National Intelligencer.

& WASHINGTON ADVERTISER

... IX. | WASHINGTON CITY, PRINTED BY SAMUEL HARRISON SMITH, PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE. | NO. 1800.

FIVE DOLLARS PER ANNUM, | FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1809. | PAID IN ADVANCE.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

Some time since Mr. Gregoire, of France, addressed a letter to Mr. Barlow, containing critical observations on the Columbiad, which he caused to be published in that country. To this letter Mr. Barlow has made a reply, which has just been emitted from the press at this place in a pamphlet form. We offer both these letters to our readers.

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
POEM OF MR. JOEL BARLOW,
THE COLUMBIAD.
By M. GREGOIRE,
Formerly Bishop of Blois, Senator, Member of the National Institute, &c.

My Dear Friend,

I have received with gratitude, and read with interest, your magnificent work *The Columbiad.* This monument of genius and typography will immortalize the author and give fame to the American press; this alone would be sufficient to destroy the assertion of Pauw and other writers, that there is a want of talents in America, if your country did not already offer a list of great men, who will go down with *eclat* to posterity.

When a book is published, it enters the domains of criticism; you yourself solicit it in the letter which accompanies your present; you solicit it with the frankness which is natural to you. Thus I exercise a right as well as perform a duty, not in addressing literary observations to you, but in repelling an insult to christianity, an insult on which I should be silent, if Barlow was a common writer, or his poem an inferior work, because the book and its author would soon sink together into the stream of oblivion.

Amicus usque ad aras, says an ancient. It is at the foot of the altar, that I blame certain lines in your book, and an engraving which has the following inscription, *Final destruction of prejudices.* Prejudices!—Perhaps no one desires their destruction more than myself. But what do you call by this equivocal name? And what do I perceive in the midst of the heaps in this picture, which serve for emblems? The attributes of the catholic ministry, and above all, the standard of christianity, the cross of Jesus Christ! Are these what you call *prejudices!* If even the excellent works, which have rendered evident the truth of the gospel; if even the principles and the history of eighteen centuries did not formally contradict you, it would be easy to shew that this picture is an attack against all christian societies, that it is an act of intolerance, of persecution, which offends God and man.

The unlimited freedom of religion in the United States confers on no sect a character of domination, nor any of those exclusive privileges, that are possessed in different countries of Europe by the churches of the Catholics, Greeks, Lutherans, Calvinists, &c. &c. Let us leave to the partizans of the English church the endless dispute on the prerogatives of the *established church,* on the utility of those *civil establishments* which, already shaken, will crumble, perhaps, on all sides, at no very distant epoch. Though I am by conviction, by sentiment, a Catholic, and honored with the episcopal character, after a deliberate examination, I think that if we owe to the state a guarantee of obedience when it requires it, that nevertheless these *civil establishments,* which may be in favor of others as well as of truth, are often unjust, impolitic, dangerous in more than one respect, though Providence may draw good from them, as it does from many other evils which it tolerates.

Let every thing relating to conscience, as well as every thing that belongs to social organization be freely discussed; truth demands examination, which despotism can only fear; this alone finds it necessary to invoke ignorance, to surround itself with darkness, to repel the light which breaks out from the researches that are directed by good faith and sagacity.

But what will be the result, if, instead of reasoning with calmness and respect on religion, the most important object for man in the course of his fugitive existence, calumny should point its sarcasms, and spread its black colours over historical facts which it misrepresents; if, instead of speaking to the understanding to enlighten it, we address ourselves to the passions to seduce? This has been the conduct which our infidel Frenchmen have followed pluming themselves with the title of philosophers. It is important to recollect and to recollect often, that of those who have combatted christianity, the greater part have vomited the most infamous things against decency and morality; Lamettrie, Voltaire, J. J. Rousseau, Diderot, Mirabeau, of the constituent assembly, P...., &c. Others have said before me, that incredulity almost always has its source in the heart, and that the antagonists of a religion, whose morality is so pure, are advocates who defend their own cause.

Almost all of them have attacked christianity by reproaching it with the abuses it has exprienced, as if the abuses were the thing itself; as if, after having directed the wind on the straw, we must still blow away the grain; as if wine and iron ought to be proscribed, because there are debauchees and assassins.

