



The Tarborough Press,

BY GEORGE HOWARD. Published weekly, at Two Dollars and Three Cents per year, if paid in advance...

Communications.

FOR THE TARBORO' PRESS.

Dear Sir: I send you the within for publication in your paper, if you will be so good as to do so...

JOSHUA LAWRENCE. Mr. George Howard.

Mr. George Howard, Editor of the Tarboro' Press.

Dear Sir: I saw in a column of your valuable paper a few days past, my name held up in nomination as a member of the Convention of the State of North Carolina...

of laying down fundamental law for the State, which may be for the happiness or misery of thousands unborn. Nevertheless, fellow citizens, be assured that I am the firm friend of civil and religious liberty to the full extent of my abilities with all faithfulness, where it shall not interfere with my ministerial office, and am ready to serve the church of my native State in all emergencies—yet render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are his—for he has the first claim on my services, therefore you must excuse me from filling that office.

Yet I beg your indulgence so far as to offer you a few thoughts on the proposed amendments of the Constitution of the State, (in a hurry of business)—that is, on the 32d article, which reads thus:

XXXII. That no person, who shall deny the being of God, or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority either of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the state, shall be capable of holding any office, or place of trust or profit, in the civil department, within this state.

Now I would ask, why did our forefathers, the framers of the Constitution of this State, put this clause in the Constitution—can you say? Is it not written as with a sunbeam in the very expressions of the article? That they saw, whether real or imaginary, great danger to society by letting a man into office of trust or profit that denied the being of a God—that denied the truth of the Protestant religion—that denied the divine authority of the Old or New Testaments—or that held religious principles contrary to the freedom and safety of the State. And because they thought, whether really so or not, that men holding such principles were dangerous to civil society; therefore they erected these four barriers to keep such men out of office of trust or profit in the civil department of this State. The only question then that arises here—were the framers of the Constitution right or not? On this pivot turns all that any Convention can say on this 32d article. If they were right, then let the article stand as it is. If they were not right, then alter it. Then there are some of the good people of this State, it is presumed, that say that the framers of the Constitution were not right in their opinion on this article; there are others who think they were, of which I am one. Then each party have their reasons to offer, why it is not right; and their reasons why it is right, and ought to stand as it is, sacred and inviolate, and unchanged to all generations.

Now the strongest argument that can be used why this 32d article should be altered is, because it makes a religious test; it makes that religious test an inability to the citizen from holding certain offices of trust or profit; it makes an inequality in the members of the same society, and grants to one an eligibility to office and not another; it gives Tom an office and puts money in his pocket, because he believes in a God, religion, the Bible, and shapes his creed to please the State,—but Jack, because he denies all these, is sent by this article empty away. These, with other objections, I must believe, form the strongest ground of objection to this article that can be taken, which I cannot now separately discuss, yet I am firmly of opinion that our fathers of liberty were right in this article—first, because all laws are designed to curb our vices, and the vices of certain men and their acts, for the benefit and the peace of the rest or major part of society. Then this article of constitutional law is highly necessary to

curb the licentious and profane principles of such men as the article sets forth—such as deny the being of a God, &c. Then to alter the article is to throw down the fence our fathers have set up as a safeguard to the peace, morality, prosperity and safety of this State, and let into office of trust and profit wolves, tithing gatherers, pickpockets, and atheists, those fools of scripture language that say in their heart there is no God. I, for one, want no such men in office in this State—and thus by letting such men into office, open a still wider door to let in atheism, infidelity, anarchy and confusion throughout the State; for righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people—much more so to those in office.

Second, is there not the same reason to amend the 31st article, which disables ministers of the gospel from a seat in either the House of Commons or Senate? Surely, for this article denies them equality with the rest of their fellow citizens for office. But of this no amendment or alteration is proposed, although they rest essentially upon the same grounds of plea. Why then alter the one and not the other? Why was one proposed for an alteration and not the other? I tell you, my fellow citizens, both these articles are right as they stand, and for the sake of posterity I beg you as a well wisher of my State, don't suffer a pin to be moved in either. There is a thousand times more danger in altering the 32d, than there would be in altering the 31st; but the reason why one is proposed and not the other, it is to be feared, is, that there are designers behind the curtain who feel they cannot pocket the loaves until these barriers of the Constitution are broken down. Be on your guard—our fathers have for the best of reasons put up the fence; you keep it up, since none can break it down but yourselves; remembering that it is easier to keep up the fence and keep the hogs out, than it is to get them out after they get in and then put up the fence. Let the legislator and all others know your promptness and stability when your sovereignty is attacked, or cunningly designed to be abridged in that which may be for the general good of society, although it may seem to bear hard upon a few scoundrels for office and profit.

