

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

T H U R S D A Y, JANUARY 20, 1785.

By the HOUSE of DELEGATES,
JANUARY 8, 1785.

RESOLVED,

THAT it is the opinion of this house, that the happiness of the people, and the good order and preservation of the civil government, depend upon morality, religion, and piety; and that these cannot be generally diffused through a community, but by the public worship of Almighty God.

RESOLVED, That it is the opinion of this house, that it is highly necessary, and the indispensable duty of the legislature of this state, to discourage vice and immorality, to enact a law for the support and encouragement of the christian religion, as the best means of manifesting our gratitude to God for his past mercies and deliverances, and procuring his blessing and favour upon all our future endeavours, for the honour, prosperity, and happiness of this country.

RESOLVED, That it is the opinion of this house, that agreeably to the constitution and form of government, it is proper for the general assembly to lay a general and equal tax on all the citizens of this state, of all denominations of christians (as far as their present circumstances will permit), for the support of the ministers of the gospel of all societies of christians within this state, without any preference or discrimination.

By order,
W. HARWOOD, Clk.

An ADDRESS of the HOUSE of DELEGATES of MARYLAND to their CONSTITUENTS.

THE Resolves hereunto prefixed are the foundation of a bill highly interesting both to your temporal and everlasting concerns, which we have ordered to be published, for your consideration; and we wish to draw your most serious attention, not only to its form and substance, but to its principles and probable operation.

The house of delegates, your immediate representatives in general assembly, have not entered hastily upon this great business. They have long beheld a growing indifference to religion and things sacred, very alarming to the interests of morality, peace and good order in society. They found themselves called upon, in their legislative capacity, not only by the mournful voice of Religion herself, but by the voice of the constitution, and numerous petitions from our constituents; all which was still further enforced, in the most powerful manner, by an address of the governor and council (in the month of May seventeen hundred and eighty-three) in the following pathetic words: "It is far from our intentions to embarrass your deliberations with a variety of objects; but we cannot pass over matters of so high concernment as religion and learning. The sufferings of the ministers of the gospel of all denominations during the war, have been very considerable; and the perseverance and firmness of those who discharged their sacred functions, under many discouraging circumstances, claim our acknowledgments and thanks. The Bill of Rights and Form of Government recognise the principle of public support for the ministers of the gospel, and ascertain the mode. Anxiously solicitous for the blessings of government, and the welfare and happiness of our citizens, and thoroughly convinced of the powerful influence of religion, when diffused by its respectable teachers, we beg leave most seriously and warmly to recommend, among the first objects of your attention, on the return of peace, the making such provision, as the constitution, in this case, authorises and approves."

Being called upon, in this solemn manner, to consider the high concerns of religion and learning; as one of the first objects of legislative attention, upon the happy return of peace, some suitable provision hath been accordingly made for the latter of these (namely, learning) by the foundation of two colleges (viz. one upon each shore) connected together, as one university, upon

such liberal principles as (it is hoped) will merit a continuance of the public approbation, and be productive of the most lasting advantages to our posterity.

The bill (herewith published) is intended to make the best provision in the power of the legislature, for the former of these great concerns, namely the support and advancement of religion among all denominations of christians, without preference or distinction, as is set forth in the resolutions prefixed, which contain principles so universally received, that it cannot be supposed they will meet with a dissenting voice among mankind, if considered by themselves, without any other view, than as conducive to the general happiness of society.

That religion hath the most powerful influence upon manners, and hath been more or less interwoven with the very frame and texture of every civil government upon earth, needs but little proof.

The savages of the wilderness around us can bear testimony to this truth; and the ancient Romans, the wisest and the greatest of the nations, unenlightened by immediate revelation, owed more of their grandeur to their religious institutions, than either to their strength or stratagem. Religion pervaded their whole system of laws; its precepts regulated their conduct in peace and war; and at any time, in the dire extremity of affairs, the safety of the commonwealth, their supreme law, required the least deviation from the laws of religion, yet still they paid a strict regard to its external sanctions and appearances, and threw a veil over the status of their gods, to persuade the people, that the gods did either not see, or (for that time) would connive or dispense with the great and necessary, although (otherwise) sacrilegious, action!

