

Keep God
in
American
History.

BY
Harry F. Atwood



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"Back to the Republic"

"The Constitution Our Safeguard"

LAIRD & LEE, *Publishers*

CHICAGO ILL.

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KEEP GOD IN
AMERICAN
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THE PROUDEST heritage of this country is that all through its history there has run, like a golden thread, a deeply religious strain. It would seem that our great leaders in the past have sensed the sublime truth which Dr. Frank W. Gunsaulus phrased so strikingly when he said: "Statesmanship is seeing where almighty God is going and then getting things out of His way."

Bishop Frank M. Bristol, referring to the Discovery of America, said: "When it is remembered that Columbus desired to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, that his expedition of discovery was begun in prayer, that he insisted upon the worship of God as one of the duties of the ship's company, that after a voyage of seventy days on an unknown sea the sight of the new world was greeted by the exultant sailors with



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the 'Te Deum,' that magnificent thanksgiving to God, that Columbus sprang upon the new world, planted the Cross and knelt in prayer; and when the history of America is remembered from that great hour to this, the Christian thinker sees in it all the hand of God, leading a devout genius to the execution of a Divine plan."


The great theologian, dear old Dr. George Northrup, once declared: "God Almighty writes a legible hand." All over the walls of this republic we find the handwriting of God. We find it written into our state papers, in the words spoken by our statesmen, on the coins that we circulate, in the songs that we sing, in the literature that has been written, and in the aspirations of our people. More, far more than any other country, we have been essentially a religious and God-loving nation; and it is that fact more than




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anything else which has put character into our statesmen, courage into our soldiers, justice into our government, and conscience into our people.

The Mayflower Compact

HE historic Mayflower Compact, signed in the cabin of the little vessel which brought the Pilgrim Fathers to America, begins: "In the name of God, Amen. And having undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith—" Those are the opening words of the first State paper ever adopted for the government of a community on American soil.

Declaration of Independence

N the Declaration of Independence we find such sentences as "Appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our



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intentions . . . and for support of this declaration with a firm reliance upon Divine Providence.”

The Constitution

IN our Constitutional Convention were assembled the greatest body of men, from the standpoint of physical vigor, mental acumen and moral courage, that ever met together for human achievement. When the great William Pitt read our Constitution he exclaimed: “It will be the wonder and admiration of all future generations and the model of all future constitutions.” It is to the everlasting discredit of our various States (which by the Constitution are guaranteed a republic as the form of government) and of all foreign countries, that they have failed to make it their model, and that Pitt’s prophecy has not been realized.

The writing and adoption of our Con-



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stitution was unquestionably the greatest and most important human achievement since the Creation, and as an event it ranks in history second only to the Birth of Christ. That marvelous body of men met day after day for four weeks and had not agreed on a single sentence or a single word. On the last morning of the fifth week, in the midst of a very heated discussion, they were about to adjourn and abandon the great purpose for which they had met, when Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the wisest man in the convention, mature in years, ripe in wisdom and consummate in tact, arose, and, addressing George Washington in the chair, spoke as follows:

Benjamin Franklin



MR. PRESIDENT, the small progress we have made after four or five weeks' close attention and continual reasonings with each other,



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our different sentiments on almost every question, several of the last producing as many noes as ayes, is, methinks, a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the human understanding. We indeed seem to feel our own want of political wisdom, since we have been running all about in search of it. We have gone back to ancient history for models of government and examined the different forms of those republics which, having been originally formed with the seeds of their own dissolutions, now no longer exist; and we have viewed modern states all around Europe, but find none of their constitutions suitable in our circumstances.

“In this situation of this assembly, groping, as it were, in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, sir, that we have not



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hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understandings?

“I have lived, sir, a long time; and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings, that ‘except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel; we shall be divided by our little, partial, local interests, our project will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a byword down to future ages. And, what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from



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this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing government by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war, conquest.

“I therefore beg leave to move:

“That hereafter prayers, imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.”

And from that moment they began to make progress in the framing and adoption of that fame-crowned document, which Gladstone asserted was “the greatest piece of work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man.”

There were men in the Constitutional Convention who refused to sign that immortal document. Alexander Hamil-



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ton was the only man from the great State of New York who signed it, but those who refused have all long since been forgotten. The men who refused to sign the Constitution were urging the inclusion of popular fallacies that are as old as Methuselah and played their part in the downfall of Greece, Rome and other countries. And the same old fallacies, during recent years, have been advocated by modern demagogues in this country as new panaceas. When the men who favored those socialistic nostrums learned that they could not appeal to the reason of the men who wrote and signed the Constitution, they tried to appeal to their fear, and they said, in effect, "Unless you write into this Constitution some popular fallacies to fool and please the people, the Constitution will never be adopted."



