

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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With an account of the Origin and Progress of the Movement.

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ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT

TO SECURE THE RELIGIOUS AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY T. P. STEVENSON,
Corresponding Secretary of the National Association.

THAT there is no acknowledgment of God or of the Christian religion in the Constitution of the United States, has been deplored by many devout and thoughtful men ever since that otherwise admirable political instrument was framed. In the early part of the present century the eminent Dr. John M. MASON, of New York, employed these words: "One would imagine that no occasion of making a pointed and public acknowledgment of the divine benig- nity could have presented itself so obviously as the framing an instrument of government which, in the nature of things, must be closely allied to our hap- piness or our ruin; and yet that very Constitution which the singular goodness of God enabled us to establish, does not so much as recognize his being."

In the admirable treatise on "The Oath," by the Rev. D. X. JUNKIN, D. D., published in 1845, the writer says: "The oath of the President of the United States could as well be taken by a pagan or a Mohammedan as by the Chief Magistrate of a Christian people: it excludes the name of the Supreme Being. Indeed it is negatively *atheistical*, for no God is appealed to at all. In fram- ing many of our public formularies, greater care seems to have been taken to adapt them to the prejudices of the infidel few than to the consciences of the Christian millions. In these things the minority in our country, has hitherto managed to govern the majority. * * We look on the designed omission of it the name of God in the oath] as an attempt to exclude from civil affairs him who is the Governor among the nations." These views have been intelli- gently and publicly maintained by a portion of the American people at all times since the adoption of the Constitution. The contrast, in this respect, between the Constitution of the nation and the Constitutions of nearly all the States did not escape observation, and it was remembered that, before the national Constitution, no similar instrument of government had been framed by any portion of the American people without an explicit acknowledgment of Almighty God and the Christian religion.

No public or united effort however was made to secure an amendment which should suitably express the religious sentiment of the nation until the year 1863. The civil war in which the nation was then engaged was almost universally felt to be an expression of the Divine displeasure against the nation. The public conscience was prepared to welcome any measure which proposed in a suitable and becoming way to give honor to the God whom we had offended

and express our feelings of repentance and purpose of reformation. A Convention for prayer and Christian conference, with special reference to the state of the country, had been called to meet in Xenia, Ohio, on the third day of February, 1863. When it assembled, it was found to include representatives from eleven different denominations of Christians, and from seven of the States of the Union. An unusual degree of patriotic and religious fervor pervaded all its exercises. It was therefore an auspicious hour for the consideration of the subject when on the second day of its sessions, Mr. JOHN ALEXANDER, then of Xenia, now of Philadelphia, quietly laid on the table of the Convention a paper of which the following are the principal portions :

In this, the day of our national calamity, it becomes us to inquire what the Lord would have us to do. In considering the way by which God has led our nation and the poor returns we have made to him for his distinguishing blessings, we are constrained to confess that we have been an ungrateful and backsliding people; and if the deserved judgments now upon us for our sins do not produce repentance and reformation, national division and prostration, if not destruction, are inevitable.

In the earlier struggles of the people for national independence, the frequent acknowledgment of God and his authority, the notable declaration of reliance on the aid of Divine Providence and the sentiment that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with an inalienable right to liberty, which were uttered in the Declaration of Independence, gave evidence of a religious public sentiment in the nation. Might it not, then, have been reasonably expected that after our national independence had, by the help of God, been secured, and our national troubles had passed away, and when, after the enjoyment of years of peace and prosperity, the national Constitution was adopted, such a nation, with such a history of divine deliverance fresh in their memory, would, by common consent, stamp indelibly on their Constitution that sentiment of "Glory to God and good-will to men," which they had so often professed in adversity and which they had so conspicuously proclaimed to the world in the Declaration of Independence?

But alas for human frailty and ingratitude! Instead of going on to promote more and more the glory of God and the rights of man, a terrible, and, if God's mercy prevent not, a fatal backward step was taken in adopting that otherwise noble instrument without any direct recognition of God or his authority and with a toleration of human slavery, thus contradicting two of the noblest principles of the Declaration of Independence, viz.: Reliance upon Divine Providence, and acknowledgment of the equal rights of man.

From that day the nation has been demoralized by the promulgation of an instrument as the paramount law of the land, which is far beneath the Christian sentiment of the nation. These two defects in our otherwise inimitable Constitution, so dishonoring to God and unjust to man, we believe to be the plague-spots in the heart of our nation, corrupting its vital fountains and threatening its dissolution.

These facts have long been understood and deplored by patriots and Christians. But pecuniary interest and corrupting prosperity on the one hand and avarice and wicked ambition on the other, have conspired to allow these defects to remain, and step after step to be taken in their support, until we have well-nigh legislated God out of the government, while we hold man, made in his image, as a chattel. And now God has arisen in his anger and is vindicating his own glory and the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Therefore his just judgments are upon us as a nation, and we must repent and forsake our national sins, or be destroyed.