I ask you, is a man worthy of your trust, who denies the being of a God? This is one of the strongest bands of moral and civil society. Break this, and at once more than half the bands are broken that tie and support good society together, and throws open all the doors of vice. For if no God, no accountability hereafter; if no God, no resurrection of the dead, nor future rewards to the good, nor punishment for the wicked; if no God, then there is nothing to fear but penal laws—and we see that both these joined together cannot now keep men from crime and maintain peace in society. How will it then be, if you remove the first band? If no God, what can give solemnity to an oath? How will you support truth and justice in society, when the very heathen of all ages and all countries have been forced to have an oath as a test of truth, and that founded on the belief of a God, whether Jupiter, Apollo, Vulcan, Diana, or the belief of the Great Spirit? From the days of Abraham until now, an oath has been the test of truth and its confirmation; and the belief of a God is, and must be, all that can give solemnity to an oath, added by penal law. And we find that both these cannot keep some men from swearing false—how will it then be, if men in public office are permitted vauntingly and exultingly to proclaim, there is no God? I tell you, fellow citizens, an attack on this article is a satisfactory proof to me that infidelity in our land is raising its deformed head. Alter this article and you will endanger the peace, safety, and happiness of our State. So then, it is nothing but the belief of a God and religion that can give support to good society, whether that God or religion be true or false. The history of all nations prove this fact. Then let this part of the Constitution stand as it is, and we shall get along as we have done, and that is well enough. For these and many other reasons that I could assign, I think no man fit for any public office, nor to be trusted with my civil nor religious rights—no, nor the public purse neither—that denies the being of a God.

To deny the truth of the Protestant religion—I am well aware that this is the biting clause and the great bulwark in the 32d article, that is chiefly aimed at to be undermined and removed out of the way, that some tender consciences may come into office of trust and profit. I then come to enquire, what is meant in this clause of the 32d article, by the words (Protestant religion?) that he that is so base as to deny this kind of religion should be disabled from holding an office of trust or profit in the civil department of this State, as thought the framers of the Constitution; or else they would not have put this clause in the article, if they had not thought such a man dangerous to civil society, who denied the Protestant religion. Were they right or wrong, is the ground of argument. I say they were right, and I give a few reasons to show they were so.

It is well known to all readers of ecclesiastical history, that the Christian religion was violently opposed by Jews and Heathens for the first 300 years, and that its professors waded through blood, tribulation, fire and sword; and that in or about the year 323, it supplanted Heathenism and became the established religion of the Roman empire; and that then, after its establishment, Bishop Sylvester became a tool of State, and plunged the Christian religion into error, superstition, and absurd ceremonies; and that from 323, the Bishops of Rome rose by gradual steps of authority until they acquired the title of Universal Bishop, which title was conferred on Boniface III. by the Emperor Phocas, in the year 606. From the days of Sylvester up to the year 1500, there were many dissenting and protesting persons and sects from and against the Roman Catholic religion, which had become oppressive and absurd past endurance by virtuous men—such as Claude of Turin, Peter Waldo of France, Wickliffe, Jerome, Huss, &c. &c. These men protested against the Church of Rome—not mentioning the various sects that protested—yet the word Protestant never became a common acceptable phrase for a body of professing Christians, until after the year 1517; it was then given to the Lutherans, and has long since become an established and an accustomed term, and used in the general to signify all sects and persons that oppose the Catholic religion, and dissent from that church. For the words reformers, dissenters, and protestants, all are used to mean a people or sect that protest against the Catholic religion.

Then I shall hazard nothing by saying, that what our fathers the framers of this article in the Constitution meant by this clause, the Protestant religion, was, when taken either in its limited or broadest sense, all religions but

that of the Roman Catholic, and comprehends the Church of England, Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, Lutherans, Menonites, Congregationalists, Independents, Moravians, Swedenborgians, Universalists, Presbyterians, &c. &c. So that their plain and obvious meaning was by the words Protestant religion, not the religion of the Church of England only, from which they (our fathers,) had suffered so much by tithing and persecution, but any religion that was among them at that time protesting against the Catholics. But to be plainer in their meaning, he that believed that there was no religion or true church of God, but the Catholic church, should not be eligible to an office of trust or profit in the civil department of this State. That this was their meaning I have not a doubt, because the very face of the Constitution goes to show that their intention was to tolerate all religions; and that that man who believed that there was no religion, which was first to deny the being of a God, and secondly, to deny the truth of the Protestant religion, should not hold an office, &c. So that the one who believed in no religion, and he that denied the other, was in their opinion not fit for office, nor to be trusted with the civil affairs of the State.