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George Washington

GEORGE WASHINGTON had taken no part in the discussion of the convention up to that time, but when he heard that statement he rose from the president's chair and in tones of suppressed emotion, said: "It is too probable that no plan we propose will be adopted; perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained; if, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the event is in the hands of God." Professor Fiske has well said that those words ought to be written on the walls of every legislative hall, state and national, in this country, and ought to be carved upon the walls of every convention room where people meet to write a platform or adopt a resolution or nominate a candidate. It is illus-



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trative of the type of reasoning that prevailed in the Constitutional Convention.

Those men were not trying to follow the crowd; they were trying to mold public opinion and give the people what they needed. The great difficulty during recent years is that we have had crowd followers instead of statesmen who were leaders. The crowd does not want to be followed; it wants to be *guided*; and the great men, the men who have molded public sentiment, frequently have had to stand in the minority for a time. But history points to these men finally as the ones who molded public opinion and who stood for what they believed to be right.

George Washington wrote to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut: "I can almost trace the finger of Divine Providence through those dark and mysterious days which first led the colonists to assemble



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in convention, thereby laying the foundation for peace and prosperity, when we had too much reason to fear that misery and confusion were coming too rapidly upon us."

In his Farewell Address, he said, among other things: "Of all habits and customs leading to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."

Alexander Hamilton



ALEXANDER HAMILTON exclaimed: "The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of Divinity itself." Again, he said: "A nation without a national gov-



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ernment is in my view an awful spectacle. The establishment of a constitution in time of profound peace by the voluntary action of all the people is a prodigy. It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief.”

John Marshall

CHIEF Justice John Marshall, generally regarded as the greatest judge that ever sat on the bench, in his seventy-fifth year, said: “Advert, sir, to the duties of a judge. The judicial department comes home in its effects to every man’s fireside. It passes on his property, his reputation, his all. Is it not to the last degree important that he should be rendered perfectly and completely independent, with nothing to influence or control him but God and his Conscience?”



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Daniel Webster

DANIEL WEBSTER, expounder and defender of the Constitution, who stands at the mountain peak of New England history and ranks second only to Alexander Hamilton as a governmental genius, said: "I mean to stand upon the Constitution. I need no other platform. The ends I aim at shall be my country's, my God's, and truth's."

John Ireland

THE great patriot, Archbishop Ireland, once exclaimed: "Tell men there is a God in Israel; that authority is Divine; that God's' majesty encircles with its rays the legislators and rulers of nations. God is the master of man and God's will is man's supreme law. Authority is from God and civil governments rule by Divine right. The underlying religious spirit of the people is the surest hope of the Republic."



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“In God is Our Trust”



INTO our national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Francis Scott Key wrote: “And this is our motto, ‘In God is our trust,’” and we have written that motto, substantially, upon the coins that we circulate in our country.

In the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” Julia Ward Howe wrote these beautiful lines:

“Mine eyes have seen the glory
Of the coming of the Lord.
* * * * *

“In the beauty of the lilies
Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom
That transfigures you and me.
As He died to make men holy,
Let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.
Glory, glory, hallelujah,
His truth is marching on.”

Samuel Francis Smith wrote as the



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closing verse of our inspiring national hymn:

“Our Fathers’ God, to Thee,
Author of Liberty,
To Thee we sing!
Long may our land be bright
With Freedom’s holy light!
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King.”

Abraham Lincoln



COMING down to the next great epoch of American history, when it was necessary to preserve the Union and save the Republic founded upon our Constitution, and uphold the work of Alexander Hamilton and his associates: Someone on a certain occasion said to Abraham Lincoln: “I hope God is on our side,” to which Lincoln replied: “My concern is not so much whether God is on our side. My great concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”



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Lincoln based the great issue of this Republic upon a text taken from the Bible, "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

In his farewell address to his old neighbors at Springfield, he said, among other things: "Today I leave you. I go to assume a task more difficult than that which devolved upon George Washington. Unless the Great God who inspired him shall be with and inspire me, I must fail; but if the same Omniscient Mind and Almighty Arm that directed and protected him shall guide and support me, I shall not fail; I shall succeed. Let us pray that the God of our fathers will not forsake us now. To Him I commend you all. Permit me to ask that with equal sincerity and faith you will invoke His wisdom and guidance for me,—the Great God who can stay here with you and go there with me and be everywhere for good!"



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In his inaugural address, when passion was running high, Lincoln wrote: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

Into the Emancipation Proclamation he wrote: "And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, I invoke the deliberate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

In his immortal Gettysburg Address he said: "That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom."

And in Lincoln's second inaugural, written the month before his passage into the Great Beyond, occur these solemn words:

"Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth



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piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' ”

James A. Garfield



AT the time of Lincoln's assassination, crowds had gathered in New York City, and their minds were inflamed with the thought, "Our leader is gone; our cause is lost." Men killed one another upon the streets. A group was organized to destroy the World Building, in which the newspaper was published which had opposed Lincoln's administration. James A. Garfield



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happened to be in the city, and it was suggested that his presence and personality upon the platform where the telegrams had been read announcing Lincoln's condition might tend to bring calm to the situation. He raised his hand and wove together some of the choicest gems of the Psalms that his good old mother had taught him in childhood as she held him upon her knee.

