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American Bible Society.
Constitution.

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CONSTITUTION

OF THE

AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY,

FORMED BY



A CONVENTION OF DELEGATES,

HELD IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK, MAY, 1816.

TOGETHER WITH THEIR

ADDRESS

TO THE



PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES;

A NOTICE OF THEIR PROCEEDINGS;

AND

A LIST OF THEIR OFFICERS.

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED FOR THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY, BY G. F. HOPKINS,
72 WILLIAM STREET.

At a Meeting of Delegates from different Bible Societies, convened in the Consistory Room of the Reformed Dutch Church on the 8th day of May, 1816; JOSHUA M. WALLACE, Esq. of New-Jersey, was chosen President of the Convention, and the REV. DR. J. B. ROMEYN, and REV. L. BEECHER, Secretaries.

The meeting was then opened with prayer by the Rev. Dr. NOTT.

The following persons appeared as Delegates:

Rev. Dr. S. SPRING, from the Merrimack Bible Society.		
Rev. Mr. HUMPHREYS, - - -	} Fairfield	do.
*Dr. I. LEWIS, - - -		
Rev. Dr. JOHN M. MASON, - - -	} New-York	do.
PHILIP MILLEDOLER,		
J. B. ROMEYN, - - -		
Mr. J. WILLIAMS, - - -		
Mr. GARDINER SPRING, - - -		
Dr. BRADFORD, - - -	} Albany	do.
Dr. NEILL, - - -		
Mr. CHESTER, - - -		
Mr. WILLIAM WILLIAMS, - - -	} Oneida	do.
General JOHN LINCKLAEN, - - -		
Rev. ANDREW OLIVER, - - -	} Otsego	do.
ELI F. COOLEY, - - -		
Mr. JAMES COOPER, - - -		
Mr. GUYSBERT B. VROOM, - - -	} New-York Auxiliary	do.
HENRY W. WARNER, - - -		
W. C. MULLIGAN, - - -		
ROBERT SEDGWICK, - - -		
Rev. Dr. E. NOTT, - - -	} Union College	do.
		Rensselaer
Rev. Dr. S. BLATCHFORD,	} Saratoga	do.
Rev. Dr. J. BASSETT, - - -	} Long-Island	do.
Mr. SAYRE, - - -		
Mr. D. S. BOGART, - - -		
Mr. A. VAN SINDERIN, - - -		
CHARLES WRIGHT, - - -	} Delaware	do.
Rev. Mr. R. FOREST,		
Mr. LEVI CALLENDER,		

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Mr. JOSHUA M. WALLACE, -	}	<i>New-Jersey Bible Society.</i>
SAMUEL BAYARD, -		
Rev. Dr. J. RICHARDS, -		
Mr. G. S. WOODHULL, -		
Mr. J. M'DOWELL, -	}	<i>Nassau Hall do.</i>
Mr. THOMAS J. BIGGS, -		
J. W. PLATT, -		
Rev. Mr. DAVID JONES, -		
Mr. C. HORNBLOWER, -		
JOHN E. CALDWELL, -		
Rev. Mr. S. WILMER, -		
Mr. M. S. CLARKE, -		
Rev. Mr. J. H. RICE, -		
Mr. W. BURD, -		
Rev. Dr. HALL, -		
Dr. J. BLYTHE, -		
Mr. H. FORD, -		
Rev. Dr. A. PROUDFIT, -		
	}	<i>do. do. Kingston.</i>
	}	<i>Franklin do. do.</i>
	}	<i>Frederick do. do.</i>
	}	<i>Petersburgh do. do.</i>
	}	<i>North-Carolina do. do.</i>
	}	<i>Cayuga do. do.</i>

The following gentlemen, though not formally commissioned as delegates; yet appearing, from satisfactory evidence, to be substantial representatives of their respective Societies, or of a number of members thereof, for all the purposes contemplated by this convention, were admitted to seats, viz.