We regard the Emancipation Proclamation of the President and his recommendation to purge the Constitution of Slavery as among the most hopeful signs of the times. But we regard the neglect of God and his law, by omitting all acknowledgment of them in our Constitution, as the crowning, original sin of the nation, and slavery as one of

its natural outgrowths. Therefore the most important step remains yet to be taken,—to amend the Constitution so as to acknowledge God and the authority of his law; and the object of this paper is to suggest to this Convention the propriety of considering this subject and of preparing such an amendment to the Constitution as they may think proper to propose in accordance with its provisions.

In order to bring the subject more definitely before the Convention, we suggest the following as an outline of what seems to us to be needed in the preamble of that instrument making it read as follows:—(proposed amendment in brackets)—

WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, [recognizing the being and attributes of Almighty God, the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, the law of God as the paramount rule, and Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour and Lord of all] in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare [and in order to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and to our posterity,] do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

These words expressed the life-long convictions of the writer. For many years he had urged these views as he had opportunity, and had employed his influence to secure similar acknowledgments in the Constitutions of some of the States of the Union. The paper was endorsed simply, "FROM A MEMBER OF THE CONVENTION," and without either argument or personal influence in its favor, was presented for consideration on its own merits. Its reception was opposed by the Committee in charge of the order of business, who feared that it would draw the Convention away from the programme of exercises already agreed upon, but it was earnestly and zealously argued in reply that the paper was entirely germane to the subject then before the Convention, viz., "Religion in the Nation," one of a series: "Religion in the heart," "the family," "the church," &c. At length with great unanimity the paper was received and referred to a Committee representing all the denominations of Christians gathered in the Convention, and the Report of this Committee, approving the spirit and design of the paper, and endorsing the action which it proposed, was adopted. Objections which have since grown stale from repetition, were not wanting during the discussion, and some did not so much oppose the design of the paper, as its introduction into that Convention, but an earnest and decided majority argued, in the words of one who took part in the debate, that it was the real question of the hour, and of the weightiest importance; God was forcing it upon them, and there was danger in delay; they must begin the work, and begin it then. The friends of this measure in that Convention remember gratefully the timely and effective help rendered in this discussion by the Rev. H. H. GEORGE, now of Cincinnati, and the Rev. SAMUEL COLLINS, now of Pittsburgh.

From the foregoing facts it will be seen that this movement is the fruit of intelligent and mature convictions, confirmed by long reflection and careful study of the spirit and history of our institutions, and quickened into active effort in an hour of deep religious and patriotic feeling. The eleven denominations of Christians represented in this Convention, are witnesses to the unsectarian character of the movement. It is interesting, too, to observe that though the language of the proposed amendment was afterwards modified, yet all the principles which it seeks to acknowledge, and the suggestion of the preamble to the Constitution as the appropriate place for its insertion, were contained in this paper, which originated the movement.

Steps were next taken to secure the meeting in Pittsburgh on the fourth day of July ensuing, of a Council, composed of delegates appointed by the various ecclesiastical bodies whose spring meetings were soon to be held. To this call, there was no general response; the few delegates, however, who were appointed, with other friends of the cause, met at the designated time, and issued an address to the people of the country. From this paper, written by the venerable and lamented Dr. JOHN T. PRESSLY, we extract the following paragraphs:

While there are doubtless various causes which may have conspired to provoke the Lord to withdraw his protecting care from the nation, and leave us to experience our own helplessness and entire dependence upon him, there is one to which we desire at this time particularly to call the attention of all who feel an interest in the perpetuity and prosperity of our government; and that is, our neglect to give to God the glory which is due to His name in our National Constitution. This remark may possibly excite the surprise of some whose attention may never have been called particularly to the subject. Our National Constitution is the production of statesmen distinguished for their profound wisdom; men who had a clear perception of human rights, and the great principles of civil liberty; and viewed in its political aspect it is worthy of all commendation. But it is when viewed as the fundamental law of a Christian nation, that we are constrained to acknowledge a defect, over which the Christian patriot must mourn. The name of God is not found in our National Constitution, nor does it contain a distinct recognition of his authority or existence. And this omission to make an unequivocal acknowledgment of God is the more to be lamented when we consider the signal interposition of Divine Providence in behalf of the nation which had just been experienced. Though, as a people we were comparatively feeble; few in number and limited in resources, we had been brought successfully through a war with a powerful nation, and our independence had been secured. What a loud call was now addressed to us, when framing our National Constitution, to make a distinct acknowledgment of Him to whose providential disposition in our favor we were indebted for our national existence. And yet in this important instrument there is no unequivocal declaration which would prove to a people unacquainted with us that we, as a nation, believe in the existence of God, or acknowledge our dependence upon his providential care.

