be clear and definite. (1.) It is the creature of God. (2.) It is clothed with authority derived from him. (3.) It is under the rule of Jesus Christ. (4.) It is subject to the Bible, the special revelation of moral law. In constituting and administering its government, the nation is bound to act upon the principles involved in these relations. It is under obligation to acknowledge God as the author of its existence and the source of its authority, Jesus Christ as its ruler, and the Bible as the supreme law of its conduct. Such an acknowledgment has its appropriate place in the fundamental law of the nation, the written constitution or compact of the political society, on which the government rests, and according to which it is to be administered. It is not required in every ordinary enactment. An acknowledgment in the national constitution carries with it a virtual acknowledgment in every law enacted under it and in accordance with it.

There is an important difference between fundamental or constitutional law and ordinary enactments. The former determines the structure of the government. The latter meet, at the time, the incidental wants and varying exigencies of the nation. Fundamental laws settle the policy of the government and the principles of its operation. When a ship sets sail she has fundamental rules laid

down for her direction in all circumstances of wind and weather. The end and object of the voyage, and general rules for the safety of the passengers and freight, are all specified and settled when she starts, and are applicable in every condition of the ship. So the ship of state must have her fundamental laws.* And what more important fundamental regulation can the state lay down for its guidance in peace and war, in prosperity and adversity, than an acknowledgment of its relations to Almighty God, and of its subjection to the Bible, as the fountain of its laws and the rule of its conduct? Failing to do this, the ship of state sets sail without compass, and without the guiding pole-star, on her perilous voyage. She has no anchor that can hold her fast amid the tumults of the people, when "the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea, and the waters thereof roar and are troubled."

The written constitution of the United States contains no such proper and adequate acknowledgment as the nation is bound to make of its relations to God. Up to the time of its adoption, the States in their constitutions did acknowledge God and Christianity. Some of the State constitutions yet contain similar acknowledgment. And in the actual administration of the national government the principle is admitted. But the national constitution contains no acknowledgment of God. The convention that framed it manifestly designed that all such acknowledgment should be omitted. Good men, and

* See this distinction between fundamental laws and ordinary enactment, admirably stated, and illustrated by the figure of a ship in Judge Jameson's *Constitutional Convention*, pp 83, 84.

Christian men, as many of the members of the convention were, they made the deplorable mistake of yielding to others who were unwilling to express, nationally, any acknowledgment of the Almighty. The spirit that ruled in the framing of the constitution showed itself unmistakably in the deliberate refusal of the convention, after the full and urgent presentation of the matter, to ask God for guidance in prayer every morning before proceeding to business.* With such an omission of

* The statement has been repeatedly made that Franklin's motion was carried, and that prayers were thenceforth offered. Such writers as Morris, in his "Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States," and Lossing and Goodrich, in their popular histories, make this statement. How such a statement came to be made at first, it is difficult fully to explain. Its repetition, when once sent forth, is not surprising. The following considerations may help to account for the assertion :

1. The public felt that prayers should have been offered, and could hardly be made to believe that a motion like Franklin's could fail to pass. 2. Prayers were offered in the same hall at a former convention, when the Declaration of Independence was framed. This might naturally lead to confusion and misstatement. But the following facts are decisive proof, unpleasant as it is to be compelled to acknowledge it, that prayers were never offered in the convention that framed the constitution. 1. For nearly five weeks the convention sat and never thought of looking to God in prayer. (See Franklin's speech in support of his motion.) 2. Franklin's motion for prayers, made in the fifth week, was opposed. A substitute was offered by Mr. Randolph, proposing that a sermon be preached on July 4th, about a week after, at the request of the convention, and thenceforward prayers be offered. Franklin seconded this substitute. The record of the convention, given in the Madison papers, says : "After several unsuccessful attempts for silently postponing this matter by adjournment, the adjournment was at length carried without any vote on the motion." (Elliott's Debates, vol. v, pp. 254, 255.) 3. Franklin's own statement in a note appended to his speech is explicit. "The convention, except three or four members, thought prayers unnecessary." (Sparks' Works of Franklin, vol. v, p. 155.) No unauthenticated statement, though drawn up with minute particulars, and indefinitely repeated, can have any weight beside such fully authenticated facts.

duty—nay, worse, such a deliberate decision not to seek God's direction—on the part of the convention that framed the constitution, it is not to be wondered at that the instrument itself does not acknowledge God, and fails to place the government in its fundamental compact in its true relations to him.

