

gued that those who do not believe in a future state of punishment, have no just sense of moral responsibility. He confessed he was surprised to hear such sentiments.

Moral responsibility! Why sir, a sense of moral responsibility, is as omnipresent as the Deity Himself. Where can we go to escape it; where is the asylum upon this vast globe, or in the boundless regions of infinite space, to which we can flee from the torments of a guilty conscience. If we travel beyond the pale of civilized man, even there the poor savage unconscious of the light of Divine Revelation, acknowledges his responsibility to that Great Being, whose voice is heard in the howling of every tempest, the rustling of every leaf, and the murmuring of every stream. It is a mistaken idea to suppose, that the Universalist has no just sense of moral obligation, because he is not actuated by a slavish fear of eternal punishment. For although he may not be frightened into a sense of duty, by the fear of Hell, of "gorgons, hydras, chimeras dire," may he not be governed in his conduct by that higher and nobler motive—a sense of duty to his fellow and his God?

It is an outrage upon the feelings of this highly respectable class of our fellow-citizens, that they should be driven from our courts of justice, whilst the most abandoned men in the community, are dragged forth from the gutters and sewers of our cities, to stand up as competent witnesses, merely because they profess to believe in a future state of rewards and punishments. For his part Mr. F. protested against any such invidious distinctions. He was opposed to any proscription on account of religious opinions. And whilst he had a high regard for the Christian religion, he was disposed to be liberal towards all denominations, with the confident expectation that the same charitable feeling will pervade this Convention.

We should be the last, sir, (continued Mr. F.) to encourage any thing like a feeling of intolerance, for if there be any spot upon this broad earth, which has been consecrated to the spirit of genuine freedom, it is here upon the soil of this glorious old Commonwealth, where the standard of religious liberty, was first reared in the Western world.

Mr. Biser said that in advocating this amendment, as it was his intention to do, he felt that he was treading upon delicate and dangerous ground. He knew that he was speaking in favor of a proposition which would subject those who sustained it to animadversion and criticism beyond these walls; and he desired, therefore, that the motives for the course he might take, should be understood so explicitly, as to leave no room for mis-apprehension or mis-statement.

He disclaimed any desire or intention to make invidious distinctions in matters of religion. No man here or elsewhere respected religious institutions, and religion itself, more sincerely than he did.

At an early period in the session of this Convention his attention had been called to this subject by a numerous, respectable and intelligent

portion of his constituents. They desired that a provision might be inserted in the Constitution, dispensing with religious tests either as a qualification for office, or as rendering persons competent witnesses in our judicial tribunals. He had no particular acquaintance with the creed of the Universalists; (for, from that sect it was that the application to which he referred had been made,) but he took occasion, by means of letters to members of their society, and in other ways, to inform himself as to the precise character of their doctrines. The result of his investigation had led him to the conclusions which he would now state. They believed in a Supreme Being; they believed in rewards and punishments, either in this or a future world; they believed that no man would go unpunished for his misdeeds, and that the punishment must come at some time; but they did not believe in perpetual punishment.

Upon ascertaining these facts, he had looked into the Constitutions of the different States of the Union, and had found that in nearly all of them, religious tests were dispensed with. The fourth section of the declaration of rights of the State of California, had met his views more fully than any other. As an humble member of the committee of which the venerable gentleman from Anne Arundel, (Mr. Dorsey,) was Chairman, he, (Mr. B.,) had submitted that as his own proposition. But it had found no favor. A majority of the committee had voted it down. And it would be in the recollection of the Convention that he had yesterday offered the same section, but had been informed by the President, that it was not then in order.

He felt disposed to vote for the amendment of the gentleman from Baltimore county, (Mr. Ridgely,) though he, (Mr. B.,) must say, that he was better satisfied with the first amendment, than with this. He yielded, however, to the better judgment of the gentleman, who entertained the opinion that the pending proposition would cover the whole ground, and answer every object which he had in view. If that proposition should fail, he would then offer the amendment which he had yesterday indicated.

The gentleman from Washington county, (Mr. Fiery,) had, given his experience as to the operation of the existing provision in his own district. He, (Mr. B.,) could go even beyond the limits of his own county. He had seen a Justice of the Peace reject the testimony of a Universalist on account of his religious opinions, when the community at large would have taken the *word* of the witness in preference to the *oath* of the Justice of the Peace. And similar evidences of injustice and of wrong he had seen time and again. He declared himself the friend of religious toleration and equality, under all circumstances and in every aspect. He believed that more danger, far more danger, was to be apprehended from those who, under the false garb of religion, made themselves competent witnesses, than from that respectable and intelligent class of our citizens who had the independence to come forward and proclaim the doctrines in which they conscientiously believed. To use the language of the gentleman from Calvert, (Mr. Weems,) he, (Mr. B.,) was