If we come to revelation, the government of the Jews under the Old Testament was wholly a theocracy, or government of religion, instituted by God himself as their supreme lawgiver; and their empire was great and flourishing, or miserable and depressed, as they obeyed or forsook his holy laws. And as to the New Testament, where shall we find a system of religion which conduces so effectually to the good order, peace and happiness of society, as the religion of Christ? Whatsoever things are honest, pure, lovely, and of good report, are enforced by it, under the sacred sanction of everlasting rewards and punishments.

If we come to our own situation in America, and recal to memory the many arduous contests of the late war, while we were laying the foundations of our present liberty and happiness; religion, both in belief and practice, was considered as our principal support and stay. How frequent were our appeals to Heaven for the justice of our cause? How many our days of fasting and prayer, to implore the Divine protection on the success of our arms? And how many our days of thanksgiving for mercies received? By all which, religion was, at least, acknowledged in our national councils, as having the most powerful influence on the minds of men, in order to lead them to a sense of duty, and the faithful discharge of it as good citizens.

The right and duty of the legislative or supreme power to interpose in matters of religion, so far as concerns the general peace and welfare of the community, and "to make suitable provision, at the public expence, for the institution of the public worship of God," are fully acknowledged and recognised under the American revolution.

By the constitution of this state, no man can hold any office of profit or trust, without professing and declaring "his belief in the christian religion." Government can have no confidence in that man who is under no religious tie, and who believes neither Heaven nor hell, or, in other words, a future state of rewards and punishments. What the celebrated commentator on the law of England delivers on this subject, deserves the most serious attention.

"The preservation of christianity, as a national religion, is (abstracted from its own intrinsic

truth) of the utmost consequence to the civil state, which a single instance will sufficiently demonstrate. The belief of a future state of rewards and punishments, the entertaining just ideas of the moral attributes of the supreme Being, and a firm persuasion that he superintends, and will finally compensate, every action of human life, (all which are clearly revealed in the doctrines, and forcibly inculcated by the precepts, of our Saviour Christ), are the grand foundation of all judicial oaths, which call God to witness the truth of those facts, which perhaps may be only known to him and the party attesting; all moral evidence, therefore, all confidence in human veracity, must be weakened by irreligion, and overthrown by infidelity."

Upon the whole, since religion has such an intimate connexion with government, and is so conducive to the happiness of mankind in this world, as well as their best preparation for the happiness of the world to come, we cannot but consider it as the indispensable duty of every wise and virtuous legislature, to make the most early and permanent provision for the administration and support of both.

We have now stated the principles of the bill, and our motives for bringing it before you at this time. The subject is of the utmost magnitude, and it is your duty to weigh it with the greatest deliberation and temper. It requires no depth of learning, nor any other exertion than that of a common understanding, love to your country, and christian forbearance, one with another.

In considering it therefore you will remember, that in religion, as well as government, the labourer is worthy of his hire; that the ministers of the gospel among us, for the future, must chiefly be our own natives; that their profession will deprive them, for the most part, of any other means of getting a livelihood, or providing for their families; that they ought to be endued with considerable learning and knowledge to be respectable and useful in their sacred calling; and that without a competent support in prospect, few men will put themselves to the expence of a liberal education for the ministry; and the discharge of its sacred functions will be left chiefly to those, whose ignorance would render them improper even to be entrusted with any of our worldly affairs.

Objections will probably be made to the proposed mode of supporting the ministry. It may be called a "poll tax, and yielding partial favours, to raise one denomination of christians above others, contrary to the Declaration of Rights." But let such objections be well weighed before they lead you to any injurious suspicions of the integrity of your representatives. Let it be considered, whether they come from the friends or enemies to the general principles of the bill—those who wish for any legal support to the ministers of religion, or those who profess themselves opposed to it.

Consider the whole frame and spirit of the bill. It declares the most perfect equality; and if your representatives were so weak or wicked as to design any thing contrary to the constitution, they are at least wise enough to know that the act would be null and void in itself.

A poll tax, such as was levied under the old constitution (where the expence of government was not supported in proportion to property and the benefits to be derived, but by the head) is justly declared grievous and oppressive by the Bill of Rights.

The instruction to be given to all men, from the Word of God, is equally important, to the rich and poor; and the souls of both are alike precious in their Maker's sight. Yet still, the rich man will pay in proportion to the number of his family and the taxables dependent upon him, which is just and reasonable. Nevertheless the sum to be paid by every individual, when thus borne equally by all, will be small indeed compared to the burden which now falls upon a few; while many of the rich and prodigal, as well as many of lower degree, whose profligate lives are a reproach to society, escape wholly free.