

COMMUNICATIONS.

FOR THE PUBLIC LEGER.

ANTI-SECTARIAN, No. II.

Among the causes which have contributed to bring about the great excitement & distraction which so lamentably abound throughout the different denominations of professing christians, may be enumerated, we conceive, that of an undue reliance on the scriptures. We are well aware, that in this we approach a very delicate subject—one on which most professors are extremely tenacious, and still more sensitive. Claiming however as we do, the right to think for ourselves, we shall not shrink from the responsibility attendant on the exercise of this right. We do profess to hold ourselves amenable for all our opinions, not to man, or associations of men, but to the Great Author of our being. And here let us remark, lest we be misapprehended, that we believe in the authenticity of the scriptures; and that they were written under the influence of truth.

The position, that the scriptures are the supreme and only rule of faith and practice, we hold to be inadmissible. If the scriptures are the only rule, it will follow, as a necessary consequence, that those nations, which have not yet got them into possession, have no rule, and therefore, cannot transgress; for, "where there is no law, there is no transgression." Hence the heathen are in a much safer situation, than the Christians! This is one of the absurdities resulting from the position.—Another can be drawn from the great diversity of construction and application to which they are liable, as a rule. To put a case: The Baptists' creed maintains that water baptism is a divine ordinance, the observance of which the scriptures positively enjoin on all christians. The Quakers flatly deny this doctrine. Both parties appeal to the scripture for proof of their positions; and both are apparently sincere and pious. This contrariety of opinion among men equally pious, learned, and desirous to advance the cause of truth, must be attributed either to the imperfections of the rule itself, or to the capacity of the human mind, to comprehend it. To adopt the latter, would be to charge our Creator with folly and injustice. To give a law, and require obedience thereto, and at the same time withhold the facilities necessary to understand it, is manifestly unjust. Equal absurdity attends the former hypothesis: For, as the plenary inspiration of the scriptures is a necessary accompaniment of this doctrine, to admit them to be imperfect, is admitting inspiration itself to be imperfect, and consequently the source from which it proceeds. But Deity is perfect in all his attributes.

Again, the scriptures are used to prove the supremacy of the Pope—the real presence in the sacrament—the right of the church to institute an inquisitorial tribunal—to burn heretics—to dispense pardons—to enforce celibacy among the priesthood—peculiar confessions—absolutions—the observance of Lent—the saying of Mass for the dead—the adoration of images, &c. &c. and they are used, also, to disprove all these doctrines *in toto*. The doctrines of original sin and total depravity—of unconditional election and reprobation—of the sacraments of the supper and baptism—of the Trinity—vicarious atonement—the right of the clergy to demand tithes—the lawfulness of christians engaging in wars and fightings—the impossibility of salvation without a historical knowledge of christianity—the cessation of immediate revelation, and many more that might be mentioned *are all established, and overthrown by argument drawn from the scriptures!* Now, we frankly confess, that the man who can, under all these circumstances, and with all these difficulties staring him in the face, believe the scriptures to be the *only sure rule* of faith and practice, must possess a mind very differently constructed from ours.

It is worthy of remark, that the great Author and founder of the Christian religion did not commit any of his doctrines to writing; neither did he, as far as we know, order it to be done by others. The omission is matter of astonishment, indeed, if the scriptures were designed to constitute our only rule. Had he reduced his doctrines to writing, all the difficulties which arise out of the little discrepancies in the histories as recorded by the evangelists, as well as the contention about the plenary inspiration of those histories, would have been entirely obviated. But he declared that it was expedient for him to go away—"For if I go not away the comforter will not come." So long as he continued with his disciples, their attention was turned to him, as an outward guide and deliverer, to the exclusion of the "comforter." Therefore it was expedient that he should go away, that all external appearance might be cut off, and, by that means, they brought to see and feel the necessity of "tarrying at Jerusalem till they were endued with

power from on high." If he had left a record of his doctrines, that record would have been relied on, as a guide and director, in the same manner and in the same spirit, that he was, when personally with them; consequently, that which made it expedient for him to go away, made it inexpedient for him to commit his doctrines to writing.

The scriptures are undoubtedly the best of books, and ought to be attentively and frequently read; but we believe they are only a secondary rule—but the shadow of the substance. If "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," it will inevitably follow, that every individual must be sensibly influenced by the Holy Spirit, or he will speak without knowing, and consequently, as respects the evidence of the fact, falsely, whenever he says, "Jesus is the Lord;" and if he cannot make this declaration in truth, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, how can he say, that the scriptures (which testify of him) are true, except by the aid of the same illuminating power? Here, then, we are reduced to the necessity of acceding, that a sensible "manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with all," or, of denying that we can know that "Jesus is the Lord," or that the scriptures are true. "That for which a thing is, the thing itself is more so;" therefore that by which the scriptures were given forth, which enables us to know they are true, is superior to them; and not to them only, but to all other sources of knowledge accessible to man.

