

National Reform and the Rights of Conscience

THE avowed purpose of the National Reform party is to secure an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, by which every man shall be compelled to acknowledge that God is Sovereign, that Christ is Ruler, and that the Bible is the supreme law. Whether a man believes it or not, is no difference, he must be compelled to acknowledge it because *they* profess to believe it. The *Christian Statesman* of October 2, 1884, says:—

"Give all men to understand that this is a Christian nation; and that, believing that without Christianity we perish, we must maintain by all right means our Christian character. Inscribe this character on our Constitution. . . *Enforce upon all that come among us the laws of Christian morality.*"

"*Enforce,*" according to Webster, is "to force; to constrain; to compel; to execute with vigor." Therefore the proposition of these National Reformers is to

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force, to compel all to keep the laws of Christian morality,—to *execute with vigor* upon all the laws of Christian morality.

And what is to be the penalty for dissent? Well, they *pretend* to be so kind that they will not whip anybody for it; they pretend to be so liberal that they will not impose a fine upon anyone for it; they pretend to be so merciful that they will not imprison anyone for it; but they are neither so kind, so liberal, nor so merciful but that they *will disfranchise* everyone who will not acknowledge, and submit to, the provisions which they choose to embody in their Religious Amendment to the Constitution.

Thus, for a religious opinion, however conscientiously held, which may disagree with theirs, they deliberately propose to deprive men of their birthright to the most inestimable right of earth—that for which thousands upon thousands have laid down their lives; that for which our fathers pledged their lives, their

fortunes, and their sacred honor—the right to be a citizen among a free people, and in this instance a citizen of the best Government *on* the earth. Every honor to which he might otherwise aspire, every right to which he might otherwise be entitled, must be swept away at one stroke, because, forsooth, he chooses to claim the right to worship God according to the dictates of *his own* conscience. That this is no

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fancy picture that we have drawn, that it is no fable that we have devised, in regard to what that party proposes to do, we have abundant proof in their own words.

In the *Christian Statesman*, of November 1, 1883, Mr. W. J. Coleman, one of the principal exponents of the National Reform religion, replied to some questions that had been put by a correspondent who signed himself "Truth Seeker." We copy the following:—

"What effect would the adoption of the Christian Amendment, together with the proposed changes in the Constitution, have upon those who deny that God is the Sovereign, Christ the Ruler, and the Bible the law? This brings up the conscience question at once. . . The classes who would object are, as 'Truth Seeker' has said, Jews, infidels, atheists, and others. These classes are perfectly satisfied with the Constitution as it is. How would they stand towards it if it recognized the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ? To be perfectly plain, I believe that the existence of a Christian Constitution would *disfranchise* every logically consistent infidel."

There we have in plain words what they propose to do with dissenters under their "Christian Constitution." But let us look into this a little further. Notice, it is only the *logically consistent* dissenter that will be disfranchised. By the same token, then, the logically inconsistent can all be citizens. That is, the man of honest intention, of firm conviction, and of real principle, who values his principles more than he does political preference, *he* must be disfranchised; while the time-servers, the political hacks, the men of no

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convictions and of no principle, *they* can all be acceptable citizens. In other words, the *honest man*, if he be a dissenter, *cannot* be a citizen; but *every hypocrite can* be a citizen. Therefore the inevitable logic of the National Reform position is to put a premium upon hypocrisy. And *such* will be the value of citizenship under their so-called Christian Constitution.

Such a result from such proceedings is not new. The Puritan Parliament "solemnly resolved that no person shall be employed but such as the House shall be satisfied of his real godliness." And as the natural consequence, the realm was filled with hypocritical piety.

But it is not so much our purpose in this place to notice the logic of their position, as it is to show their avowed purpose of outraging every principle of the rights of conscience. Mr. Coleman is not alone in thus defining the *status* of dissenters. In the *Statesman of* February 21, 1884, Mr. J. C. K. Milligan, in writing upon the same subject, expressed himself thus:—

"The worst result will be to disfranchise them."

But this is *not* the worst result which they wish, nor which they intend. Read carefully the following extract from an address delivered by Rev. E. B. Graham at a National Reform Convention held at York, Nebraska, and reported in the *Christian Statesman of* May 21, 1885:—

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"We might add, in all justice, if the opponents of the Bible do not like our Government and its Christian features, let them go to some wild, desolate land; and in the name of the devil, and for the sake of the devil, subdue it, and set up a Government of their own on infidel and atheistic ideas, and then, if they can stand it, stay there till they die."