"The kingdom is the Lord's and he is the Governor among the nations." Men, in their national as well as their individual capacity, are subject to the divine government, and are under obligations to acknowledge the authority of the Most High, who ruleth in the kingdom of men. Rulers who are called in the providence of God to preside over the interests of their fellow-men, are expressly required to yield to Him the homage of their obedience. "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little." "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee, saith God, shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." What, then, can a nation, favored with the light of divine revelation, which practically ignores God's authority, expect but that sooner or later divine vengeance shall overtake her, and that an end shall be put to her national existence, unless she is brought to repentance?

True, it may be said that under our present excellent Constitution we have enjoyed great prosperity, and therefore have no reason to suppose that God is displeased with us on account of anything defective in it. But do we not know that God is long-suffering, and slow to wrath, and that he often bears long with sinful nations as well as individuals? But there is a limit to the exercise of divine forbearance. And what is the aspect of God's providence toward us as a nation at the present time? Does not every one see that God is displeased with us as a nation, and has been provoked to bring upon us a terrible calamity? "We, the people," without acknowledging God's authority

and the need of his help, framed a Constitution, "but we are this day a divided, dismembered nation. "We, the people," prepared a Constitution, "in order to insure domestic tranquility;" but to-day we are suffering under all the dreadful evils of a civil war. Have we not reason to fear that "we, the people," have presumed too much upon our own wisdom and strength, and without acknowledging our dependence upon God, have undertaken a work to which our unaided powers are not adequate? And have we not cause to apprehend that God is now chastising us for neglecting to acknowledge our dependence upon him, and for withholding from him the honor which is due his name? "Them that honor me," saith God, "I will honor; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." This declaration involves a great principle in God's moral government, which will hold good in application to nations as well as individuals.

As the disciples of Him whose kingdom is not of this world, we do not consider that it is within our province to interfere with anything in our Constitution which is strictly of a political character. But what we desire is to see that God who has done so much for us as a nation, and on the enjoyment of whose favor our national existence depends, is duly honored by a distinct acknowledgment of his authority in the fundamental law of the land. And we cordially invite our fellow-Christians and Statesmen to co-operate with us in our efforts to secure, in a constitutional way, this desirable object.

JOHN T. PRESSLY, CHAIRMAN.

A little reflection had clearly shown that the church courts were not the proper machinery for carrying forward such a movement, and, at this meeting, steps were taken to call a National Convention, of all citizens favorable to the measure. This Convention assembled in Allegheny on the 27th day of January, 1864. It was an earnest, prayerful, and most encouraging meeting. Its action was as follows: *

RESOLUTIONS.

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

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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.

The National Association to secure the Religious Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, was organized at this Convention, with JOHN ALEXANDER, Esq., as President; Zadok Street, Salem, Ohio, of the Society of Friends) Vice-President; a full list of other officers, and an Executive Committee.

A large delegation was appointed to visit Washington, and urge the proposed Amendment on the attention of President LINCOLN. This Committee, embracing Professor J. H. McILVAINE, D. D., Princeton, N. J.; Professor J. T. PRESSLY, D. D., Penna.; Rev. JOHN DOUGLASS, D. D., Penna.; Rev. D. C. PAGE, D. D., Pa.; Rev. H. H. GEORGE, Ohio; Dr. STERRITT, Pa.; JOHN ALEXANDER, Esq., Ohio; Rev. J. S. T. MILLIGAN, Mich.; Rev. R. A. BROWNE, Pa.; and Rev. A. M. MILLIGAN, Pa., met in Willard's Hotel, Washington, on Tuesday evening, February 9. The Rev. Dr. GURLEY, Rev. Dr. CHANNING, Chaplain of the U. S. Senate, J. J. MARKS, D. D., Rév. B. F. MORRIS, Rev. R. D. JOHNSON, and Rev. N. R. CROW, of the District of Columbia met with the delegation, heard the address prepared by Dr. McILVAINE, the chairman of the committee, and gave it their hearty sanction; most of them signed the address and waited on the President with the delegation. Revs. S. O. WYLIE and J. R. W. SLOANE, with Wm. BROWN, Esq., delegates from the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian church to the President, also, by invitation signed the address and acted with the delegation. Through the aid of Senator Sherman, of Ohio, an arrangement was made with the President for an interview on Wednesday, 3½ P. M., when the delegation was introduced to the President by Dr. GURLEY, and the chairman made the following address:

ADDRESS TO THE PRESIDENT:

MR. PRESIDENT:—The object for which we have taken the liberty of trespassing a moment upon your precious time, can be explained in very few words. We are the representatives of a mass convention of christian people, without distinction of sect or denomination, which was held in Allegheny city, on the 27th and 28th of January last; and we are instructed to lay before your Excellency the action of that convention.