When urging his motion for prayers, Franklin said, in words of eloquent reproach: "In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard; and they were graciously answered. All of us, who were engaged in the struggle, must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor. To that kind Providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need his assistance?" The practical answer to these questions by the convention, in refusing to have prayers, and in omitting an acknowledgment of God from the constitution, was: "We have forgotten him; we no longer need his assistance; we shall establish our future national felicity without looking to him." Franklin went on: "I have lived, sir, a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, *that God governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the city, they labor in vain that build it.'" To all this, the

reply of the convention, by its action in refusing to ask God's blessing in prayer, and to acknowledge him in the instrument they framed, was: "We will build an empire without his aid." God grant that our future may not fulfil Franklin's warning words: "Without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel; we shall become divided by our little, partial, local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a by-word down to future ages." We may not, we must not, strike hands in a political compact which knows no dependence on God, no subjection to him, and which thus most gravely threatens our national future. We cannot solemnly agree to govern ourselves and our fellow-citizens on the basis of such a political covenant.

2. *The political compact of the government contains express and positive provisions in violation of the divine law for nations.* It is admitted that the provisions of the constitution are, in the main, most excellent. Let no one withhold from it the admiration which it richly deserves. But it would be as unwise to let its merits blind us to its defects, as to let its defects prejudice us against its merits. Framed by a convention which, as a convention, refused to apply to the Father of lights to illuminate their understandings, it could hardly be expected to be free from essential defects. Failing to acknowledge God and seek his guidance, the convention did grope in the dark, and fell into some of the gravest of errors. One of these errors, in regard to the rights of man, the nation has been led to acknowledge and correct by proper amendment. Two

positive provisions remain to be corrected: (1.) The provision as to the form of the presidential oath; and (2.) That which prohibits the requiring of any religious qualification for office.

In regard to these points, the law of the Scriptures, under which nations are held bound, is clear. As to the first, it specifically requires all who administer oaths, as well as all to whom they are administered, to perform this solemn act of worship in the name of God: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt swear by his name." In direct violation of this command, the national compact provides a form of oath from which the name of God was intentionally and deliberately excluded. As to the second point, intimately connected with the first, the divinely approved direction contained in the Scriptures is: "Provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers." The opposing language of the political compact is: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." The intention of the convention cannot be misunderstood. They designed so to frame the compact of government that no irreligious man would be ineligible to office—that even an avowed and practical infidel or atheist might have no obstacle in the way of reaching the highest position in the land. For this very purpose the common form of oath in use was changed, and God's name omitted. Luther Martin, a member of the convention from Maryland, in a letter to the legislature of his State, says: "The part of the system which provides that

no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States, was adopted by a great majority of the convention, and without much debate; however, there were some of the members so unfashionable as to think that a belief of the existence of the Deity, and of a state of future rewards and punishments, would be some security for the good conduct of our rulers, and that in a Christian country it would be at least decent to hold out some distinction between the professors of Christianity and downright infidelity and paganism.”* So the treaty with Tripoli, carrying out the idea of the constitution, signed by the president and senate about eight years after the constitution was adopted, and never called in question as to its constitutionality, declares: “The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion; it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity of Mussulmans.”† And Justice Story, in his Commentaries on the Constitution, describes that instrument as a compact according to which the Christian, Jew, Mohammedan and infidel, all sit down in common at the table of the national councils, without any regard to their religious belief.‡

In some of the State conventions which ratified the national constitution, it was acknowledged that none but God-fearing or religious men should hold official trusts. In the North Carolina convention, Mr. Iredell said: “It is never to be supposed that the people of America will

* Elliott's Debates, vol. v, pp. 385, 386.

† 8 U. S. Statutes at Large, p. 154.

‡ Commentaries on the Constitution, §1879.

trust their dearest interests with persons of no religion, or of a religion materially different from their own.”* Theophilus Parsons, afterwards chief justice, said, in the Massachusetts convention: “It has been objected that the constitution provides no religious test, and that we may have in power unprincipled men, deists and pagans. No man can wish more ardently than I do, that all our public offices may be filled by men who fear God and hate wickedness; but it must remain with the electors to give the government this security.”† But if the electors are to give the government this security, they must do it in the covenant by which they agree to govern themselves and the nation. In the same convention the Rev. Mr. Shute said: “The presumption is, that the eyes of the people will be upon the faithful of the land.”‡ But it might have been known then, as experience has since proved, that there will always be a large class whose eyes are *not* upon the religious and the God-fearing, but upon the wicked and corrupt. And no action of the great body of electors can give the government security against the election of such corrupt and irreligious men to office, except an express agreement in the compact of the political society. What that able journal, the *New York Nation*, has said of appointments, is equally true of elections to office: “Some presidents will appoint good men, others will not; and some will try to appoint them, and give it up as too troublesome. It is the *system* which is rotten, and it is the system which

* Elliott's Debates, vol. iv, p. 194.

