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## HUMAN RIGHTS, OR "NO RIGHTS."

THE first of these phrases is long familiar to us; the second is novel, and has originated in connection with the question, whether the United States is waging lawful war against the traitors and rebels, and semi-barbarous slaveocracy of the South. Some among us who take the negative on this question, or, what is the same thing, deny that a Covenanter can rightfully shoulder a musket, "with or without an oath," and enter the field of battle, would make very speedy work of it, by the assertion that this nation has "no rights" at all, and therefore no right even to defend itself; its integrity, its liberties and its civil rights. And this doctrine, they think, needs little, if any, other defense and vindication than what is found in the principle, that mankind forfeited all their rights in Adam's fall. From this they draw the conclusion that none but Christians have any rights at all. This, then, is the question we purpose to discuss in the present article, as preliminary to a more direct examination hereafter of the "war question." And here we note:

1. *That common sense and humane feeling revolts at this "no rights" doctrine.* To maintain that no man but a Christian has a right to defend his own life; to marry and have children; to protect his wife against the ravisher, or his children against the murderer, or his property against the robber, would be to teach doctrines shocking to every feeling of humanity and justice. If this be true, it is no sin or wrong to visit the coasts of Africa, kidnap its pagan inhabitants, transport them to Cuba, sell them, scourge them, and drive them by the lash under a torrid sun, to a speedy grave; at least no sin or wrong, so far as any wretchedness of the poor victims themselves is concerned, for they have *no rights* which *any body* is bound to respect! Such a doctrine once current in any community, would fill it with robbery, rape and murder. It is the doctrine of the Mormons, who deny to the Gentiles all rights, and when they dare, rob and murder them.

But suppose individual men and women have *some* rights, what

successfully sustain the government against enemies at home and abroad. Infidels would not support the constitution if God and the Bible were acknowledged. And Christians could not, if Infidelity were affirmed; and so the matter was compromised, and passed over; each party hoping to become, in time, strong enough to insert its own principles and maintain the government without the assistance of the other. In this country, Christianity obtained the ascendancy. In France, Infidelity succeeded, and at once began to produce its legitimate fruits of blood and ruin. But in this country neutrality, or negativism, which is half-sister to Infidelity, continued to prevail in the government. And under this regime, the result has been what we might expect—slavery, Sabbath-breaking, dishonesty, intemperance, licentiousness, &c., &c. And now, God has brought on us for our milder form of rebellion against him, the same kind of punishment, viz. internecine strife and civil war, that he brought more speedily upon France for her more open and more daring, but hardly different kind of rebellion against him.

Desiring the peace and permanent prosperity of the nation, and knowing that this can be secured only by making the glory of God our object, and the law of God our rule, we hope to see the proposed amendment adopted as a part of the fundamental law of the land.

One thing is worthy of remark here. Our opponents argue:

1st. "That adopting the amendment will exclude Infidels, Jews, &c., from participation in the government;" and yet,

2. "That the amendment is substantially incorporated in the constitution already." If so, how do Infidels, Jews, &c., swear to support the constitution? Who ever heard of them having any difficulty on this score? No. The two arguments, though used by the same persons, do not harmonize. They cannot both be true. We do not believe either of them is.

But this article has already grown to more than double its intended length. We have not gone over the scriptural ground. This has been done by others, in part at least; for to present all the scriptural arguments on this subject, would be to use the whole Bible.

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#### CONVENTION ON THE SUBJECT OF AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION.

In connection with the action of the Convention, which met in Allegheny on the last Wednesday of January, we give a brief history of the movement which gave rise to it. In the beginning of February, 1863, a number of ministers and members of several Christian denominations met in Xenia, Ohio, to interchange views respecting public affairs in connection with devotional exercises. The subject of constitutional changes was then introduced and received with much favor. Shortly after, Mr. John Alexander, who was present at that meeting, arranged with the writer of this ar-

ticle to have a consultation on this subject with evangelical ministers in Pittsburgh and Allegheny. A meeting was appointed and held on the ensuing week, which issued a circular addressed to the supreme judicatories of the several Christian bodies, inviting them to send delegates to a convention to be held in Pittsburgh on the 4th of July. To this none responded but the two bodies known as Reformed Presbyterian. A meeting was held, however, of such persons as were present and favored the cause, and a central committee was appointed to issue an address, and call a convention. The committee held their meetings with barely a quorum present each time, and finally called the convention that met as mentioned above. The action of the convention is highly encouraging to the friends of the measure. Till now they had to labor without a word of cheer from any of the weekly religious papers. Some sneered at the movement; others pronounced it Utopian, or passed it by in silence. There are already indications of a change in this quarter. The object is one of too great importance, and has enlisted too much interest to be either sneered at or ignored. The religious press must come out either for or against it.

We give the action of the convention, and subjoin a few additional remarks:

*Resolved*, 1. That we deem it a matter of paramount interest to the life, and prosperity, and permanency of our nation, that its Constitution be so amended as fully to express the Christian national character.

2. That we are encouraged by the success attending the labors of the friends of this movement to persevere, in the hope that, with the blessing of God, this effort will speedily result in the consummation of this great object.

3. That in the late proclamations of His Excellency, the President of the United States, recommending the observance of days of national fasting, humiliation and prayer, (as suggested by the Senate of the United States,) for the purpose of confessing our national sins, which have provoked the Divine displeasure, and of imploring forgiveness through Jesus Christ—and also days of national thanksgiving for the purpose of making grateful acknowledgment of God's mercies—we have pleasing evidence that God is graciously inclining the hearts of those who are in authority over us to recognize his hand in the affairs of the nation, and to cherish a sense of our dependence on him.