Rev. Mr. LYMAN BEECHER, -	}	<i>Connecticut.</i>
Mr. ICABOD SKINNER, -		
Rev. Mr. N. W. TAYLOR, -		
Rev. Dr. J. MORSE, <i>from the Middlesex, New-Hampshire and Dartmouth University Bible Society.</i>		
Mr. WILLIAM JAY, <i>from the Westchester Aux. Bible Society.</i>	}	<i>Bible and Common Prayer Book Society of Long-Island.</i>
Rev. Mr. HENSHAW, -		
Mr. JOSHUA SANDS, -		
*General SWIFT, -		

The members marked thus (*), came in after the convention was formed, and before the adoption of the constitution and address.

The following gentlemen were also received as members, viz.

- *JOHN MURRAY, jr.
 - *THOMAS EDDY,
 - *JOHN GRISCOM,
 - *DR. VALENTINE MOTT,
- } of the Society of Friends.

On motion,

Resolved unanimously, That it is expedient to establish, without delay, a general Bible Institution, for the circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment.

A committee consisting of Dr. NOTT, Dr. MASON, Mr. BAYARD, Mr. WILMER, Mr. BEECHER, CHARLES WRIGHT, Mr. RICE, Mr. JONES, Dr. MORSE, Mr. JAY, and Dr. BLYTHE, was appointed to prepare the plan of a constitution of the said Society; and an address to the publick, on the nature and objects thereof.

And the convention adjourned until the morning of Friday the 11th inst. at eleven o'clock.

The convention met according to adjournment, and their committee laid before them the draft of a constitution, which having been read first in the whole, and afterwards by paragraphs, and carefully considered, was unanimously adopted; and is hereunto annexed.

The committee reported also an address to the publick, which, in like manner, was unanimously approved, and is hereunto annexed.

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The convention then proceeded to the choice of managers of the *American Bible Society* for the current year, and the following persons were unanimously chosen: *viz.*

HENRY RUTGERS,
 JOHN BINGHAM,
 RICHARD VARICK,
 THOMAS FARMAR,
 STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER,
 SAMUEL BOYD,
 GEORGE SUCKLEY,
 DIVIE BETHUNE,
 WILLIAM BAYARD,
 PETER M^CCARTY,
 THOMAS SHIELDS,
 ROBERT RALSTON,
 JOHN R. B. RODGERS,
 DR. PETER WILSON,
 JEREMIAH EVARTS,
 JOHN WATTS, M. D.
 THOMAS EDDY,
 WILLIAM JOHNSON,

EBENEZER BURRILL,
 ANDREW GIFFORD,
 GEORGE GOSMAN,
 THOMAS CARPENTER,
 LEONARD BLEECKER,
 JOHN CAULDWELL,
 RUEUS KING,
 THOMAS STOKES,
 JOSHUA SANDS,
 GEORGE WARNER,
 DE WITT CLINTON,
 JOHN WARDER,
 SAMUEL BAYARD,
 DUNCAN P. CAMPBELL,
 JOHN ASPINWALL,
 JOHN MURRAY, JR.
 CHARLES WRIGHT,
 CORNELIUS HEYER.

After due notice of their appointment, the managers met in the City-Hall, on the 11th May, and unanimously elected the persons whose names are hereunto subjoined, to the offices for which they are named respectively.

Information of this choice was communicated by a committee of the managers to the convention, who having before *resolved*, that the first annual meeting of the "American Bible Society" be held in the city of New-York; and the business of the convention being now accomplished, their meeting was closed with prayer, by the Rev. Mr. WILMER, and the convention was dissolved.

OFFICERS

OF THE

AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY.