† Ibid, vol. ii, p. 90.

‡ Ibid., vol. ii, p. 119.

must be reformed. The desire of the nation for honest servants must be expressed in *laws*."

Irreligious and godless rulers are a curse to any nation. "The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted." In intrusting power to the nation, God requires the nation to intrust it in turn to such men as fear him and hate covetousness. The nation must make sure that it shall be so intrusted. The governing body must agree in their compact, that the qualifications laid down for rulers in God's law shall be required. They have no right to require any ecclesiastical test. They have no warrant for making the ordinances of the church the badge of fitness for civil rule. But they *are* under imperative obligation to require that "he that ruleth over men *must* be just, ruling in the fear of God." If to insist upon a good moral character and a God-fearing walk and conversation is to encourage hypocrisy, as it is sometimes objected, it may be replied that the world can afford to have such "hypocrisy" encouraged. All good laws encourage such "hypocrisy." If it fail to insist upon such religious qualifications in its rulers, the nation violates the express requirement of God's law, makes itself partaker in the wickedness of its corrupt and irreligious rulers, and calls down upon itself such judgments as have overtaken, not the tyrannical Emperor who lives in affluence and ease, but the responsible nation of humbled, bleeding, unhappy France.

While, then, the political compact of our government violates in its essential provisions the clear and explicit requirements of the divine law, we cannot identify ourselves with the governing body that is most solemnly bound by this unscriptural covenant.

3. *It is impossible to avoid responsibility for such a morally defective constitution and its legitimate consequences in any other way than by political dissent.* It is due to many of the members of the convention that framed the constitution, to admit that they did not intend that the government should be actually administered on the principle that all religions, the true and all opposed to it, should be viewed nationally on a level. They did not fully comprehend the nature and consequences of their act in omitting all acknowledgment of God and Christianity, and prohibiting the requirement of any religious qualification for official position. It is no doubt true that, as Justice Story says, "at the time of the adoption of the constitution, the general, if not the universal sentiment in America was that Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the state, so far as was not incompatible with the private rights of conscience and freedom of worship. An attempt to level all religions, and make it a matter of state policy to hold all in utter indifference, would have created universal disapprobation, if not universal indignation."* It must also be admitted that in the actual administration of the government of this nation a preference always has been shown, and is still in great measure shown, to the Christian religion. Indeed, it has been maintained in judicial decisions that, in the words of Chancellor Kent, "Christianity, in its enlarged sense, as a religion taught and revealed in the Bible, is part and parcel of the law of the land."† And much of the actual administration of affairs has been carried forward on this principle.

* Commentaries on the Constitution, § 1868.

† Case of People vs. Ruggles, 8 Johnson's Reports, p. 290.

But that by which the members of the political society are solemnly bound to govern the nation is not the common custom of any portion of the people, nor even the unauthenticated public sentiment of the nation. It is the written compact itself. And this agreement, as we have seen, does, according to its best interpreters, put all religions on a level. Every year this interpretation of the written constitution is being more distinctly brought to bear upon such features of the actual administration of the government as are inconsistent with it. In opposition to Chancellor Kent's decision, already quoted, we have the following declaration: "According to the best considered authorities, the Christian religion is not a part of the common law of this country."* Many decisions might be quoted like the following, of the superior court of New York: "The principles of our government and the provisions of our constitution are designed to secure equality between different religions, and different forms and sects of religion."† The determined attempts of infidels and atheists, and others combining with them, to exclude the Bible from the common schools, abolish the administration of the oath by civil authorities, expel chaplains from halls of legislation, and, in a word, break down all the existing Christian features of the national life, proceed on the ground that these customs and usages are inconsistent with the written compact by which the nation agrees to govern itself, and which is the summary of all the powers the government may ever legally exercise.

* Comstock's edition of Kent's Commentaries, vol. i, p. 633, Note.

† 4 Sandford's Reports, p. 182.

Now who are responsible for this instrument, with its failure to acknowledge God and Christianity, and its consequent powerful influence against all that is distinctively Christian in the nation? The nation, itself, as a unit, is undoubtedly responsible. But every member of the nation who acquiesces in such a compact has his individual share of the responsibility. The convention that framed our morally defective constitution were first to blame. But the members of the political society that received it with its defects from the hands of the convention, and ratified it, by their act became responsible for it. This society continues its identity from generation to generation; and those who are members of it to-day, stand in precisely the same relation to the compact as those who first framed it or ratified it. They are just as responsible for its character as if they had yesterday actually adopted it for themselves.