4. That the following Memorial and petition to Congress be circulated throughout the United States for signatures:

#### MEMORIAL TO CONGRESS.

*To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives, in Congress assembled:*

We, citizens of the United States, respectfully ask your honorable bodies to adopt measures for amending the Constitution of the United States, so as to read, in substance, as follows:

"We, the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler among the nations, his revealed will as the supreme law of the land, in order to constitute a Christian government, and in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the inalienable rights and the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness

to ourselves, our posterity, and all the people, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

"And further : that such changes with respect to the oath of office, slavery, and all other matters, should be introduced into the body of the Constitution as may be necessary to give effect to these amendments in the preamble. And we, your humble petitioners, will ever pray."

*Resolved*, That a special committee be appointed to carry the Memorial to Washington, lay it before the President, and endeavor to get a special message to Congress on the subject, and to lay said Memorial before Congress.

This committee was then appointed by the Convention, and is as follows :—J. H. McIlvaine, D. D., John T. Pressly, D. D., Rev. A. M. Milligan, John Douglas, D. D., Rev. Prof. J. M. Wilson, Rev. R. Audley Browne, D. C. Page, D. D., Rev. H. H. George, Rev. George S. Chace, W. A. Passavant, D. D., Rev. N. R. Johnson, John Alexander, Esq., Zadok Street, Esq., Rev. S. Collins.

The following, reported by the committee appointed for that purpose, was adopted as the

#### FORM OF PERMANENT ORGANIZATION.

1. This association shall be called the "*National Association for the Amendment of the Constitution.*"

2. The object of this Association shall be to obtain such amendment of the Constitution of the United States as shall fully express the Christian national character according to the resolutions adopted by this Convention.

3. The officers shall be President, Vice President, Recording and Corresponding Secretaries, and Treasurer. These, with five other members, shall be the Executive Committee of the Association, any five of whom shall be a quorum—all to be elected at the annual meetings.

4. Persons may become members by assenting to the Constitution.

5. This association shall meet annually upon its own adjournment, and at the call of its officers.

The following were appointed officers of the Association :

John Alexander, Esq., Xenia, O., President ; Zadok Street, Esq., Salem, O., Vice President ; John Douglas, D. D., Recording Secretary ; J. T. Pressly, D. D., Corresponding Secretary ; Daniel Euwer, Allegheny City, Treasurer.

The following were appointed members of the Executive Committee :—Rev. G. S. Chace, Rev. Dr. Page, Rev. S. T. Stewart, Prof. S. J. Wilson, and Rev. Dr. Elliott, of the Western Theological Seminary.

The Executive Committee is authorized to appoint sub-committees to organize auxiliary associations in all parts of the country.

Members and friends of the Association were, by vote of the Convention, recommended to raise funds to advance the object of the association, and forward them to the Treasurer.

We remark, 1. The position taken by the Convention is the same that has all along been occupied by the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The amendments embodied in the Memorial to Congress contain the great principles that we always maintained to be essential to the life of the nation. The absence of these left the nation without a Christian character. And it was because the nation lacked this character, that we stood aloof from it. Our profession is now publicly vindicated, and so will be our position so soon as there is a consistent and conscientious application of these principles by those who have declared them.

2. The work is only fairly begun. The present indications seem to be that the measure will be a popular one. But appearances are deceptive. Is it probable that Infidelity, with its allies of false Christianity and wickedness at its back, will remain silent when a movement of this kind presents a prospect of success? The friends of the measure may calculate on a severe moral struggle, and if any are indisposed to take a part in it, they had better say so at once, that we may know on whom to depend.

3. Criticisms on what has been done, and suggestions for the future, do not come with a very good grace from the lately avowed friends of the measure. Had their counsel been taken it would not have been begun. They might afford to let those who have it in hand go on with it in their own way. Fault is found because the pro-slavery provisions of the constitution are included in the proposed amendments. This criticism displays, to us, a singular lack of judgment. Is there anything now in public affairs more popular than a movement to destroy slavery? As a matter of worldly policy, the linking of an amendment in regard to the religious character of the Constitution with a measure that is just now going with a rush, would seem to be wise. We indeed would prefer that the religious amendments would take the lead, as they are entitled to do, from their importance. The reason for keeping them separate is given in the *United Presbyterian* of Feb. 3d:

There may have been some indiscretion in the first movings on the subject; and, in one respect, we are not sure that this Convention has done the wisest thing, that is, in linking slavery with the primary object of the movement. Slavery, just now, may be safely left to the statesmen of the country, whom the events of the war are rapidly educating to right views, that, there need be no doubt, will lead in due time to a correction of any defects of the Constitution in that respect. Better that the religious influence of the country should be concentrated on the more needed and essential matter of a proper recognition of God; and this, unembarrassed by connection with a subject so mixed up with the politics of the country as slavery now is, and on this account so much a subject of bitter and violent prejudice. The danger is that this prejudice will be arrayed against the whole movement.

Is it thought that this movement will be kept out of politics? Can it be? As certain as is the law of gravitation, there is a moral force that will bring it as an element into the political canvass. And till it gets there it will make but little progress. We might learn this from the history of the anti-slavery reform. Moral suasion and religious influence are indispensable to prepare the public mind for the struggle that must ultimately take place on the great arena of political action.

We learn that the committee appointed by the convention had an interview with the President, and that he assured them he would take the matter into serious consideration. At the same time, the committee appointed by our Synod, at its last meeting, were in Washington, and also attended to the duty assigned to them. We will perhaps be able to give in this No. some of the results of these interviews.

T. S.