After reading the resolutions of the convention, and the Memorial to Congress, embodying the proposed Amendment, the address continued as follows:

We are encouraged, Mr. President, to hope that you will give the great object for which we pray, your cordial and powerful support, because you have already shown by many significant acts of your administration that the principle on which it rests is dear to

* This clause was dropped after the amendment prohibiting slavery was adopted.

your heart. This principle is our national responsibility to God, which you have expressly and repeatedly recognized. We remember that when, under one of your predecessors, an anti-christian power had refused to treat with the United States on the ground that we were a christian nation, the objection was removed by the authoritative statement that we, as a nation, had no religion; also that several of your predecessors refused, when earnestly importuned, to appoint days of national fasting and thanksgiving for the same reason, whilst you, sir, within the space of a single year, have thrice, by solemn proclamation, called us either to national fasting, humiliation and prayer, for our many and grievous sins, especially our sin of forgetting God, or to national thanksgiving for His unspeakable mercies.

You, moreover, as no other of our Chief Magistrates ever did, have solemnly reminded us of the redeeming grace of our blessed Saviour, and of the authority of the Holy Scriptures over us as a people. By such acts as these you have awakened a hope in the Christian people of this land that you represent them in feeling the want of a distinct and plain recognition of the divine authority in the Constitution of the United States. For we hold it most certain truth, that nations, as such, and not individuals alone, are the subjects of God's moral government, are responsible to Him, and by Him are graciously rewarded for their obedience, or justly punished for their disobedience of His divine laws.

We believe also that our civil and religious liberties, our free institutions, and all our national prosperity, power and glory, are mercies and blessings derived from God to us through the channel of the christian religion. Notwithstanding, either from inadvertency, or following some Godless theory of civil government, we have omitted even the mention of His blessed name in the most significant and highest act of the nation.

We believe that in thus leaving God out of our political system, we have grievously sinned against Him, have brought upon ourselves and children His just displeasure, opened the flood-gates of that political corruption which is the mediate, and given occasion to that prodigious development of the spirit of oppression and injury to the negro race, which is the immediate source of our present calamities and sorrows. We believe, therefore, that it is our first duty to repent of this and all our national sins, and to return to our obligations as a christian people, by acknowledging the true God as our God in our fundamental and organic law, in order that we may consistently implore His merciful interposition in our behalf, to give victory to our national arms, and success to the national cause; to establish the unity of the nation and the authority of the Government, now assaulted and shattered by a horrible rebellion. We ask for no union of Church and State—that is a thing which we utterly repudiate; we ask for nothing inconsistent with the largest religious liberty, or the rights of conscience in any man. We represent no sectarian or denominational object, but one in which all who bear the christian name, and all who have any regard for the christian religion, can cordially agree; and one to secure which we are persuaded that any lawful and wise movement would call forth an overwhelming public sentiment in its support.

We, therefore, do earnestly hope that you, our beloved Chief Magistrate, will not be indifferent to our prayer. For, by what you have already done in this cause, and by your integrity, firmness, and excellent wisdom, (divinely guided as we believe it has been, and pray that it may ever continue to be,) under the terrible responsibilities laid upon you in this the darkest hour of our country's peril and rebuke, you have won the confidence and affection of the christian people of this land, beyond all your predecessors, save only the Father of his Country. Knowing, then, the respect and deference with which your sage counsels are listened to by the whole people, and deeming the present time and occasion most opportune, we are persuaded that if you will give this movement your favor and support, it will be successful, and thus you will place yourself in the hearts of the present, and of all future generations, as one of the greatest benefactors of your country. For, having inaugurated those measures which aim to right, so far as that is possible, our great national wrong committed against man, you will have wielded that vast influence with which you have been clothed by Divine Providence and by the voice

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of the people, to right, so far as that can be done, that great wrong which we as a nation have committed against God, in leaving Him out of our political system.

The President replied as follows:

GENTLEMEN: The general aspect of your movement I cordially approve. In regard to particulars I must ask time to deliberate, as the work of amending the Constitution should not be done hastily. I will carefully examine your paper in order more fully to comprehend its contents than is possible from merely hearing it read, and will take such action upon it as my responsibility to our Maker and our country demands.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, (O. S.) in session at Newark, in May, 1864, in answer to an overture on the subject from the Synod of the Pacific, adopted the following preamble and resolutions, offered by Dr. MUSGRAVE:

Whereas, Almighty God, the God of nations, is the head and source of all authority and power in civil government and nations as such are the subjects of his moral laws, and his revealed will is the supreme law of national life;

Whereas, The Christian and loyal people of our country are everywhere beseeching God to interpose for our deliverance as a nation from the assaults of a most groundless and wicked rebellion, and to establish and maintain the national unity and authority; and—

Whereas, Resolutions have already passed the Senate of the United States, and are pending in the House of Representatives, recommending the amendment of the National Constitution in several other particulars: Therefore,

Resolved, That it is our solemn national duty so to amend our fundamental and organic law, that the preamble of the National Constitution shall read in substance as follows: "We, the people of the United States," &c., (in the words of the proposed amendment.)