FOR THE PUBLIC LEGER.

Mr. Editor:—In one of your late numbers, I discovered an act passed at the last session of the General Assembly, authorizing a vote to be taken at the next annual election, for or against a convention. The peculiarities of the act, makes it very necessary that the people should take up the subject, and come to a settled opinion before the election. I discover it is made the duty of inspectors of elections, to put these interrogations to each voter. Are you in favor of a new convention or not? I draw this conclusion from the act, that the Legislature by this provision, intended to draw from the people a general vote, and perhaps very correctly. Let I deem it of vital importance to the people to gain such information on this subject, as may enable them to give a prompt answer to one of these queries; and to such who have reasoned on this subject to inform the public mind, rapidly, and with a desire to advance the best interests of the State. Every person, with whom I have conversed on this subject has confessed some defects in the Constitution of this state, which they would wish amended, but they also expressed a fear, that, if the whole were subjected to a change and amendment, we might lose some good provisions, and ultimately gain nothing by calling a convention. But I contend that if there are defects of a character sufficient to justify a call of a convention, now is a proper time to do it; before the people by long usage, become satisfied with such defects. I believe that the framers of the Constitution, acted honestly in the discharge of their duties, and endeavored to remedy present and anticipated difficulties, and in the performance of other duties, they acted as moderately perhaps as a convention would now act. But I conceive that we have advantage of the original framers of the constitution. We have tested it for twelve years; we highly appreciate the most of its provisions, but are notwithstanding, willing to amend what we consider really necessary and defective. What those defects are, is in my opinion the main question, and ought to govern us, in forming, or expressing our opinions. I have without disguise avowed my sentiments on this question. I have concluded to answer in the affirmative, when the question shall be put to me; but whether I shall be able to give a sufficient reason for this conclusion, is a matter for others to judge. I disclaim all sinister motives whatever; have only one vote to give on this subject, and am entitled to that.

The 23d. Section of the 3d Article reads as follows: "The House of Representatives shall have the sole power of impeaching, but a majority of all the members elected, must concur in such impeachment.—All impeachments shall be tried by the Senate, and when setting for that purpose, the Senators shall be on oath, or affirmation to do justice according to law and evidence, &c." The 24th. Section says, "The Governor, and all civil officers of the State shall be removed from office on impeachment, &c." In ordinary cases, when an officer is impeached, whether convicted or not, the expense to the State may safely be put down at something like one thousand dollars. I would here inquire whether some other power could not be constituted to try inferior officers at least in some less expensive way; or give the

Circuit court jurisdiction so far as to enquire into the nature and validity of the complaint.

Malicious prosecutions may be brought before the Legislature as easily as before the Circuit court, and the Legislature is bound to notice and inquire into every charge properly made; and after having occupied the time, and patience of the members for a number of days, the accused is ultimately acquitted, and the State saddled with the expenses; when perhaps if the Circuit or Supreme court had had jurisdiction, with powers to send for persons and papers, the case would have been dismissed or carried before the legislature as in cases of appeals. I drop those hints not as my settled opinion, but for the purpose of investigation and inquiry.

The 2d and 3d Sections of the 9th Article, reads in these words, "It shall be the duty of the General Assembly, as soon as circumstances will permit, to provide, by law, for a general system of education, &c. And for the promotion of such salutary end, the money which shall be paid, as an equivalent by persons exempt from militia duty, except in time of war, shall be exclusively, and in equal proportions applied to the use of county seminaries," &c. If every county in the State had an equal number, who refuse or are exempt from militia duty, this provision would be reasonable and just; but when it is known that only a few counties contain persons of that description, it in my opinion changes the question. An amendment that would appropriate such fines, for seminary purposes in the counties where they may be collected, would be just and reasonable; for should a call for the militia be made, this, as one of those few counties, would have to furnish her quota of men, notwithstanding she had assisted the other counties to build & furnish their seminaries. Some may contend, that little or no money is collected on such accounts, and that the fines are so very low as renders the subject trifling, &c. But let it be remembered, that we have no security for the continuance of the present law, therefore let us be prepared when changes are made, and money collected, for its retention in the counties where it may be collected."

An opinion prevails with some, that it would answer every purpose, to convene the Legislature biennially. In support of this position they advance as reasons, that the laws would be better understood by a longer experience, and amendments necessary to be made become more apparent, &c. Others contend, that in States where the General Assembly convenes biennially the members consider themselves privileged to hold the sessions double the time occupied in states where they convene annually, and that it would be no saving, &c. In a new state, like Indiana, daily receiving emigrants, Territory filling up, new counties to organize, &c, the plan for a biennial legislation is not warranted by experience.

