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NATIONAL REFORM AND POLITICAL DISSENT.

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The issue which must soon divide into two hosts the entire people of our country is already distinct and well defined, and is even now perfectly understood by the leaders on both sides. It is an issue between those who are for and those who are *against* Christian government in America.

Of those who desire truly Christian government only a small band are "political dissenters." Admit that they are the far-seeing, the logical, the consistent, and the courageous national reformers; give them the credit of occupying "the post of honor in the fore front of the hottest battle." (See leading article in OUR BANNER for January); admit that they hold a place in the National Reform movement similar to that of the Garrisonians in the Anti-Slavery movement. (See R. P. and C. *passim*.) It by no means follows that political dissent is the only way, or even the principal way, to promote the cause of National Reform. It by no means follows that this cause is to be carried by the conversion of any considerable number of "the members of other churches to political dissent." It by no means follows that political dissent should be insisted upon as essential to the National Reform movement.

In the January R. P. and C. it is clearly intimated that the National Reform movement, with its organ, the *Christian Statesman*, should be placed on the ground of political dissent. Reference is made to the Garrisonian movement as showing how potent, if not omnipotent, was political dissent in the anti-slavery conflict. Let it not be forgotten that the Garrisonians never made political dissent their *main theme*, never made political dissent a test for anti-slavery workers, never aimed to convert any considerable number of the anti-slavery people to their views. What would have been the result had they won

over a majority of the anti slavery people, is a question which only the lineal descendants of the schoolmen would care to ask. What would be the result should we adopt the suggestion made in the November number of OUR BANNER, *i. e.* Should we send out a corps of true (?) National Reformers "to win over the members of other churches to political dissent," is a question which must take its place beside the unanswerable question, What shall we do with all the larks we shall catch when the skies fall? Is it not notorious that the ablest and most faithful and zealous of our ministers, even those who insist that political dissent should be kept in the front of all national reform work, instead of winning over the members of other churches, have barely been able to keep their own people true to their ideas of political dissent?

No; the Garrisonians and the Covenanters, in their opposition to slavery, never dreamed of success by means of the conversion of the anti-slavery hosts to their views; and their success came without any such conversion. What they steadily aimed to do was to win over a majority of the people to a position of *determined opposition to slavery*. Nor is this whole work to be ascribed to them alone. They were the fore runners of "the great uprising for liberty and justice." God employed them to do a noble work, for which let them be rewarded with immortal honor; but let us not forget that scores, hundreds, millions of others were employed to do a work none the less necessary to be done. A grand debate, which lasted for 30 years.—debate in the Congress of the United States with a continent for an audience, resulted in the overthrow of slavery, first from its dominant place in the government by the election of Abraham Lincoln, and then from the whole land by battle.

To give the whole credit of the success of the anti-slavery movement to the little band of political dissenters, taking no note of all that was done by such men as Seward, Sumner, Chase, Stanton, Lincoln, yes, such men as Grant, Sherman and John Brown, and millions of those who for a lifetime wrought, prayed, voted and fought against slavery, without ever once dreaming of political dissent, is about as fair a representation of the beginning, progress and consummation of the anti-slavery movement as to represent that we owe the splendor and glory of the brightest summer day to the light of the morning star. Of the hosts that, in debate and in battle carried the anti-slavery cause to success, only a very small band were political dissenters. To put it mildly, is there not every reason to believe that the advocates and champions of the National Reform movement will need the aid of others than political dissenters? In fact, notice that those who make the most of political dissent do themselves, always in the end, admit that the amendment must be carried by those who are not political dissenters; and some of them maintain that it must be carried by them alone, since political dissenters could not even vote for the

complete amendment, were it proposed, because, according to them, this would be inconsistent with "political dissent."