Resolved, That this General Assembly recommend to all the people in the congregations under its care to memorialize Congress upon this subject.

As the Allegheny Convention was an intermediate meeting to effect a permanent organization it was determined to call the first annual meeting of the Association in Philadelphia in July following. It was held accordingly in the Eighth St. Methodist Episcopal Church, on Wednesday and Thursday, the 7th and 8th days of that month. Though the meeting was not large the character and position of those present, and the interest manifested in the cause were exceedingly encouraging. Addresses were made by the Rev. D. C. EDDY, D. D., of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, and the Rev. J. H. A. BOMBERGER, D. D., of the German Reformed Church. Dr. EDDY was elected President of the Association for the ensuing year. The Revs. T. P. STEVENSON and W. W. SPEAR, D. D. and Wm. GETTY, Esq., were appointed a Committee on Correspondence, and were directed to prepare an address to the public in behalf of the cause. From this address, the first issued after the organization of the Association, we extract the following passages:

Many Christians are convinced that we have failed to give our civil institutions that definite and practical religious character which is worthy of a Christian people and essential to national permanence and prosperity. We are not aware, that in the formation of our government, by any act or any declaration we recognized the divine origin of the institution then set up. While we have distinctly asserted, and jealously maintained, the right of the people to set up forms of government for themselves, we have not acknowledged—it would seem we have not felt—that the constitution of government

is an act of obedience to God, and that all legitimate civil authority is ultimately derived from him. Neither have we recognized the moral responsibility of the nation in its organic character, nor its obligation to accept and obey the will of God revealed in his word. And this defect is made painfully conspicuous by the omission of the name of God even from the form of oath prescribed in the Constitution, which simply reads, "I do solemnly swear or affirm."

THESE AMENDMENTS RIGHT AND NECESSARY.

We respectfully submit to your consideration, whether these amendments are not simply an appropriate recognition of the relations which all just human authority sustains to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. Is not anything less than this wholly inconsistent with those relations? We propose the recognition of God, not only because he is the supreme ruler of all men and all organizations, but because it is he who has given the institution of civil government to man, and the just authority of the magistrate is derived from him. "There is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God." It is surely fitting that a Constitution framed by a Christian people should recognize a higher source of civil authority than the mere will or consent of the citizen. And in presenting civil government thus, as a divine institution, we enforce, by the highest possible sanctions, its claims upon the respect and obedience of the citizen. The true strength of a government lies in the conscientious regard felt for it as the ordinance of God. Thus only is the magistrate clothed with his true authority, and the majesty of the law suitably preserved. "The sanctions of religion," says De Witt Clinton, "compose the foundations of good government."

The moral character of a government has a powerful reflex influence on the moral character of the people. Especially is this felt in a popular government, where the people are brought into constant contact with it, study its history, admire its provisions, and drink deeply of its spirit. An irreligious government begets an irreligious people. It must be deplored that in a Constitution so universally and so justly admired and loved and studied by the American people, there is nothing to turn the mind of the nation to God, to inculcate reverence for the authority of his Son or respect for his word.

JUSTIFIED BY OUR OWN HISTORY.

The principles which we here present are not new in American politics. We are able to plead many precedents, which must have the weight of authority with the American people. Our country was originally settled by men of high religious character, whose only motive in seeking a home in the wilderness was the freedom and safety of religion and the glory of God. They left the impress of their character on the civil institutions which they set up. In the cabin of the May flower, and before landing on Plymouth rock, the Pilgrims agreed upon a constitution of civil government, in which they declared the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith "to be among the ends of their organization. This Constitution, beginning: "In the name of God, Amen," invokes, says Webster, "a religious sanction and the authority of God on their civil obligations."

The Constitution of the first government established in the limits of the present State of Connecticut, declares that "where a people are gathered together, the word of God requires that there should be an orderly and decent government established according to God."

The first form of government that existed in Pennsylvania asserted "the origination and descent of all human power from God," and the first legislative act of the Colony, passed at Chester in 1662, recognized the Christian religion, while it established liberty of conscience, and declared that the glory of God and the good of mankind are the reason and end of government, which is, therefore, a venerable ordinance of God. And the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, in 1824, on a trial for blasphemy, referring to this early statute, says: "Christianity—general Christianity—is and always has been a part of the

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common law of Pennsylvania: not Christianity founded on particular tenets, nor an established Church with tithes and spiritual courts, but Christianity with liberty of conscience to all men."