That is pretty heavy, but there is one more step that could be taken, and it is taken. Rev. Jonathan Edwards says:—

"Tolerate atheism, sir? There is nothing out of hell that I would not tolerate as soon."

The "true inwardness" of this last can be the more readily appreciated when it is understood that this reverend gentleman defines atheism to be whatever opposes National Reform. For in

the same speech he distinctly named atheists, deists, Jews, and Seventh-day Baptists, besides using the general term, "our objectors." He declares that "the atheist does not believe in the soul," and says of all:—

"These are all, for the occasion, and so far as our Amendment is concerned, one class. They use the same arguments and the same tactics against us. . . . They must be named from him [the atheist]; they must be treated as, for this question, one party."

So, then, under a National Reform *regime*, dissenters must not only be disfranchised, but they must all be sent to the devil, and that, too, in some "wild and desolate land;" and even that is not enough, but they must "stay there till they die." And *that* is the Na-

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tional Reform idea of "justice." *That is* the kind of Government that they propose under their Christian Constitution. *That is* the way in which they propose to convert men to the Christian religion. *That is* the way in which they propose to exemplify the sublime Christian principle of brotherly love, and the means which they will employ that brotherly love *may continue!* *That is* the way in which they are going to bring about the reign of universal peace, even, as they say, the millennium itself. *That* will be indeed the reign of the saints(!)! By a like scheme of the Christian endeavor of the "Society of Jesus," there was peace once in the fair Waldensian Valleys. By like exertions Innocent III. succeeded in creating peace amidst "the graceful scenery, the rich fields, and the splendid cities of Languedoc and Provence."

And yet, by resolution in National Convention, they gravely assure the world that "the Religious Amendment, instead of infringing on any individual's right of conscience, will form the strongest safeguard of both the civil and religious liberties of all citizens"! But the liberty which the National Reformers propose to guarantee to every man, is the "liberty" to do as *they* say, and the "liberty" to conform to what *they* shall establish as Christianity and morality. And *that* is a kind of liberty that is strictly compatible with

absolute tyranny. Such liberty as that, the Papacy at the height of its power was willing and anxious to grant.

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Indeed, of that kind of liberty the Inquisition was the best conservator the world has ever seen.

More than this, they declare themselves to be the "conscience party"! Dr. Edwards, in the speech previously referred to, exclaimed, "We are the conscience party, the free conscience party!" Their purpose to disfranchise and deliver to the devil in "some wild, desolate land," etc., all who do not assent to the National Reform ideas of Government, is to be carried out altogether in behalf of liberty of conscience, *that is*, the conscience of the National Reformers. They give us clearly to understand that it is entirely out of respect to their own consciences that they propose to do all these things. Mr. Coleman says further, in the place before quoted:—

"If there be any Christian who objects to the proposed Amendment on the ground that it might touch the conscience of the infidel, it seems to me it would be in order to inquire whether he himself should not have some conscience in this matter."

So, then, in this National Reform Christianity, it is the perfection of conscientiousness to outrage some other man's conscience. And the *reverse* of the golden rule becomes, to them, the law and the prophets. Their chief complaint is that the present Constitution disfranchises *them* (which is false), and therefore they must have it changed so that it will disfranchise everyone but them.

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Therefore all things whatsoever *ye would not* that men should do to you, *this do ye* even unto them; for this is the law of National Reform.

When we read these things, and many others of like import, in the National Reform literature, and, in view of them, express our fears that religious intolerance and persecution will be the inevitable consequence of the success of the National Reform movement, they seem to think it passing strange.

To them it seems only "folly and fanaticism" that anybody should harbor any such fears. Then they come cooing like a dove, "Why, you need have no fears at all; we would not hurt a hair on your heads." But the sentiments expressed in the above quotations are spoken with too much earnestness, and are received with too much favor in the National Reform Conventions, for us to allow any weight whatever to such honeyed phrases as, "You need have no fears," and, "We would not hurt a hair of your heads."