I discover that in some of the States, the term of the members of both Houses is the same. Which course is the best, or whether any preference is due to either, I am not prepared to determine. It would have been well in my opinion if the framers of the constitution had introduced a provision for the amending or revising of the Constitution in the following form: The General Assembly, whenever two thirds of each house shall think it necessary, may propose amendments to this constitution; which proposed amendments shall be duly published in print, at least three months before the next annual election of Representatives for the consideration of the people; and it shall be the duty of the several returning officers at the next annual election which shall be held for representatives to open a poll for, and make a return to the Secretary of State, and if it shall appear that a majority of those who voted, voted for such proposed amendments, and two thirds of both houses of the next General Assembly shall after such an election ratify the same amendments, by yeas & nays, they shall be valid to all intents and purposes.

The emigration to this state of persons of color, bond and free is, and ought to be a matter of deep inquiry. Whether the free states are to be subjected to the maintenance of worn out slaves emancipated, and those also who are and may be born free, is a question of importance. I contend that a constitutional provision, or act of Assembly is necessary to a certain extent, to remedy this apparent evil.

SEMONIDES.

May 26th, 1828.

Abolition of Capital Punishment.—What ever may be said or done to the contrary, the spirit of philosophy and that of humanity, which is inseparable from it, continue to make a rapid progress in all countries, and will end in universal reform. We have just heard, and we hasten to inform our readers, that the Grand Council of the

Valais, in Switzerland, has passed a decree abolishing the punishment of death. This great and generous determination augurs most favorably for the success of similar efforts which are making both in Bavaria and at Geneva, and the success of example which the canton of Valais gives to Europe by an act which must be rated as one of the happiest results attending the discussion of the points most interesting to philosophy and morals, will not, we should hope, remain without imitation. Grant that it may become the signal of general reform in the criminal legislation, rigorous, not to say barbarous, in nearly all the states of Europe! Grant that, by having brought about the gradual abolition of a punishment which the most celebrated publicists have regarded as excusing the attributions of human justice, it may also lead to the abolition of most of those irreconcileable penal inflictions, which in shooting out those whom they affect, strip all hope of reconciliation with society, would seem to connect the guilty with his crime, and only spare his life to render its burden and disgrace!—[French paper.]

Mirror of Life.—The following observations on a looking glass, made at an advanced period of life, convey a moral reflection, which, if duly weighed, may prove salutary warning against indulging those deceitful dreams, which too frequently grow on the mirthful scenes and careless indolence of youth.—"This piece of furniture brings before me an epitome of my life. When first I looked on it this identical article, being then such as it now appears, presented to my view a rosy-faced laughing little boy. A few years passed away, and it reflected the image of a growing heedless youth, full of health, and exhibiting all the animation of joyous hope. At a subsequent period I again looked on it, and saw a man. Boundless expectation had now been brought down to calm satisfaction; I had no further good to expect; the first thrill of exultation was over, but fear and disgust were unknown. More advanced in years, I saw in it one of middle-aged appearance, whose aspect was soured by the disappointments and vexations of the world, but yet cheered with hope and elated with consious integrity. Now this object, which originally reflected my infant mirth, gives me a picture of declining life, a faded remnant of humanity, and a living record of mournful error."

HUMAN GRANDEUR.

We gaze upon a billow with wonder and awe, Swelling high as it threatens the shore; Till broken and lost, we forget what we saw, And think of that billow no more.

So the pomp of the great, so the fame of the brave, So the treasures of glory and pride, Tho' they mount on the flood like the high swelling wave,

Like that too must ebb with the tide.

SONG.

I will not wring thy bosom more, Nor ask one last, one thrilling kiss: Thy tears shall not again flow o'er, Though shed to bless an hour like this.

We need not speak that word farewell! 'Twas spoken when we met to part; How we have loved we need not tell, 'Tis told in that which breaks each heart.

The mutual language of our eyes, The sighs which now our bosom swell, Say what the faltering tongue denies, The sad'ning words, farewell! farewell!

A Bargain!

Continued & inveterate ill health obliges me to offer for sale the establishment of the

PUBLIC LEGER.

The flourishing prospects of Richmond and the adjacent country, its healthy and pleasant situation add value to the establishment, which now receive a respectable and growing support: there is not, perhaps, a more punctual list of subscribers to any paper in the Union.

The establishment will be sold on extremely liberal terms. Letters on the subject, post paid, will be promptly attended to.

S. B. WALLING.

Richmond, Va. May 13, 1828.

Take Notice.

Dr. THOMAS GRIFFITH having left his local accounts in my hands for settlement, those indebted, or against whom there are accounts, are requested to make settlement by the first of July next, or I shall be obliged to pursue the track marked out by law.

WILLIAM BROWN, J. P.

Wayne Township, May 20, 1828. 483

FOR SALE.

THAT well known

TAVERN STAND,

In the town of Richmond, lately in the occupation of Wm. H. Vaughan. A bargain will be given, and possession at any time that may suit the purchaser.

EPHRAIM LACEY.