Some may say that they are bound, not by the written compact, but by the unwritten or vital constitution of the nation, which the written document ought, but fails, to represent. Doubtless the unwritten constitution of our nation, embracing our customs, social and educational institutions, civilization generally, and much of the actual administration of the government, is distinctively Christian, and ought to be translated into legal language and authenticated in the written constitution. But whatever the character of the unwritten constitution may be, the written compact of government binds every member of the political society, anything in customs or usages to the contrary notwithstanding. On this point Judge Jameson, in his thorough treatment of the relation of the

written to the unwritten constitution of a nation, remarks as follows: "A very important question may arise: admitting the possibility of discrepancies between the constitution of a state as a fact [the unwritten constitution], and its constitution as an instrument of evidence [the written constitution], which has the superior validity? In answering this question it would be easy, and to some minds the temptation would be strong, to propound doctrines subversive of all regulated liberty. The reply seems reasonable that the constitution as an objective fact, the constitution as it ought to be written out, to harmonize with the results of existing social forces, ought to prevail, rather than any empirical transcript of it made by fallible men, and therefore inadequate at the start or become so by the progress of society. But such a doctrine would be anarchical—one according to which no government of laws could long exist. The constitution as it has been declared to be, with its compacts as well as its bare transcriptions, must be the sole guide to all matters and persons within its proper cognizance."*

Thus the written constitution, failing, as it does, to acknowledge the nation's relations to God and his laws, and degrading Christianity to the level of false religions, is the sole guide for members of the political society in governing the nation. It may contain provision for its own amendment. But if it should never be amended, the members of the governing body take it as it stands, and bind themselves by it as it is, and thus become responsible for its morally defective character, and its mischiev-

*Constitutional Convention, pp. 72, 73.

ous influence upon all the best and dearest features of our national life. The only way to avoid this responsibility is by occupying a position of political dissent.

4. *The position of political dissent is the most effective one for the reformation of the nation.* We might rest the case here, without any further discussion. The reasons already dwelt upon are sufficient in themselves. They necessarily involve the additional reason now given. The course of moral rectitude is the only sure pathway to true success. For a man to refuse to bind himself by an immoral compact is to pursue the course of rectitude. When the members of a political society bind themselves by a covenant which fails to acknowledge the nation's relations to God and his law, and which violates the express requirements of that law, they must plainly do what is a moral evil. And we are strictly forbidden to say, or, whatever the supposable good of such a course may be, to act upon the saying: "Let us do evil that good may come." If we do thus act, our condemnation is just.

There is oftentimes a strong temptation to deviate from the path of strict rectitude, arising from the prospect of some immediate and tangible benefit. In no case, perhaps, does the promised good appear more tangible than in the election at the present time in our land of a good man to office, in preference to a notoriously wicked and corrupt politician. But it is a very short-sighted view of the momentous affairs of a nation, which fails to comprehend the truth that the position of complete separation from what is wrong, though attended with an apparent temporary increase of evil, is and must

be, in the end, the most effective position for the thorough suppression of the wrong, and the sure advancement of the right and truth. Communities, cursed with bad rulers and threatened with worse, may strain every nerve to have the electors give the government, for once, the blessing of honest and God-fearing officials. They may succeed. And with such very imperfect success the excitement lulls, and the way remains open for bad men once more to work their way to office, and again to plunder the public treasury, and grind the faces of the poor. A failure to throw off the thieves and plunderers at first would be a cheap price to pay for the lesson, if by it the nation or community would only be taught to go to the very root of the evil, and enact their desire for good rulers, in accordance with the divine command, into the nation's law.

We can afford, then, to have fellow Christians, or fellow citizens, or both, who do not or will not understand our position, say to us: "Why all this talk about the necessity of reform, if you will not act? You are *doing* nothing. Put your shoulder to the wheel. Vote for men in favor of the reforms you seek." We are *doing* what it is most difficult to do. It is easy to follow the multitude. It requires no effort to fall in with the current, and go swimming down the stream amid the acclamations of accompanying millions. But to stem the popular tide, and to give warning to the ship of state, of perilous rocks and shoals ahead—this is the real *work* which but few are found ready to do. "*Hic labor, hoc opus est.*"

Moral truth is the great instrumentality, the mighty power in God's hands, and in the hands of all who are co-workers with him, in overthrowing moral evils. The effective worker with God is the man who makes the truth to be known and felt. The opponents of American slavery never caused the truth they held to make a deep impression upon the national conscience, until they dissented from the constitution which protected the wrong. Their dissent, and the energetic efforts logically connected with it, held up the abomination of slavery to the gaze of the nation and the civilized world, and more than anything else prepared the way for its complete extinction.