Testimony comes from all parts of our country that wheresoever the National Reform cause has been fairly brought before the Christian people, it enlists their hearty approval and support. "The cause has but to be presented to secure the approval of Christian people," is the calm, unequivocal statement of Rev. Mr. Timmons, of the United Presbyterian Church. This statement scores of laborers in that cause can heartily confirm. The leading men in all the churches are already thoroughly in favor of Christian government. I have had providentially some opportunity to collect from a variety of public journals for some months past what I have judged to be National Reform literature. These selections are from papers ranging from country newspapers up to the *North American Review*. It is beyond measure astonishing how in one way or another genuine National Reform literature has made its way into the public prints! I can give but a few specimens. I take from the *Topeka Capital* the following paragraph:

"What is the object of the church in this world? Leaving aside any doctrine of Christian living or belief as affecting a future state of existence, what is the object in this world of this great, powerful, divinely founded society called the Church? *Is it to establish and maintain in civil society the law of Christ?* The church should stand for nothing less than this: To maintain in human laws and regulations the supreme law of Christ. . . . Is it not high time that the sceptre in politics, in legislation, in business, and in all departments of social life, pass from the bloody hands of King Alcohol into the hands of the only rightful sovereign of the earth, King Jesus?"

James F. Legate, a quondam Democrat and Anti-Prohibitionist, with characteristic frankness and courage, which timid Christians would do well to emulate, says: "The whisky saloon must be rejected, and the Sunday-school and the Church must be protected and nurtured."

In the *North American Review* for January there are two articles, each of which contains a mighty argument for National Reform and for the religious amendment of the United States Constitution. Senator Blair, in his article "Alcohol in Politics," has the following: "The national government is the great ally and protector of alcohol, and so long as the *national constitution* is its *real stronghold* the battle for Prohibition in the States . . . must still falter, and in the end substantially fail, or at best, be renewed forever."

"John Taylor, President of the Church of the Latter day Saints," furnishes unconsciously a mighty argument for the religious amendment of the United States Constitution, when he designates the action of our government in opposing polygamy, as "a most summary method of robbing a people of their rights, one that we claim is entirely op-

posed to both the *letter and spirit of that great charter of human rights*, the Constitution of the United States—an instrument for which, be it said, we have the most profound reverence, believing, as we do, that those who framed it were *inspired of the Almighty.*" (?) And at the close of his article he insists that he and his Mormons are standing up for "the glorious and grand principles upon which this great government was founded."

What could more effectually arouse the Christian people to the need of the constitutional amendment than the boldly stated fact that the constitution is the "real stronghold" of both these horrid systems of iniquity?

The New York *Tribune* of April 17th, 1884, editorially says in an able review of an address of Judge Noah Davis, on "Marriage and Divorce":

"It is, indeed, evident that the most urgent measure of social reform is a national divorce law, and that the constitution, sooner or later, *will have to be amended* to enable Congress to enact such a law. . . . It is therefore clear that nothing but a national divorce law will meet the exigencies of the case; and though opinions differ as to the character of the provisions to be put in such a law, all can consistently unite in clearing the ground for uniform legislation on the subject. A constitutional amendment is the primary requirement, and steps should be taken at once to secure that. . . . It is, in fact, the duty and interest alike of the nation to surround the family relation with every safeguard; to give to it all the solidity and permanence wise and uniform laws can furnish; and to discourage by every possible method the restless, fickle, immoral and unstable conditions which spring from facile divorce laws, and which exercise corrupting and depraving influences upon the community in many directions. The demand for a constitutional amendment permitting uniform divorce legislation might well be inserted in the platforms of both parties in the coming campaign; for it is not a partisan question, but one emphatically of national concern."

This from the *Tribune*, which has always opposed our religious amendment, and any recognition in the constitution of Christian morality, shows a wonderful advance in the power of moral reform, and a radical change in public sentiment and its foremost organs. Considering the entire situation, the wondrous way in which the public mind has been prepared to receive the truth,—the wonderful way in which National Reform views, yes, Covenanter views of Christian civil government have forced their way into current literature in the public prints, it seems to me that it would be a great mistake for the Covenanter Church to turn all its energies to the work of winning over to political dissent the members of other churches.