And the reason why they thought so is, that Catholics contend they are the only true apostolic church on earth; that they and they alone are right, and all other sects and professors are heretics, and are only fit fuel for fire, and therefore, they have burned their thousands and destroyed their millions of honest and virtuous citizens, and filled kingdoms and nations with rebellion, oppressive taxes, bloodshed and misery. And, secondly, the framers of the Constitution knew what the Catholics had done to destroy the freedom, and safety, and lives, and property of the people of England, Ireland, France, Germany, &c. therefore they put up this fence to keep them out of power, and do you keep it up, for office and profit is power.

Thirdly, it is well known that the Catholics have a Pope, and that he is a despot and tyrant in church and State; and that they have swayed their iron sceptre over churches, States and kingdoms as angry agents of hell, none can doubt that reads church history; and the framers of the Constitution wanted no spiritual master, nor civil one either, in North Carolina—no despots nor tyrants to filch their pockets nor rule over them with a rod of iron. They had by hard suffering broke the yoke of John Bull and his tithing gang of Oxford and Cambridge tobacco men, and were determined to be free from lords spiritual, and lords and kings civil; for this reason they put in this clause in the Constitution, and do you, fellow citizens, keep it in, if you have no use for a Pope in North Carolina. The Catholics enjoy all the privileges by the Constitution of worshipping Almighty God in the way they think right, and practice their own modes of worship as much as any other citizens in the State; but this is not the thing wanted—what then? It is office, office of trust; it is profit—ah, that's the bite—loaves and fishes. This is what North Carolina must hold a Convention for, and spend her thousands, to put some men in office that the sufferers for liberty did not think worthy of office, trust, or profit. For who cannot see, explain as the nose on his face, that it is to get into office of trust and profit that it is proposed to alter this article! But you will say, the spirit of Catholicism is much altered. Dont tell me—the

beast is the beast, if he has got his deadly wound—it is the same scarlet colored beast it always was. If the wise rulers of nations had not put up the bulwarks of toleration to all sects, this beast would yet kill sheep as in days of old, and be colored with the blood of the saints. For when wolves won't kill sheep out of the pen, then I may believe this fact, that the spirit of Catholicism is changed. The sheep are fenced up, of which this clause in the Constitution is one part—no thanks to wolves not to kill sheep in the pen. Was not this the case, the world would flow with Protestant blood, as did the streets of Paris on the night of St. Bartholomews. Then I say our fathers were right in this clause, to keep a few men out of office of trust and profit; to keep them out of power, for the general good, peace, and safety of society, or the major part of the State. And it is sound, good, and wise policy to disable a few scoundrels for office, for the benefit of the rest.

It is clear that every sect in the United States protest against the Roman Catholic religion—this is obvious to all men that read church history. So that to deny the truth of the Protestant religion, is to deny the truth of all religion but that of the Roman Catholic. And for this reason our fathers shut such men out of office of trust or profit in the civil department of this State. For it would at once give them, (the Catholics,) the pre-eminence above all other sects to acknowledge this fact and put them in office of trust and profit, to use that despotic power in church and state that they have in countries heretofore, where they have had the power of doing so. And I see no cause why these four disabilities to hold office should be a plea for the alteration of the 32d article, more than other disabilities mentioned in the Constitution—such as, each Senator should possess 500 acres of land; this is a disability to office, and may perhaps keep out of the Senate men of better talents than twenty men worth 300 acres of land. And also each Commoner shall possess 100 acres of land—here is another fence put up by the framers of the Constitution, yet both are right and good. Another is, that of not permitting a free man of the age of 21 years to vote for a Senator without he possesses 50 acres of land. A man not being eligible to the office of Governor under 30 years of age, &c. &c. All these are equally disabilities to office in the Constitution as well as those mentioned in the 32d article, and rest upon as good ground of plea for their alteration; yet no mention is made of these, and the reason is plain to me—that is, that the Roman Catholics are at the bottom of the alteration of the 32d article.

The next disability is, to deny the divine authority of either the Old or New Testaments. The man that would openly do this crime, the framers of the Constitution thought unfit to hold an office of trust or profit in the civil department of this State. Now the argument is, not whether the scriptures are really of divine authority or not, which thing I believe; but the argument stands thus: were the framers of the Constitution right or not, in this clause of the 32d article, to prohibit a man from office who dares to make such an avowal of his disbelief of the scriptures. I say they were right, in my opinion, for which I offer a few reasons out of the many I could give. First, it is on this basis of the truth or divine authority of the scriptures, that the society of some of the first States in the Union were formed. On this truth they agreed, and the Bible became the test of truth and justice among them. On this truth of the divine authority of the scriptures, are all