PRESIDENT,

Hon. ELIAS BOUDINOT, - - - of *New-Jersey.*

VICE-PRESIDENTS,

Hon. JOHN JAY,	-	-	}	of <i>New-York.</i>
MAT. CLARKSON, Esq.	-	-		
Hon. SMITH THOMPSON,	-	-	}	of <i>New-Hampshire.</i>
Hon. JOHN LANGDON,	-	-		
Hon. CALEB STRONG,	-	-	}	of <i>Massachusetts.</i>
Hon. WILLIAM GRAY,	-	-		
Hon. JOHN COTTON SMITH,	-	-	}	of <i>Connecticut.</i>
Hon. JONAS GALUSHA,	-	-		
Hon. WILLIAM JONES,	-	-	}	of <i>Rhode-Island.</i>
Hon. ISAAC SHELBY,	-	-		
GEORGE MADISON, Esq.	-	-	}	of <i>Kentucky.</i>
Hon. WILLIAM TILGHMAN,	-	-		
Hon. BUSHROD WASHINGTON,	-	-	}	of <i>Pennsylvania.</i>
WILLIAM WIRT, Esq.	-	-		
Hon. CHARLES C. PINCKNEY,	-	-	}	of <i>South-Carolina.</i>
Hon. WILLIAM GASTON,	-	-		
Hon. THOMAS WORTHINGTON,	-	-	}	of <i>North-Carolina.</i>
Hon. THOMAS PGSEY,	-	-		
Hon. THOMAS PGSEY,	-	-	}	of <i>Ohio.</i>
Hon. THOMAS PGSEY,	-	-		
Hon. JAMES BROWN,	-	-	}	of <i>Indiana.</i>
Hon. JAMES BROWN,	-	-		
JOHN BOLTON, Esq.	-	-	}	of <i>Louisiana.</i>
Hon. FELIX GRUNDY,	-	-		
ROBERT OLIVER, Esq.	-	-	}	of <i>Georgia.</i>
Hon. FELIX GRUNDY,	-	-		
ROBERT OLIVER, Esq.	-	-	}	of <i>Tennessee.</i>
JOSEPH NOURSE, Esq.	-	-		
JOSEPH NOURSE, Esq.	-	-	}	of <i>Maryland.</i>
JOSEPH NOURSE, Esq.	-	-		
JOSEPH NOURSE, Esq.	-	-	}	of <i>the District of Columbia.</i>
JOSEPH NOURSE, Esq.	-	-		

SECRETARY for *Foreign Correspondence,*

Rev. Dr. J. M. MASON.

SECRETARY for *Domestic Correspondence,*

Rev. Dr. J. B. ROMEYN.

Treasurer,

RICHARD VARICK, Esq.

CONSTITUTION.

- I. This Society shall be known by the name of The **AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY**, of which the sole object shall be, to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment. The only copies in the English language to be circulated by the Society, shall be of the version now in common use.

- H. This Society shall add its endeavours to those employed by other Societies, for circulating the Scriptures throughout the United States and their territories; and shall furnish them with stereotype plates, or such other assistance as circumstances may require. This Society shall also, according to its ability, extend its influence to other countries, whether Christian, Mahometan, or Pagan.

- III. All Bible Societies shall be allowed to purchase at cost from this Society, Bibles for distribution within their own districts. The members of all such Bible Societies as shall agree to place their surplus revenue, after supplying their own districts with Bibles, at the disposal of this Society, shall be entitled to vote in all meetings of the Society; and the officers of such Societies shall be, *ex officio*, directors of this.

- IV. Each subscriber of three dollars annually shall be a member.
- V. Each subscriber of thirty dollars at one time shall be a member for life.
- VI. Each subscriber of fifteen dollars annually shall be a Director.
- VII. Each subscriber of one hundred and fifty dollars at one time, or who shall, by one additional payment, increase his original subscription to one hundred and fifty dollars, shall be a Director for life.
- VIII. Directors shall be entitled to attend and vote at all meetings of the Board of Managers.
- IX. A Board of Managers shall be appointed to conduct the business of the Society, consisting of thirty-six Laymen, of whom twenty-four shall reside in the city of New York or its vicinity. One fourth part of the whole number shall go out of office at the expiration of each year, but shall be re-eligible.

Every Minister of the Gospel, who is a member of the Society, shall be entitled to meet and vote with the Board of Managers, and be possessed of the same powers as a Manager himself.

The Managers shall appoint all officers and call special general meetings, and fill such vacancies as may occur, by death or otherwise, in their own Board.

X. Each member of the Society shall be entitled, under the direction of the Board of Managers, to purchase Bibles and Testaments, at the Society's prices, which shall be as low as possible.

XI. The annual meetings of the Society, shall be held at New York or Philadelphia, at the option of the Society, on the second Thursday of May, in each year; when the Managers shall be chosen, the accounts presented, and the proceedings of the foregoing year reported.

XII. The President, Vice Presidents, Treasurer, and Secretaries, for the time being, shall be considered, *ex-officio*, members of the Board of Managers.