But even if we heard only pleasant words and fair speeches on their part, and had none of these plain and forcible expressions of their real sentiments and feelings, we should be none the less assured that intolerance and persecution would be the result of the success of the National Reform party. First, because all history proves that such a thing is to be dreaded; and,

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secondly, because such a result is inseparable from the success of such a movement.

We repeat: *Intolerance and persecution are inseparable from the success of such a movement as is represented in the National Reform Association.* Their purpose is to place what they decide to be Christian laws, institutions, and usages, upon an undeniable *legal* basis in the fundamental law of the land. Such Christianity thereby becomes the law of the land; and the only point upon which turns the question of persecution or no persecution is, Will the law be enforced? If the law shall not be enforced, then their movement will be a failure; for, so far as any real, practical results are concerned, the whole matter would stand just as it does at present, and the present order of things is the subject of their sorest lamentations. But if the law shall be enforced, then there is persecution, for compulsory conformity to religious opinions is persecution. So the sum of the matter is this: If the laws which they establish shall not be enforced, their movement will be a failure. If those laws shall be enforced, then there will be persecution. And that the principles which they advocate will be enforced, if they obtain the power, is just as certain as that human nature is what it is, or that two and two make four.

And who are they that propose to do these things? An Association of which the vice-presidents alone

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number *one hundred and twenty*, than whom we verily believe that there cannot be found in the United States an equal number of other men and women who could exert a more positive influence. In a list given in the *Christian Statesman* of December 24, 1885, we find the names of *eleven* Bishops, *sixteen* College Presidents, *fifteen* College Professors, *three* ex-Governors, *seven* Justices of Supreme Courts, *five* Judges of Superior Courts, *two* Judges of the United States District Court, *one* Judge of the United States Circuit Court, with such a number of Hons., Revs., and D. Ds., that we cannot attempt now to count them.

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not charge that *all* the eminent men here referred to intend to persecute, nor that they would favor persecution. We freely grant, and we really believe, that among these there are those who would abhor persecution. But that they would abhor persecution does not help the matter a particle, as long as they, as officers of the Association, are doing their very best to establish a system of Government and laws under which it will be possible for persecution to be inflicted by those who do not abhor it, but who, on the contrary, are bigoted and fanatical enough to enjoy it.

Admitting that among these there are men so humane that they would shrink from the enforcement of unjust or oppressive laws, such consideration does not in

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the least relieve them from the responsibility so long as they persist in doing their utmost to make it possible for the fanatic or the savage to enforce [*sic.*] the laws which are put into his hands. George Bancroft truly says: "As the humane ever decline to enforce the laws dictated by bigotry, the office devolves on the fanatic or the savage. Hence the severity of their execution usually surpasses the intention of their authors." Doubtless there are men who favor the National Reform movement and the enactment of laws embodying its principles, but who would be shocked at such an enforcement of

them as is proposed by the Rev. E. B. Graham, and the Rev. Jonathan Edwards, D. D. But that does not relieve them of the responsibility; they have no business, much less have they any right, to enact such laws. It matters not how humane, nor how eminent for Christian character, they may be, they are but playing into the hands of the fanatic and the man of savage disposition. If they so abhor persecution, just let them withhold from such characters as these the power to persecute.

As for us, we are neither Jews, infidels, nor atheists. But as we dissent totally from the doctrines of the National Reform party, we suppose, of course, that we shall be placed in Dr. Edwards' catalogue of atheists; and we are willing to confess that we belong to that fourth class to which Mr. Coleman referred by the

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phrase, "and others." We do not deny that God is Sovereign, nor that Christ is Ruler, nor that the Bible is the supreme law. We freely confess all these. But while we confess that God is Sovereign, we positively deny that he has delegated his sovereignty to the National Reform party. While we confess that Christ is Ruler, we deny that he has chosen the National Reform party as his confidential advisers in his rule, or that he has appointed that party as his vicegerent in the United States to rule this country in his absence. While we confess that the Bible is the supreme standard of human actions, we deny *in toto* that the Author of the Bible has appointed the National Reform party to be the infallible interpreters of that book.

And now from the plain statements of the National Reform officials themselves, we submit to all candid men that we are justified in saying that the success of the National Reform movement will be the destruction of the dearly-bought principle of American liberty; the destruction of the inestimable treasure of American citizenship; and the destruction of every principle of the rights of conscience, under the Government of the United States. And because of this we labor for the defense of the genius of American institutions. A. T. JONES.