In the stormy course of our revolution, the infidels held, during some years, the sceptre of power; you were a witness of the use they made of it. In an instant, these champions of toleration and humanity were seen to display all the ferocity of Diocletian; to shut up, profane & destroy our temples; to pursue the religious man even into the asylum of his thoughts; to incarcerate and transport bishops and priests. A great number of catholic pastors were dragged to the scaffold; during eighteen months I feared and expected the same fate; it is well known with what outrage I was loaded, in the midst of the national convention, for having braved the infuriated howlings of impiety; the greatest favor that was accorded us, was only to mark us out as *superstitious,* as *fanatics;* these were the epithets in fashion. For several years we were constantly under the axe of executioners, calling themselves *philosophers.* Do you hasten to tell me they usurped this title? We are agreed. God preserve me from attributing to philosophy the crimes of brigands, who dressed themselves in her liveries. In the face even of the altar, I have justified her from crimes she abhors;* but will our infidels ever exercise good faith? Will they ever cease to reproach christianity with the abuses which she laments?

What further did they do? They travested august liberty as a bacchante; they exclaimed no one could be a once a christian and a republican, at once a republican and a *moderate;* though thousands of examples among us, as well as among you attested the contrary; though a holy and natural alliance establishes itself between those characters. Some pious but unenlighted men, were frightened by these clamors; believing themselves placed between liberty and religion, could they balance in their choice? It may be seen how our reformers, wishing to associate the republic with every thing that could destroy it, themselves precipitated the vessel of liberty into the abyss, at the moment it was reaching the port.

What would they have substituted for christianity? A *goddess,* and a *temple of reason,* man for God himself. They afterwards made *temples to the Supreme Being;* temples in which theophilanthropy erected her booths, till the period when the worship of the deists found its chapels deserted in France as that of David Williams was in London.

At this period foreign nations waved among us the banners of discord; they were powerfully aided by all the enemies of the revolution, of whom a part having fled their country when it was in danger, to stir up against it the potentates of Europe, corresponded with those who remained in their homes, to kindle discord and anarchy. By a refinement of perversity, they conceived the plan of destroying the most salutary reforms, by outstretching the object, and forcing every measure; of rendering odious or ridiculous the soundest notions by exaggerating them; in fine, of revolting the people by alarming their consciences.

Who could believe it, if accumulated facts did not attest it, that two classes of men the most opposite were seen at this period acting in concert to commit the same crimes, and to destroy religion? Pretended philosophers from hatred against it; pretended christians from hatred to every priest, who had submitted to the law requiring an oath? They would rather have seen our altars overturned, our sanctuaries profaned, and covered with filth and sacrilege, than to behold their brethren in the same sacerdotal habits, but, faithful to their God and their country, offer the same sacrifice, and preach the same gospel. These distressing recollections will be engraved by history, they will resound in future ages; and when reason shall surmount extinguished passions, impartial posterity will decide on which side were truth, charity and justice.

Does not your engraving appear to retrace, not as regards the manner, but the results, what our persecutors have executed? The illusory theories of impiety are falsified by the most decisive experience; which attests that morality is wavering and without support, if it does not receive it from the hands of religion; that religion is without consistence, if it is not *positive,* that is to say, founded on facts and on revelation. I conversed on this subject with your countryman, Thomas Paine. Write, said I to him, on political rights, but not on religious matters; your *Age of Reason* has discovered your incapacity; you will never be able to oppose any thing solid to the excellent refutation of your systems by a crowd of writers, above all by the learned bishop of Landaff.

Some of our *persecutors,* who styled themselves philosophers, are already thrown into the sewers of history, the rest will be, in their turn. The greater part of those who have survived vent themselves in maledictions over the tomb of Robespierre, that it may be forgotten they were his accomplices, his guards, and his banditti. They would be so again, if he and his power were resuscitated. Formerly under grotesque names and cynical dress, they dishonored the cause of liberty; vile Proteuses, they have changed their language still more than their dress. Formerly they blasphemed against christianity; bigots now, and at no time pious, limited to certain forms, certain trifling customs, neglecting in religion every thing that restrains them, perverting its august truths as their interest may dictate, and from the motives which St. Augustine has developed in so striking a manner in his *City of God.** they call themselves christians through policy, because, according to the expression of a modern orator, *religion is necessary for the people;* and as the secret of their heart always betrays itself more by their conduct than their discourse, the sacred instrument they would pervert is broken in their hands; for among that race always frivolous and without character, that is called Frenchmen, there is not one, even to the servant girl, who, in robbing her master, does not repeat that *religion is necessary for the people,* on condition that she may be dispensed from having it herself.