XIII. At the general meetings of the Society, and the meetings of the Managers, the President, or in his absence the Vice President first on the list then present; and in the absence of all the Vice Presidents, such member as shall be appointed for that purpose, shall preside at the meeting.

XIV. The Managers shall meet on the first Wed-

nesday in each month, or oftener, if necessary, at such place in the city of New-York, as they shall from time to time adjourn to.

XV. The Managers shall have the power of appointing such persons as have rendered essential services to the Society, either Members for life, or Directors for life.

XVI. The whole minutes of every meeting shall be signed by the Chairman.

XVII. No alteration shall be made to this Constitution, except by the Society at an annual meeting, on the recommendation of the Board of Managers.

TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE

UNITED STATES.

EVERY person of observation has remarked that the times are pregnant with great events. The political world has undergone changes stupendous, unexpected, and calculated to inspire thoughtful men with the most boding anticipations.

That there are in reserve, occurrences of deep, of lasting, and of general interest, appears to be the common sentiment. Such a sentiment has not been excited without a cause, and does not exist without an object. The cause is to be sought in that Providence which adapts, with wonderful exactitude, means to ends; and the object is too plain to be mistaken by those who carry a sense of religion into their speculations upon the present and the future condition of our afflicted race.

An excitement, as extraordinary as it is powerful, has roused the nations to the importance of spreading the knowledge of the one living and true God, as revealed in his Son, the Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. This excitement is the more worthy of notice, as it has followed a period

of philosophy, falsely so called, and has gone in the track of those very schemes which, under the imposing names of reason and liberality, were attempting to seduce mankind from all which can bless the life that is, or shed a cheering radiance on the life that is to come.

We hail the re-action, as auspicious to whatever is exquisite in human enjoyment, or precious to human hope. We would fly to the aid of all that is holy, against all that is profane; of the purest interest of the community, the family, and the individual, against the conspiracy of darkness, disaster, and death—to help on the mighty work of Christian charity—to claim our place in the age of Bibles.

We have, indeed, the secondary praise, but still the praise, of treading in the footsteps of those who have set an example without a parallel—an example of the most unbounded benevolence and beneficence: and it cannot be to us a source of any pain, that it has been set by those who are of one blood with the most of ourselves; and has been embodied in a form so noble and so Catholic, as "*The British and Foreign Bible Society.*"

The impulse which that institution, ten thousand times more glorious than all the exploits of the sword, has given to the conscience of Europe, and to the slumbering hope of millions in the region

and shadow of death, demonstrates to Christians of every country what they *cannot* do by insulated zeal; and what they *can* do by co-operation.

In the United States we want nothing but concert to perform achievements astonishing to ourselves, dismaying to the adversaries of truth and piety; and most encouraging to every evangelical effort, on the surface of the globe.

No spectacle can be so illustrious in itself, so touching to man, or so grateful to God, as a nation pouring forth its devotion, its talent, and its treasures, for that kingdom of the Saviour which is righteousness and peace.

If there be a single measure which can overrule objection, subdue opposition, and command exertion, this is the measure. That all our voices, all our affections, all our hands, should be joined in the grand design of promoting "peace on earth and good will toward man"—that they should resist the advance of misery—should carry the light of instruction into the dominions of ignorance; and the balm of joy to the soul of anguish; and all this by diffusing the oracles of God—addresses to the understanding an argument which cannot be encountered; and to the heart an appeal which its holiest emotions rise up to second.

Under such impressions, and with such views, fathers, brethren, fellow-citizens, the *American Bible Society* has been formed. Local feelings, party prejudices, sectarian jealousies, are excluded by its very nature. Its members are leagued in that, and in that alone, which calls up every hallowed, and puts down every unhallowed, principle—the dissemination of the Scriptures in the received versions where they exist, and in the most faithful where they may be required. In such a work, whatever is dignified, kind, venerable, true, has ample scope: while sectarian littleness and rivalries can find no avenue of admission.

The only question is, whether an object of such undisputed magnitude can be best attained by a national Society, or by independent associations in friendly understanding and correspondence.

Without entering into the details of this inquiry, we may be permitted to state, in a few words, our reasons of preference to a national Society supported by local Societies and by individuals throughout our country.

