

## THE NATIONAL REFORM ASSOCIATION.

We shall have to worry along awhile yet without God in the Constitution. On March 27, the proposed amendment to the preamble to our National constitution, "acknowledging the supreme authority and just government of the Almighty God in all the affairs of men and nations," was tabled by the House Judiciary committee with only one dissenting vote, that of Representative Stone of Pennsylvania.

Every year or two a lot of religious cranks, with more zeal than common sense, make a vigorous effort to get their God-in-the-constitution amendment before the House. The present failure which amounts to a snubbing, ought to discourage them forever. All that ground was gone over during the Confederation and before our Constitution was adopted, and our fore-fathers were wise enough and just enough to prepare a constitution for the whole people, not for any sect.

Equal rights to all and special privileges to none, was their motto. A little history bearing upon this matter may interest some if not all our readers. On June 12, 1876, the Virginia colony in its House of Burgesses adopted a Declaration of Rights, which was a very liberal document indeed. The last, or 16th section is as follows:

"That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence, and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love and charity towards each other." There is evidence that Thomas Jefferson had a good deal to do with that document for every one of the sixteen sections, in substance, found a place in the Declaration of Independence and National Constitution. Immediately after the Declaration of Independence was passed and published to the world, the Presbytery of Virginia addressed a memorial to the Virginia General Assembly, eulogizing the Declaration and recognizing the new nation, also praying that all laws then in force in the commonwealth of Virginia favoring religious domination be speedily repealed.

We wish we had space for the whole of that remarkable document, for it would be interesting reading about this time when there is such a persistent struggle going on to have the Christian religion

recognized by the law of the land. We cannot refrain, however, from inserting the following extracts, in which will be found unanswerable argument against the union of Church and State:

"Certain it is that every argument for civil liberty gains additional strength when applied to liberty in the concerns of religion; and there is no argument in favor of establishing the Christian religion but may be pleaded, with equal propriety for establishing the tenets of Mohammed by those who believe the Koran. . . . . We beg leave farther to represent, that religious establishments are highly injurious to the temporal interests of any community. . . . . Neither can it be made to appear that the gospel needs any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our Savior declares his kingdom is not of this world, he renounces all dependence upon State power; and as his weapons are spiritual, and were only designed to have influence on the judgement and heart of men, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in quiet possession of their inalienable religious privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish by its own native excellence. . . . . Therefore we ask no ecclesiastical establishments for ourselves; neither can we approve of them when granted to others."

The Quakers and Baptists at once sent a similar petition, but the Episcopalians (It will be remembered the Episcopalian was the established church of Virginia,) and the Methodists sent up a counter petition couched in language intolerent enough to have suited old Calvin himself.

But Jefferson was in that assembly and championed the cause of liberty. "It was" he says, "the severest contest in which I was ever engaged." But the state church advocates were beaten and the assembly, in December of that year, repealed all laws which compelled contributions to the Episcopal church, and discontinued state support of the Episcopal clergy. An attempt was then made to pass a law taxing the whole colony for the support of all religious denominations, but the Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers were on hand and finally defeated the bill which took about three years to accomplish. The state-church party, however, couldn't rest easy, and after the war—1784—made another attempt to re-establish the union of church and state.

Strange as it may seem, Patrick Henry was the leading light in this truly unpatriotic movement. But the irrepressible Jefferson was there, bravely assisted by James Madison, and after a long siege, not only defeated that bill but succeeded