The State Constitutions of the era of the Revolution present the same characteristics. In 1780, the Constitution of Massachusetts declared "that the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend on piety, religion and morality." And in the Convention of that State, met in 1820 to revise the Constitution, Mr. Webster said: "I am clearly of opinion that we should not strike out all recognition of the Christian religion. I am desirous that in so solemn a transaction as the establishment of a Constitution we should express our attachment to Christianity—not indeed to any of its peculiar forms, but to its general principles." But it is needless to multiply examples; for of the thirteen States existing originally, not one had failed in its Constitution to make recognition, more or less explicit, of the authority of God and the claims of his law. And it is a matter of deep regret, that when we were enabled, after the triumphant assertion of our independence, to set up a statelier governmental structure, we left out that which constituted the chief strength and glory of those earlier commonwealths.

Whatever explanation we put upon this unfortunate omission, it cannot be considered presumptuous, after the experience of nearly three-quarters of a century, to propose amendments to any constitution, however admirable and beneficent. It has already been amended in some particulars. The present rebellion has led to a general conviction, that additional amendments are necessary to secure universal liberty, and prevent even the possible recurrence of the evils which we now suffer. We propose, that the Constitution be made unmistakably *christian*, as well as *free*.

IN ACCORD WITH OUR NATIONAL ACTS.

There are well established features in our government, which are consistent only with such principles as we seek to introduce into the National Constitution. Through our whole history Chaplains have been appointed by Congress, prayer is offered daily during its sessions, and the nation is called at intervals, by both Congress and the Executive, to thanksgiving, or fasting and prayer. A recent resolution of the Senate on such an occasion, recognized the mediation of Jesus Christ, and the President called us to give thanks "for preserving and redeeming grace." We have gone to the Christian religion for the only bond we have for the integrity of the ruler, or the fidelity of the citizen—the divine ordinance of the oath. Such acts can have no meaning, unless as a nation we acknowledge God. If such implied recognition of God be proper and becoming, no objection can be urged against the express recognition which we propose. Its necessity will be felt when we remember, that one chief magistrate once refused to appoint a day of fasting and prayer in an hour of public calamity, because the nation in its constitution recognized no God, and another, in contracting a treaty with a Mohammedan power, hesitated not to declare that "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 and religion of Mussulmans."* Surely our christian character should be so well defined, that the chief magistrate of the nation could not doubt or ignore it, so clear that all the world should know us as a nation whose God is Jehovah.

In this movement, prompted by pure christian patriotism, participated in by various christian denominations, all of whom are opposed to any sectarian establishment of religion, we invite the co-operation of every lover of his country, and every follower of Jesus Christ. We invite all ministers of the gospel to proclaim to the nation the claims of Him whose ambassadors they are. We invite the co-operation of all ecclesiastical bodies in this effort to return to our fathers' God, to honor our common Redeemer, and to secure the best interests of our land.

* Treaty with Tripoli. Art. xi. Laws of the United States, vol. 4.

The next Convention was held in the West Arch Street Presbyterian Church, on the 29th of November, 1864. Ex-Governor POLLOCK presided, and addresses of unusual interest and power were made by JUDGE STRONG, Dr. EDWARDS, Dr. McILVAINE, Dr. GEORGE JUNKIN, Dr. JOEL SWARTZ, (Lutheran,) of Baltimore and the Rev. Dr. GODDARD, (Episcopal,) of Philadelphia. Delegates were present from different parts of the country, and altogether it was a very encouraging meeting. The following resolutions were adopted:

Resolved, That a national recognition of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Scriptures, as proposed in the memorial of this Association to Congress, is clearly a scriptural duty, which it is national peril to disregard.

Resolved, That, in consideration of the general diffusion of religious intelligence, principles and institutions throughout our country—in view of the many express recognitions of Christianity by the Constitutions and the legislative enactments of the several States—and in view also, of the religious history of the founders of this Government, it is a striking and solemn fact that our present National Constitution is so devoid of any distinctive Christian feature, that one of our Chief Magistrates once refused to appoint a day of fasting and prayer in an hour of public calamity, because the nation, in its Constitution, recognized no God; and another, in contracting a treaty with a Mohammedan power, hesitated not to declare that “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 and religion of Mussulmans.”

Resolved, That the measures proposed by this Association are not sectional, nor sectarian, nor partisan, but the general voice of Christian patriotism, asking that which is right and wholesome, which is in keeping with our antecedents, and which will not operate oppressively upon the conscience of any citizen.

Resolved, That the state of the times, recent and present, and the state of public sentiment, warrants and encourages the attempt to secure the amendment to the Constitution which is proposed by this Association.