He said: "Fellow-Citizens: Clouds and darkness are 'round about Him. His pavilion is dark waters and thick clouds of the sky. Justice and judgment are the establishment of His throne. Mercy and truth shall go before His face. Fellow-Citizens: God reigns, and the Government at Washington still lives." Those words wrought like magic, and from that moment law and order was restored in the city of New York.



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Rutherford B. Hayes

RUTHERFORD B. HAYES said:
“Looking for the guidance of
that Divine hand by which the
destinies of nations and individuals are
shaped—.”

Benjamin Harrison

PRESIDENT HARRISON said to his
neighbors and friends on leaving
Indianapolis for Washington:
“There is a great sense of loneliness in
the discharge of high public duties. The
moment of decision is one of isolation.
But there is One whose help comes even
into the quiet chamber of judgment and
to His wise and unfailing guidance will
I look for direction and safety.”

At the time of his inaugural he said:
“God has placed upon our head a di-
adem and has laid at our feet power and
wealth beyond definition or calculation:
but we must not forget that we take



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these gifts upon condition that justice and mercy shall hold the reins of power.”

Grover Cleveland

GROVER CLEVELAND declared: “Above all I know there is a Supreme Being who rules the affairs of men and whose goodness and mercy have always followed the American people, and I know He will not turn from us now if we humbly and reverently seek His powerful aid.”

William McKinley's Sublime Trust in God

IN opening his inaugural address, William McKinley said: “Invoking the guidance of Almighty God, our faith teaches us that there is no safer reliance than upon the God of our fathers, who has so singularly favored the American people in every national trial and who will not forsake us



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so long as we obey His commandments and walk humbly in His footsteps." And in closing, he added: "I will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. This is the obligation I have reverently taken before the Lord Most High. To keep it will be my single purpose, my constant prayer."

In his last public address, at Buffalo, he said: "God and man have linked the nations together." Then, as he stood there extending the hand of friendship to his assassin and received two bullet wounds in return, the scene enacted more nearly approaches the spirit of the Crucifixion than any event in history with which I am familiar. When the crowd would rush to do violence to his destroyer, in the divine spirit of forgiveness he said: "Let no man hurt him." And, forgetting self and remembering his invalid wife, he said: "Break the news gently to her."



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Then, during the last days in the death chamber, he murmured: "Raise my pillow a little, so that I can look out at the green grass, the green trees and the flowers. How beautiful God has made them!" And at the last hour his words: "It is His way; His will, not ours, be done," caused the nation to stand with uncovered heads and sing his favorite hymn: "Nearer, My God, To Thee."

And so, if space permitted, we might go on and cite many other evidences of God in American history, and other sentiments worthy of quotation.

Hold Fast to these Spiritual Jewels



YIELD to no one in my respect and admiration for the marvelous achievements in commerce, science and invention that have been made in the almost miraculous century just past, but if the American people



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were required to choose between wiping them all out or crushing out these spiritual jewels in our history, I would say, hold fast to these jewels, for in my judgment this element of religious faith, more than anything else, has been responsible for giving us the undisputed leading place among the nations of the world.

Dangerous Tendencies



WITH the dawn of the twentieth century came the age of egomania and the hydrophobia of human self-assertion. The first personal pronoun was substituted for reliance upon Divine Providence. Personalities took the place of principles, demagogues replaced statesmen, rhetoric was mistaken for reason. An effort was made to remove "In God We Trust" from our coins, and epithets of denunciation took the place of a thorough understanding of the spirit of our institutions.



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We have been drifting from the guideposts of a Republic toward the danger signals of a Democracy, from constitutional restraints toward emotional impulses. This innovation has not been confined to any party or any country. It seems to have been general, and every twenty-four hours' confusion of thought becomes more confused, chaos grows more chaotic, and the crowd increases in mob-mindedness. It is humiliating to dwell upon the deplorable aspects of the political life of this country during the last nineteen years as we have drifted toward class consciousness and appeal to the mob mind.

Our Hope

BUT we must have faith that America has neither abandoned God, nor been abandoned by God. The same Divine Providence that watched over the founders of this Re-



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public, that guided them in the framing of our Constitution, is still with us to guide and strengthen us. There is need of a penitent return to reliance upon Divine Providence, both in attitude toward that matchless document wrought out with prayer and faith; and in sublime trust in the beneficent guidance of Almighty God. No nation can perish which will in all sincerity humbly pray:



*G*OD *forgive* us for our follies and blindness;

Help us to abandon the hypocrisy of popular fallacies;

Give us a thorough understanding of the Constitution;

Save us from demagogism, that we may return again to reliance upon Divine Providence;

Grant us renewed faith in the Word of God;

Imbue us with common sense and



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common honesty in safeguarding this glorious Republic;

Reveal to us a comprehensive appreciation of the marvelous heritage bequeathed to us by the founders and guardians of this Republic;

Guide us that we may administer our government as a continued blessing to the American people and a beacon light to all the other governments of the world.



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