

The United States have deliberately departed from this ancient and solid foundation. They claim that 'the people are the source of all political power.' They have left out of their Constitution any acknowledgment of the existence of a Supreme Being. They have prohibited not merely the establishment of religion in the land, but also any national preference of Christianity over Judaism, Mahomedanism, or infidelity. The American people are undoubtedly remarkable, in certain aspects, as a God-fearing community, yet they have always rejected the thought of any necessary connection between religion and politics. Now-a-days, it is unhappily a prevalent idea that the exercise of no political rights should be affected by a man's repudiation of a belief in God. The painful scenes recently exhibited in the House of Commons, in the Bradlaugh case, are sufficient evidence of this. But the distinction to which I point, in comparing the English and American Constitutions, is apparent by the fact, that in the United States there is nothing to hinder the presence of an avowed atheist in Congress, whilst in England the proposal to admit Bradlaugh into Parliament is justly regarded as breaking down the barrier which has hitherto restrained those who openly discard belief in the existence of God, and in the divine obligation of an oath, from sharing in the councils of the nation.* Notwithstanding the time-serving spirit of the Government, who were afraid to take a decided stand on this question, the religious instincts of the people—more faithful

than their leaders to the true principles of the Constitution—have thus far prevailed to close the doors of parliament against an avowed infidel and blasphemer.

At the time of the separation of the American colonies from Great Britain, the expediency of a permanent alliance between religion and politics had not become an open question. The existence of this alliance was indisputable. It was wrought into the fabric of our national polity. Such a connection does not necessarily require the perpetual union between Church and State, or forbid different Christian denominations to exist, as in Canada, upon a footing of perfect equality. But it implies and involves the distinct responsibility of a Christian government to respect the revealed laws of God, to enforce the decorous observance of the Christian Sabbath, and generally to protect and uphold the institutions of Christianity. In these particulars Great Britain has been an example to all other nations.

On the other hand; we cannot be unmindful of the fact, that in the United States—notwithstanding the abundance of individual piety amongst the people—there is a grievous lack of the restraining influences of government to repress the abuses of free thought, in social and religious matters. Witness the liberty allowed in that country to the origin and establishment of Mormonism in the western territories, and to the reckless blasphemies of Ingersoll—both of them awful growths and developments of free thought, working incalculable mischief to multitudes—but wholly disregarded by the civil authorities. Such abominable and injurious outcomes of the right of pri-

* It is true that the taking of an oath or an affirmation, by a member elect, is equally prescribed by American as by English law. But there is a material difference in the character of this obligation in the two countries. In England, the affirmation by a member elected to Parliament is essentially a religious act, as much so as taking the oath. The primary law enjoins an oath. But to meet the scruples of certain Christian denominations, who object to the use of an oath, at any time, they and they only are permitted, on such occa-

sions, to make an affirmation instead. In the United States, the alternative use of an affirmation in lieu of an oath has no such origin. It is expressly permitted, by an article of the Constitution, to any person who for any reason—as, for example, because, like Bradlaugh, he disbelieved in the existence of God,—might prefer to affirm, to do so; instead of taking the prescribed oath.