During the year 1864, petitions were actively circulated and very numerous signed, and being duly forwarded to Congress, were referred to the Judiciary Committees of either House. Before the adjournment, Mr. Trumbull, of the Senate, asked to be discharged from the further consideration of the petition for the Recognition of God in the Constitution of the United States. In the language of the report: “The Committee deem it unnecessary to make the asked for amendment, as the Supreme Being is already recognized in the Constitution, in the requirement of oaths, and the prohibition of interference with the full exercise of religious opinions.”

Amendments to the Constitution of Indiana being under discussion in the Legislature of that State, through the exertions of the Rev. John Crozier a convention was assembled in Indianapolis, on the 15th of February, 1865, to secure a similar acknowledgment in that instrument. A petition prepared by this Convention, and bearing four hundred and fifty-two signatures, was laid before the Legislature and referred to a Committee, which afterward reported favorably, recommending the adoption of the amendment, 1. Because it contained nothing sectarian; 2. “It is in harmony with our republican form of government;” 3. It places our government in harmony with the “government of God, from whom all power is

derived;" 4. "By adopting this amendment, we will propitiate the favor of Him who chastises nations for national sins." There was a minority report adverse to the petition, and the Legislature adjourned without acting.

The first Auxiliary Society was formed in the southern part of the State of Illinois, and its influence, by means of public meetings, delegations to representative bodies, the active circulation of tracts and petitions, and by the earnest labors of the Rev. James Wallace, has been felt throughout all north-western states.

The next meeting of the National Association was in the City of New York, May 16th and 17th, 1866. Addresses were made by Dr. CRAVEN, of Newark and Dr. McILVAINE, of Princeton, and Dr. McILVAINE was appointed to lay resolutions before the approaching Constitutional Convention of the State of New York, and urge a similar expression in the Constitution of that State.

The admirable "Appeal to the voting citizens of the United States," prepared by DR. JONATHAN EDWARDS, was issued during this year, and widely distributed. As it is still actively circulated by the friends of the cause, we make no extracts from it.

The next convention assembled in Philadelphia, March 5th, 1867. Addresses were made by Prof. McIlvaine, of Princeton, the Rev. J. R. W. Sloane, of New York, and the Rev. R. Audley Browne, D. D., then a member of the Pennsylvania Senate. The Hon. Wm. Strong, now of the Supreme Court of the United States, presided at this meeting, and was elected President of the National Association.

On the ninth of April ensuing, a convention of the friends of the cause in western Pennsylvania assembled in Pittsburg, and organized a local association with R. AUDLEY BROWNE, D. D., as President. The spirit and convictions of this meeting may be judged from its first resolution, viz.:

That it is the mind of this Convention that these amendments ought to be made: First, because they state facts which are as incontrovertible as they are solemn; second, because they truly express what, if properly understood, is the firm conviction of the overwhelming majority of this people; third, because God commands it, and it is perilous to disregard a Divine command.

Meanwhile many articles in magazines and papers, the influence of the pulpit, addresses and resolutions in deliberative bodies and public meetings, were employed to further the cause. In particular, the pens of Drs. PRESSLY, SPROULL, and WILLSON, of Allegheny did constant and invaluable service; DR. BENJAMIN KURTZ, of Baltimore wrote earnestly in the *Lutheran Observer*, and DR. GEORGE DUFFIELD, of Detroit, from a special committee to whom an overture on the subject was referred by the Presbyterian Synod of Michigan, reported and advocated a paper which was adopted, resolving that "devoutly recognizing in our present calamities and distresses, as we do, His avenging hand, who is 'Governor among the nations,' we bow at His Sovereign feet in humble submission to His righteous will; and while we cordially sustain our civil authorities, in the

maintenance and prosecution of a war of defence, rendered necessary for the preservation of our Union and Government, and do honor to them for having so frequently, of late, convoked the people for purposes of humiliation, fasting, prayer and giving thanks to God, we do earnestly desire and urge that the name of Jesus, 'to whom God has sworn that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess,' be distinctly recognized and honored by our rulers, and especially that the Omnipotent and righteous providence of the Lord Jesus Christ be looked to and confided in for the solution of the great questions of philosophy and morality, involved in the public affairs of our beloved country."

In September, 1867, was issued the first number of the *CHRISTIAN STATESMAN*, a semi-monthly journal, established by the writer of this sketch and the Rev. D. McALLISTER, for the advocacy of the cause. The progress of the movement from that date has been faithfully chronicled in its pages, which have presented full reports of the National Convention at Pittsburgh in 1869, at Philadelphia in 1870, that lately held at Cincinnati, together with the Ohio State Convention at Columbus in February, 1869, and the Northwest Convention at Monmouth, Illinois, in April, 1871. The Pittsburgh Convention gave a marked impulse to the cause. It assembled upon the following call, which was signed by a large number of the most distinguished citizens:

CALL FOR A NATIONAL CONVENTION.

