

MISCELLANY.

A series of letters on the establishment of the worship of the Deity, as essential to national happiness.—By an American.

*Plusque boni mores,
Quam bonae leges, valent.*

TACITUS.

“Religion!

Without thee, what were unenlighten'd man!
A savage roaming through the woods and wilds,
In quest of prey; and with th' unfinish'd fur
Rough clad: devoid of ev'ry finer art,
And elegance of life. Nor happiness
Domestic, mixt of tenderness and care,
Nor moral excellence, nor social bliss,
Nor guardian law, were his.
Nothing, save rapine, indolence, and guile,
And woes on woes, a still revolving train,
Whose horrid circle had made human life
Than non-existence worse; but, taught by thee,
Ours are the plans of policy and peace,
To live like brothers, and, conjunctive all,
Embellish life.”

THOMSON.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

YOU are pleased to ask my opinion on the sentiment expressed in Dr. Price's observations, respecting the article of religious liberty; and whether there may not be an establishment of religion consistently with the civil and religious rights of all denominations: and on the expediency of such an establishment in these states?

I submit the subsequent thoughts to your candour.

Doctor Price, by his generous and disinterested labours in the cause of human nature, merits the applause of all the friends of civil and religious liberty in the world, and especially of every American. I esteem it a special favour, that he and other foreigners, of enlarged minds, have given us their enlightened thoughts on the momentous subject of government, and the permanent foundation of such a system of regulation, as shall tend to make wise and happy present and future American generations. May we profit by their labours!

¶ We need the assistance of the wise and good, as well as the smiles of an omnipotent providence, to lay firm and lasting the basis of the most glorious empire on which the sun ever shone.

Happy land of universal liberty! Thrice happy thy future sons, if wisdom direct and establish the councils of their fathers! While the subjects of European monarchies pine in ignominious vassalage, and look up, from an humble distance, to their haughty lords and oppressors, the free-born American smiles, with conscious dignity and independence, in possession of the rights and privileges of man, and is eligible to the office of honor and influence, in the road of merit, depending not on the capricious whim of a despotic prince, or his favourite, but on the uncorrupted voice of his fellow-citizens.

May Americans, by their wisdom and virtue, for ever merit those high encomiums which the enlightened among foreign nations have bestowed upon them.

Europe has, for ages, groaned under civil and ecclesiastical oppression, and still feels the smart of tyranny in church and state. The nations have in time past revolted from oppression, and roused to seize the prize of freedom, but have generally fallen on two evils, anarchy in the first instance, and the power of some aspiring despot, as the consequence, who has more firmly riveted their chains. *Incidit in Scyllam, dum vult vitare Charybdim.* Happily we have shot the gulf, without feeling the rock of tyranny, or the whirlpool of anarchy; and our war-worn bark has reached the fair haven of peace. The heat and burden is past, but the work of the day is yet to be finished. We have to seize the advantages which providence hath put into our hands, and to turn them to the public good.

Such is the state of human nature, that the sanctions of religion are necessary to give energy to law. Mankind are held back from wrong, by the commanding of a power infinitely superior to the power of their creating; and are excited to the practice of the moral and social virtues, by the animating hope and aid of future approbation and reward.

Dr. Price passes over in silence, a point I conceive essential to the future prosperity of these states; that is, the support of the public worship of the Deity; I mean not the establishment of any one sect or denomination, accompanied either with an exclusion or toleration of others. Uniformity in mode of sentiment is not to be expected: almost all the different sects, into which Christendom is divided, are scattered throughout this continent. No one state is uniform, either in creeds or modes of worship, and therefore no one denomination can be established on the principles of equal liberty.

The magistrate steps out of the line of his duty, the moment he establishes his opinion as the standard of orthodoxy; because, in religious notions, every man is his own judge, and his speculative opinions fall not under the cognizance of human law. In this respect the constitutions of the American states have shewn a noble freedom from the shackles of human inventions in religious matters, unparalleled by other nations: but if, to shun the dangers which religious establishments have brought upon mankind, we cast off all religious worship, or leave it to the option of individuals at large, whether public worship, or religious instruction shall be supported at all, I conceive it is making such an offering at the shrine of liberty, as is inconsistent with national existence, or at least with public order and happiness.

All nations, heathen as well as christian, have ever maintained the worship of the Deity. The Grecians and Romans had their public sacred days, devoted to the worship of their deities and to the instructions of morality. They had their priests, haruspices, and prophets, who taught the knowledge of the Deity, enforced the practice of virtue, and pointed out the dangers of vice, by considerations drawn from a future state of retribution. Their fables of Tartarus and Elysium, and the sentence passed by their judges on departed spirits, according to their good or evil conduct in this world, were mighty incentives to a virtuous life, and necessary aids to civil government.

Lycurgus and Solon, Romulus and Jereboam, those founders of nations, saw the necessity of calling in the aid of religion to give stability and duration to their newly-erected empires; and without it, their political plans would have proved abortive. Human nature is still much the same; and the aids of religion are as necessary in forming empires in modern, as in ancient times.

