

Purity of National Religion

By J. H. Waggoner

A CHARACTERISTIC EXPRESSION

"Rev. M. A. Gault," a constant contributor to the *Christian Statesman*, speaks as follows in that paper:-

"The individual may confess Christ through motives of hypocrisy, but not so of the nation. Such a confession in its Constitution can only be made through the prevailing sentiment of the nation. And, therefore, as true conversion in the individual, so this amendment in our National Constitution includes the triumph of every moral reform."

This is, in every respect, a most singular expression, but just such as we might expect from a "National Reformer." It is the very opposite of everything that is reasonable on the subject. Even the confessions of "Reformers" themselves show its inconsistency. There may be many reasons for people voting for the Amendment who have no conscientious regard for Christianity. Dr. Browne, in the Pittsburg National Convention of 1874, spoke as follows:-

"There is no more persistent man alive than the typical representative American office-seeker. Of that class, the most of those who have not

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yet found whether they are for Christ or not, or who are openly decrying this movement, are ready to be its firm friends as soon as they acquire wisdom to discern the signs of the times, and are assured of its speedy success. They may pull back now at the hind axle, or scotch the wheels of the car of progress; but when they see it move, they will quickly jump in to get front seats, and avow that they always thought it was a good thing," etc.

Yes, any prospect or promise of success will insure their hearty co-operation if there is to them any hope of selfish gain in the way of office. This will be the necessary result of the success of this boasted "reform;" it will attract all the old political hacks to its side, with the understanding that they must profess their adherence to Christianity in order to have any show for office. This result we have pointed out from the beginning of the movement; it will serve to set a premium upon hypocrisy, for the greatest demagogue will, under such circumstances, make the strongest profession and the longest prayers. And it must be remembered that the vote of each one of these time-serving hypocrites would have the same weight and influence toward "Christianizing" our nation that the vote of the Rev. Mr. Gault himself would have. And yet he dares to assert that the religious profession of the nation would be free

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from the uncertainties or the liability to hypocrisy that attends an individual profession!

In the same convention in which Dr. Browne outlined the course of office-seekers in relation to the proposed Amendment, Dr. Hays spoke to the same point. He said, when the masses begin to move, "hundreds of politicians who would not for the world commit themselves to it now, will bawl themselves hoarse in applause, and swear they knew it would be so, and were on that side from the beginning."

Thus do the "Reformers" themselves recognize the fact that the ambitious, the selfish, the hypocritical politicians will give their adherence to their movement for the sake of worldly gain. And yet again they will assert that in carrying this Amendment into effect there will be none of the "motives of hypocrisy" which may attend individual confessions of Christianity! We can hardly give them credit for being deceived in a matter so plainly to be seen by all.

The Lansing, Mich., *State Republican* gave a very truthful representation of the case when it said: "Thousands of men, if called upon to vote for such an Amendment, would hesitate to vote against God, although they might not believe that the Amendment is necessary, or that it is right; . . . such an Amendment would be likely to receive an affirmative vote which

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would by no means indicate the true sentiment of the people. . . . Men who make politics a trade would hesitate to record their names against the proposed Constitutional Amendment, advocated by the great religious denominations of the land, and indorsed by such men as Bishop Simpson, Bishop McIlvaine, Bishop Eastburn, President Finney, Professor Lewis, Professor Seelye, Bishop Huntington, Bishop Kerfoot, Dr. Patterson, Dr. Cuyler, and many other divines who are the representative men of their respective denominations."

The editor of the Cincinnati *Gazette* is a Christian, and a man of acknowledged ability. In speaking on the subject of the Amendment he said:-

"The Government will continue to be administered by men of ordinary passions, such as are elected by the average intelligence and virtue, and the average ignorance and corruption of the voting population. Viciousness, and ignorance, and corruption will continue to be powers in the body politic the same as before, and these will continue to elect legislators, executives, and judges of their own sort."

And such will be the millennium of the National Reformers. No thoughtful and candid person will deny that these statements are reasonable and just, and they are also justified by the admissions of Doctors Browne and Hays.

Again, the absurdity of the remarks of Mr. Gault is shown in this: The majority of the voters of the United States is composed of people who are irreligious or indifferent to religion.

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Of this latter class are multitudes who attend meetings, show *respect* to Christianity, but have no personal, heart-felt interest in it. Many of these would no doubt vote for the Amendment. If, then, the Amendment were adopted it would not be by a vote indicative of the "prevailing sentiment of the nation." But in order that this national confession of Christ should be free from the worldly motives which may taint the individual confession, as Mr. Gault claims that it would be,

there must not be merely a "prevailing sentiment," but a *universal sentiment* of adherence to pure Christianity; but none but the wildest dreamer expects that such a state will ever mark our national politics. An individual confession of Christ must be single-minded; if the motives of the heart are mixed, partly for Christ and partly for Baal, the confession is worthless. How, then, can a national confession of Christianity be more certainly and necessarily pure than an individual confession, while a large proportion of the individuals composing the nation are irreligious? And not only so, but according to Mr. Gault's own statement, the confession of that part of the individuals professing religion may be tainted with "motives of hypocrisy," yet the religion of the nation in the aggregate would be high above all hypocritical motives. And therefore it is an accepted fact, according to the philosophy of these reformers, that the religion of the nation would be necessarily higher and purer than the religion of the individuals composing the nation! Yea, more; though only a part of

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the nation is religious at all, the religion of the whole nation would be purer than that of the religious part of the nation. Just where this super-abundance of pure national religion would be lodged is not easy to see. If it were in the hearts of the people as individuals, then individual confessions of Christ would be as free from "motives of hypocrisy" as the national confession would be; but Rev. Mr. Gault says they are not. Here is abundant room for Mr. Gault to "rise and explain."

It is also in order for these professed National Reformers to point to a national confession of Christianity, from the time of Constantine to the present, which has been worthy of our deep respect because of its purity or freedom from motives of hypocrisy. While Christianity was separate from the State, and while Christians were oppressed and persecuted by the State, then were they devoted and consecrated, and Christianity proved its heavenly origin in the lives of its adherents. But when it was allied to the State, and received State patronage, then the church became corrupt, and her highest offices were soon filled by worldly, designing men who confessed Christ "through motives of hypocrisy." As before remarked, the legitimate result of uniting the Church to the State is putting a premium on hypocrisy; it is inviting selfish office-seekers and wily politicians to make a profession of religion a material part of their "stock in trade." All the errors and wrongs and persecutions of the Papal system are traceable to the union of the secular and

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ecclesiastical power. We see its evils everywhere in the Greek Church. The highest form of national religion is found in England, and there we see that "livings" are sold like rail road stocks; openly irreligious men, who care only for games and sports, hold responsible places in the church, and sub-let the work of the gospel at enormous profits! Such a thing is possible only where there is "national religion."

We must express our surprise that men of education and fair intelligence will utter such absurdities and sophistries as are everywhere found in the literature of the "National Reform" people. They seem to be actually intoxicated with the hope of worldly aggrandizement through a change in the structure of our Government.

They show themselves utterly at fault in treating of State matters. If anything were needed to prove that it is not wise to intrust the reins of civil power to the hands of ecclesiastics, as such, they furnish the proof in the crudity of their views in questions of national politics. It would be well for the cause of religion if they would cease to electioneer for civil power, and give themselves to the ministry of the word. And it will be well for the nation, well for our civil and religious liberties, if the people shall receive the warning, and reject all overtures for such a corrupting alliance, which cannot fail to degrade religion, and to deprive some classes of equal rights and privileges in the Government. J. H. W.

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