The Constitution of the United States makes no acknowledgment of Almighty God, the Author of national existence; nor of Jesus Christ, who is the Ruler of Nations; nor of the Bible, which is the Fountain of law and good morals, as well as of religion. This has, from the beginning, been a matter of deep regret. It may have been an oversight, but it was, and it is, both an error and an evil. It does not reflect the views of the great majority of the people upon these matters. It dishonors God. It is inconsistent with the character of nearly all our State Constitutions, and with all the precedents of our early history. It has introduced, or furthered, views and measures which are now struggling for a baneful ascendancy in State and national politics: such as, That civil government is only a social compact; That it exists only for secular and material, not for moral ends; That Sabbath Laws are unconstitutional, and that the Bible must be excluded from our Public Schools.

The National Association which has been formed for the purpose of securing such an amendment to the National Constitution as will remedy this great defect, indicate that this is a Christian nation, and place all Christian Laws, Institutions and Usages in our government on an undeniable legal basis in the fundamental law of the nation, invites, &c.

The Convention was large, earnest, and harmonious, embracing more than four hundred members, nearly two hundred of whom, were delegates appointed by local associations, or in public meetings, to represent their fellow-citizens in the Convention. FELIX R. BRUNOT, Esq., now of the Board of Indian Commissioners, presided at this meeting. The resolutions were as follows:

Resolved, That civil government is grounded, like the family, in the principles of the nature of man as a social creature; that it has its powers and functions thus determined by the Creator, and is, therefore, like the family, an ordinance of God.

Resolved, That nations, as sovereignties, wielding moral as well as physical power, and having moral as well as material objects, are morally accountable to God.

XVI THE RELIGIOUS AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION.

Resolved, That the moral laws under which nations are held accountable, include not only the law written on the heart of man, but also the fuller revelation of the Divine character and will, given in the Bible.

Resolved, That it is the right of nations as such, no less than of the individuals composing them, to worship God according to the religion of Jesus Christ.

Resolved, That in order to maintain and give permanency to the Christian features which have marked this nation from its origin, it is necessary to give them authoritative sanction in our organic law.

Resolved, That the proposed amendment of our National Constitution, so far from infringing any individual's rights of conscience, or tending in the least degree to a union of Church and State, will afford the fullest security against a corrupt and corrupting church establishment, and form the strongest safeguard of both the civil and religious liberties of all citizens.

Resolved, That the present movement is not sectarian, nor even ecclesiastical, but that it is the assertion of the right, and acknowledgment of the duty of a people who believe in the Christian religion to govern themselves in a Christian manner.

I have quoted thus fully from the resolutions and published documents of the National Association, in order to show at one view the breadth, thoroughness and consistency of the principles which from the first, have actuated the promoters of this Amendment. With the same view the Call for the Philadelphia Convention, January 18th and 19th, 1871, is here appended:

There is no political document so all-important to the American Statesman and the American Citizen as the Constitution of the United States. All laws, all customs, all forms of administration are shaped by it. Every thing in any state, corporation or business that affects a citizen in the remotest degree as to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is tested by it, and stands and works only as it agrees with it. Year by year its molding power is felt. The President, the Congress and the Courts, are coming more and more into evident agreement with what is there written. Our Statesmen and our whole people are learning their Americanism, as to its letter and spirit, from that great Instrument. This is as it should be. This was intended from the beginning.

But at the same time, it is a serious matter if that Constitution should be found wanting in any principle or any matter of fact. The deficiency will in due time work mischief. Error in the Constitution will work as powerfully as truth, and what is left of it, may one day be formally declared un-American. And one such serious matter there is; one unnecessary and most unfortunate omission. God and Christianity are not once alluded to: although the Constitution is itself the product of a Christian civilization, and although it purports to represent the mind of a Christian people, who, in all their State Constitutions, had made explicit reference to both God and Religion. Hence it is that all the laws of this country in favor of a Christian morality, are enacted and enforced outside the Constitution. They rest only upon the basis of what is called Common Law. We have, strictly, no Oath, no law against Blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, or Polygamy, that has any better foundation. And, as matters seem to be going, it will soon be discovered and decreed that Common Law is only another name for Custom, which has no binding force. And then where are we? In atheism, corruption and anarchy.

This sketch, with the following proceedings of the National Convention, at Cincinnati, shows the result of nine years of labor in this cause. Its friends commit its future, in prayer and faith, and with hope of its early and complete triumph, to the providence of the RULER OF NATIONS.

Philadelphia, March 15th, 1872.