Concentrated action is powerful action. The same powers, when applied by a common direction, will produce results impossible to their divided and partial exercise. A national object unites national feeling and concurrence. Unity of a great system combines energy of effect with economy of

means. Accumulated intelligence interests and animates the public mind. And the Catholick efforts of a country, thus harmonized, give her a place in the moral convention of the world; and enable her to act directly upon the universal plans of happiness which are now pervading the nations.

It is true, that the prodigious territory of the United States—the increase of their population, which is gaining every day upon their moral cultivation—and the dreadful consequences which will ensue from a people's outgrowing the knowledge of eternal life; and reverting to a species of heathenism, which shall have all the address and profligacy of civilized society, without any religious control, present a sphere of action, which may for a long time employ and engross the cares of this Society, and of all the local Bible Societies of the land.

In the distinct anticipation of such an urgency, one of the main objects of the *American Bible Society*, is, not merely to provide a sufficiency of well printed and accurate editions of the Scriptures; but also to furnish great districts of the American continent with well executed Stereotype plates, for their cheap and extensive diffusion throughout regions which are now scantily supplied, at a discouraging expense; and which, nevertheless, open a wide and prepared field for the reception of revealed truth.

Yet, let it not be supposed, that geographical or political limits are to be the limits of the *American Bible Society*. That designation is meant to indicate, not the restriction of their labour, but the source of its emanation. They will embrace, with thankfulness and pleasure, every opportunity of raying out, by means of the Bible, according to their ability, the light of life and immortality, to such parts of the world, as are destitute of the blessing, and are within their reach. In this high vocation, their ambition is to be fellow-workers with them who are fellow-workers with God.

People of the United States ;

Have you ever been invited to an enterprize of such grandeur and glory ? Do you not value the Holy Scriptures ? Value them as containing your sweetest hope ; your most thrilling joy ? Can you submit to the thought that *you* should be torpid in your endeavours to disperse them, while the rest of Christendom is awake and alert ? Shall *you* hang back, in heartless indifference, when Princes come down from their thrones, to bless the cottage of the poor with the gospel of peace ; and Imperial Sovereigns are gathering their fairest honours from spreading abroad the oracles of the Lord your God ? Is it possible that *you* should not see, in this state of human things, a mighty motion of Divine Providence ? The most Heavenly charity treads close upon the march of conflict and blood ! The world is at peace ! Scarce has the soldier time

to unbind his helmet, and to wipe away the sweat from his brow, ere the voice of mercy succeeds to the clarion of battle, and calls the nations from enmity to love! Crowned heads bow to the head which is to wear "many crowns;" and, for the first time since the promulgation of Christianity, appear to act in unison for the recognition of its gracious principles, as being fraught alike with happiness to man and honour to God.

What has created so strange, so beneficent an alteration? This is no doubt the doing of the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes. But what instrument has he thought fit chiefly to use? That which contributes, in all latitudes and climes, to make Christians feel their unity, to rebuke the spirit of strife, and to open upon them the day of brotherly concord—the Bible! the Bible!—through Bible Societies!

Come then, fellow-citizens, fellow-Christians, let us join in the sacred covenant. Let no heart be cold; no hand be idle: no purse reluctant! Come, while room is left for us in the ranks whose toil is goodness, and whose recompense is victory. Come cheerfully, eagerly, generally. Be it impressed on your souls, that a contribution, saved from even a cheap indulgence, may send a Bible to a desolate family; may become a radiating point of "grace and truth" to a neighbourhood of error and vice: and that a number of

such contributions made at really no expense, may illumine a large tract of country, and successive generations of immortals, in that celestial knowledge, which shall secure their present and their future felicity.

But whatever be the proportion between expectation and experience, thus much is certain: We shall satisfy our conviction of duty—we shall have the praise of high endeavours for the highest ends—we shall minister to the blessedness of thousands, and tens of thousands, of whom we may never see the faces, nor hear the names. We shall set forward a system of happiness which will go on with accelerated motion and augmented vigour, after we shall have finished our career; and confer upon our children, and our children's children, the delight of seeing the wilderness turned into a fruitful field, by the blessing of God upon that seed which their fathers sowed, and themselves watered. In fine we shall do our part toward that expansion and intensity of light divine, which shall sit, in its progress, the palaces of the great, and hamlets of the small, until the whole "earth be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea!"

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