

include every possible civil disability which might arise.

It was remarkable that whilst a witness was disqualified under such a religious belief, that as far as he had been able to learn no objection had ever been taken to jurors on such a ground, and in fact a juror, or a judge might be an infidel.

Mr. CHAMBERS desired to correct the gentleman from Baltimore county. So far as regards a judge, the Constitution provides a test of belief in a future state of rewards and punishments, for all civil officers, and also for Jews.

Mr. RIDGELY resumed. He was then in error in relation to a judge, but he could not be mistaken as regards a juror; and in fact a judge of loose morals, a mere nominal professor in such religious belief, may sit as the arbiter of life and death, whilst a citizen of undoubted character of the opposite faith, may be rejected as a witness. He desired to give to christians, the benefit of the exemption, which the Constitution interposes for the Jew. The Jew was protected in his religious belief—his conscience was respected. He could not swear upon a Testament, which he disbelieved; he could not imprecate Deity upon a religious belief which he rejected, and the Constitution was altered to take this civil disability from him. Citizens, many of whom believe in Christ and his religion, are now under civil disability, because in their conscience, they cannot believe in a future state of rewards and punishments. Why not give such the same constitutional religious protection? Will you deny to a Christian, what you have granted to the Israelite? The effect of such discrimination, will be to decide, that no man is a Christian, who rejects future rewards and punishments as a religious belief.

The gentleman from Queen Anne's, (Mr. Spencer,)—not now in his seat—had objected, that the amendment, if adopted, might admit ministers of the Gospel to seats in the Legislature. Such was no part of his purpose, he could not consent to change the existing constitutional provision in that respect. His object was to protect a man's religious opinions, and to remove a disability, which the law imposed upon them; not to relieve ministers of the gospel from their civil incapacity under the Constitution. To remove all doubt upon the subject, it was his intention, to move a further amendment to the article, in the following line, by striking out the word "*profession*," so that the word "*persuasion*" only would remain. It would then read, "or suffer any civil or political disability on account of his religious persuasion." There ought, it appeared to him, in this enlightened age, to be no hesitation, in conforming the practical truth of the liberty of conscience, proclaimed in the bill of rights, to its theory. He was not willing that any human tribunal should set up restraints upon the conscience of men. Such was the theory of the bill of rights, but judicial exposition of the law had denied to many citizens the free benefit of this Constitutional guaranty. He was, therefore, for putting this cherished prerogative beyond all doubt, by the amendment he had proposed. He was pained to hear the gentleman from Calvert, (Mr.

Weems,) on yesterday, boldly assert in this House, that every man, who disbelieved in a future state of rewards and punishments, should be driven from the witness stand, as unworthy of belief. It was a harsh, and he would add, and an intolerant sentiment; and he was especially surprised that it should have been uttered by a representative from Calvert, the daughter of old St. Mary's, on whose plains the banner of religious and political liberty, was first unfurled, by the tolerant Catholic, Calvert. He would say to that gentleman, that hundreds of people entertaining that disbelief, were to be found in Baltimore city and county, who were among the most conscientious, respectable and worthy citizens of that community; men exemplary in every relation of life; of irreproachable character, and worthy of comparison with the best and purest of the orthodox faith. His attention had been called to this subject, in the early part of the session, by one of his constituents—a gentleman wherever known, universally respected for his high moral worth, and spotless honor; who had passed many years of his now advanced life, in the service of the State; had been for twenty years returned to the Legislature by the people of that county, and held many offices of public trust—and had gallantly served his country during the war of 1812. He did not design to open the subject of religion in this House, he hoped the debate would not take that direction, but he could not refrain from saying, that in his opinion, the oath of that man, who recognized the certainty of punishment in this world, for acts done in the body, was equally as reliable, if not more reliable, than the oath of one, who repudiated all punishment by Divine authority in this world, and deferred his fears of punishment for moral or religious guilt to another world; with the contemplation of which, men were little disposed to familiarize themselves. He confessed, that it required some nerve for a man to avow his disbelief in future rewards and punishments in view of the general opinions of the world, yet the very avowal of such an opinion commended itself to him as indicating at least an independence, which, in his judgment, went far to attest its perfect honesty and sincerity. The principle of this amendment is not new; it had been introduced into some of the old Constitutions, and he believed into all the new ones, although the languages employed might differ. The section under consideration without this amendment, whilst it proclaims the largest religious liberty and the right to worship according to the dictates of conscience, exposes in fact, as the price of that liberty, all who disbelieve in a future state of rewards and punishments, to the existing civil disabilities, which the courts have decided to attach to such disbelief, and which is utterly incompatible, with the freedom of conscience. He trusted that the House would not, in this nineteenth century, by rejecting this amendment, perpetuate so odious a religious discrimination upon the people of the State.

Mr. WEEMS said, that nothing could have been further from his intention, in the remarks he had submitted yesterday, than to denounce any sect or branch of the Christian