[To be continued.]

The Confession of the Freethinker, JOHN JAMES ROUSSEAU, Citizen of Geneva.

I ACKNOWLEDGE to you, that the majesty of the scriptures astonishes me, and the sanctity of the gospel fills me with rapture. Look into the writings of the philosophers, with all their pomp and parade; how trivial they appear, when compared to this sacred volume. Is it possible, that a book so simple, and yet so sublime, should be the work of man? Is it possible, that he, whose history it contains, should himself be a mere man? Is the style that of an enthusiast, or of a sectary inflated with ambition? What sweetness, what purity in his morals! what force, what persuasion in his instructions! his maxims how sublime! his discourses how wise and profound! such presence of mind, such beauty and precision in his answers! such empire over his passions! Where is the man, or the philosopher, that knows how to act, to suffer, and to die without weakness or ostentation? Plato, in his picture of the imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobriousness of guilt, and worthy of every reward of virtue, gives us an exact representation of Christ; so striking is the resemblance, that all the fathers saw it, and indeed there is no possibility of mistaking it. What prejudice, what blindness, to compare the offspring of Sophronisca to the son of Mary! How immense the difference between those two! Socrates dying without pain, and without ignominy, found it easy to support his character to the very last; and if his life had not been honoured by so gentle a death, we might have doubted whether Socrates, with all his understanding, was any thing more than a sophist. You will say, he invented a system of moral philosophy. Others had practised it before his time; he only related what they had performed, and drew lectures from their example. Aristides had been just, before Socrates told us what justice was; Leonidas

had sacrificed his life for his country before Socrates had made the love of our country a duty; Sparta was sober, before Socrates commanded sobriety; before he had given a definition of virtue, Greece abounded in virtuous men. But of whom did Christ borrow that sublime and pure morality, which he, and he only, taught both by word and example? From the centre of the most extravagant fanaticism the highest wisdom made itself heard, and the vilest nations was honoured with the simplicity of the most heroic virtues. The death of Socrates, philosophising coolly with his friends, is the easiest that can be desired; that of Christ expiring in the midst of torments, abused, scorned, detested by a whole people, is the most dreadful that can be apprehended. Socrates, rising the poisonous draught, returns thanks to the perion, who with tears in his eyes presents it to him; Christ, in the most exquisite torture, prays for his bloody executioners. Yes, if Socrates lived and died like a philosopher, Christ lived and died like a God. Shall we say that the evangelical history was invented at pleasure? My friend, inventions are not made after this manner, and Socrates's history, of which no body entertains any doubt, is not so well attested as that of Christ. Upon the whole, it is removing the difficulty farther back, without solving it; for it would be much harder to conceive, that a number of men should have joined together to fabricate this book, than a single person should furnish out the subject to its authors.—Jewish writers would never have fallen into that style, or that system of morality; and the gospel hath such strong and such inimitable marks of truth, that the inventor would be more surprising than the hero.

NOTE,

* Matthew, chap. 5. ver. 21, &c.

POLITICAL.

Remarks on the amendments to the federal constitution, proposed by the conventions of Massachusetts, New-Hampshire, New-York, Virginia, South-Carolina, and North-Carolina, with the minorities of Pennsylvania and Maryland. By the Rev. Nicholas Collin, D. D. & M. A. P. S. of Philadelphia.

[Continued from our last.]

IN treating a momentous and difficult subject, my reasoning may sometimes jar with the principles of many enlightened persons; but my pen shall be guided by a sincere zeal for the liberty and happiness of the union, and by a sacred regard to what I believe to be the truth, without even the least tincture of well-meant dissimulation. This is odious to a candid mind, and justifiable only by extreme necessity. Happily the federal cause does not want such a paltry resource: the better we understand our true situation, the more unanimous, pleasing, and effectual will be the pursuit of our common interest. With a peculiar satisfaction I can also execute my design, without reflecting on men or parties. I discuss with modest freedom the actions of public bodies, without any criticism of their motives, or distinction of the individuals who compose them: only observing that the minority of Maryland was but eleven; that the amendments were more or less approved of in the several states; and that those proposed by Massachusetts and South-Carolina are but few; from which we may conclude, that there is much more apparent than real dissent about the constitution.

Our attention is naturally first attracted by this extensive amendment—"That it be explicitly declared, that all powers not expressly delegated by the constitution, are reserved to the several states, to be by them exercised."—Ratification by Massachusetts, first amendment, Ditto, by New-Hampshire, North-Carolina, Virginia; second by South-Carolina; first, in the address of the minority of Maryland, and eleventh in that of the minority of Pennsylvania—all in words nearly the same. The convention of New-York probably supposed that so many other pointed amendments made this needless. The minority of Pennsylvania enforce it by this addition, "that the sovereignty and independency of the several states shall be retained." Virginia and North-Carolina strengthen it by this farther amendment (seventeenth and eighteenth respectively) "That those clauses which declare that Congress shall not exercise