So the position we now occupy holds up the nation's morally defective compact of government to distinct view. To abandon the position would be to paralyze our arms, and take the bone and sinew, if not the very life, out of the movement for securing the acknowledgment of God in our national constitution, and sink the truth we hold in obscurity. To maintain our position of political dissent is to press the nation's sin in failing to acknowledge its relations to God and his law, and the need of a constitutional amendment, upon the notice of thoughtful men, and thus secure, in the end, a fundamental and thorough reformation.

Fathers and Brethren, let me add, as we close, that it becomes us, who yesterday held up our hands to God in solemn oath to maintain our position of political dissent until the blessed reformation sought is accomplished, to

remember that our duty requires true faith for its right performance. It was "by faith" Moses was enabled to discharge his duty. "By faith" we must be ourselves united with Christ and consecrated to him, if we are successfully to call upon the nation to subject itself to him as its ruler. Our utterances will but provoke contempt, and be themselves but mockery, unless our life attests the sincerity of our professed desire for the advancement of the honor of the King of kings.

Nor should we forget that the truth which we hold is a heritage. It has been handed down to us by fathers who suffered and died for it. They were removed from the field of labor before their work was appreciated. They bore the brunt of the conflict, and won, at the cost of their lives, the vantage ground on which we stand. With our inheritance of the great truth of Messiah's headship over the nations, there is laid upon us a special responsibility. Other work that we have to do is the same as that given to sister churches. But Americans as we are, native-born as most of us may be, by the very line of our descent from our worthy religious ancestors, there is intrusted to us the banner of "Christ's Crown and Covenant." Do what else we may, we fail utterly in our duty unless, in some degree, we prove ourselves worthy descendants of the faithful of old, by imitating their example, and keeping our banner aloft, its folds all shaken out to the breeze, and its full motto, clear and distinct, before the eyes of the nation :

" Bear aloft, then, Zion's standard,
Crimsoned o'er with martyr's blood.
It hath waved through lapse of ages,
Undestroyed by fire or flood.

On the field of bloody conflict
 It hath waved amid the strife ;
 And our fathers, to preserve it,
 Perilled fortune, home and life.”

Finally, let us have “respect unto the recompense of the reward.” Says an eminent writer : “If there be anything which may justly challenge the admiration of all mankind, it is that sublime patriotism, which, looking beyond its own times and its own fleeting pursuits, aims to secure the permanent happiness of posterity by laying the broad foundations of government upon immovable principles of justice. He who founds a hospital, a college, or even a more private and limited charity, is justly esteemed a benefactor of the human race. How much more do they deserve our reverence and praise, whose lives are devoted to the formation of institutions, which, when they and their children are mingled in the common dust, may continue to cherish the principles and the practice of liberty in perpetual freshness and vigor.”* This is the work we are striving to accomplish. With God’s glory and the good of our fellow-men in view ; “with malice toward none and charity to all ;” as Christians and patriots, constrained to take a position of separation from citizens we respect and love ; bound most sacredly to spare no sacrifice of time, money, or strength, we shall give ourselves to the great work of disseminating the truth as to the relation of government to religion, until the nation, acknowledging its subjection to the Messiah and his laws, shall say, in principle and practice, in the constitution and administration of its government :

* Story’s Commentaries on the Constitution, § 506.

“Come, then, and, added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one, thou who alone art worthy.”

Then, when under the reign of the Prince of Peace, righteousness shall distil as the dew, and the effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance forever, the names of those whose lives were devoted to the accomplishment of this aim shall be held in everlasting remembrance. Yes, brethren, the church and the men that work devotedly in this cause, shall live in history. Here is a field for the noblest endeavor. Here is room for the highest and purest ambition. In the days when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, history will be studied and written as it never was before. And the brightest names upon its page will be, not those of warriors and kings, or men of science and great scholars, but those of the moral heroes who did most in their day and place to usher Christ's kingdom in. If, in our individual obscurity, we can hope for no part in those future honors of this world, we can still have “respect to the recompense of the reward;” for in those fields beyond, where light, sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart, come to their ripened harvest, we shall all reap, if we faint not.