Religion, necessary to every individual, is still more so to those magistrates who are the regulators of states. Fatal experience of the misfortunes occasioned by an abandonment of christianity has not yet opened our eyes. We have recourse to a palliative to cure the wounds which have been made by irreligion, and its offspring immorality; they have loosened the bonds of society to such a degree, that they menace it with decomposition, which will be common to many neighboring nations. If ever decrepid Europe makes a step towards moral order, it will be less from love of that, than from lassitude of crime; but it will be under the escort of christianity and in consequence of inevitable catastrophes. In spite of the clouds that cover the future, this epoch may be perceived, though we are unable to predict it in a precise manner, though unable to calculate its term, or its disasters.

If the bounds of this letter permitted me, I would oppose to the evils engendered by infidelity the benefits profusely spread by the christian religion; its introduction was the most vast of all revolutions, and the most beautiful, because the most useful to the human race. The cross and the gospel, in preparing us for the happiness of eternity, have civilized the world; virtue and knowledge have every where marched in their train; every region has been abandoned by virtue and knowledge, which has lost christianity; those regions have returned to barbarism; witness the church of Africa, illustrious for so many learned men, and which was once one of the most brilliant portions of christendom. Witness Algiers, where you resided two years; such would be the lot which the United States would feel, if ever they should cease to be christians.

And is not this equivalent to what you propose in some lines, and by an engraving, which a disciple of the gospel repels with horror? The attributes of pure christianity are classed among the emblems of prejudices. Where are your proofs? It is in the nature of things, that what is invariably useful should be essentially true; instead of proofs, you give up to derision objects revered by many hundred millions of men, who will not believe you on your word; they will see that your antichristian sentence wants justness; that it is a consequence without premises; that, without reasoning at all, you decide that all the disciples of the gospel reason falsely.

Virtuous minds would sigh to behold calumny, impiety, and lubricity display themselves with effrontery, protected by the liberty of the press; but as we do not know where to place the limits, if we attempted to establish by law repressive measures, this evil would be counterbalanced by others, if our mouths were locked, and our pens crushed by tyranny. The press is free in your country; thus you are not reprehensible by the law, but condemnable at the tribunal of opinion, the supreme judge of all crimes that offend propriety and justice. Yours offends both.

It offends justice, because it is a gratuitous outrage, that resembles that of the *Jesumy* at Japan. What would you say, if the attributes of liberty, which are so dear to you, were trampled under foot before your eyes?

It offends propriety, because, in holding out as *prejudices* the emblems of the christian religion, it is saying to all those who profess it, that they are fools; this compliment addresses itself to the disciples of the gospel in every part of the globe; it addresses itself to the estimable descendants of those catholics, who, flying from British persecution, established in Maryland, a state belonging to your confederation; it addresses itself to the venerable Carroll, bishop of Baltimore; you trample on the attributes of his pastoral character. In France, it is true, the non-conformists outrage in this way episcopacy in the person of those pastors who, faithful to the voice of their consciences, have committed *the unpardonable crime* of submitting to the laws of their country; this is a sad example to cite, not a model to imitate. Your Presbyterian countrymen will perhaps ask, if you have abjured the principles that you professed when you were the chaplain of a regiment in the war of independence.

If to believe in the gospel be a prejudice, permit us to partake of it with the feeble minds of Addison, Abbadie, Arbuthnot, Bacon, Berkeley, Barrow, Beattie, Bentley, Bœrhave, Bonnet, Boyle, Blackstone, Clarke, Cullen, Doddridge, Ditton, Forbes, Fothergill, Ferguson, Grotius, Gray, Hervey, Hanway, Hartley, Harrington, Hyde, Haller, Jones, Johnson, Locke, Lardner, Leibnitz, Lyttleton, De Luc, Milton, Newton, Puffendorf, Paley, Prior, Pringle, Priestley, Price, Ray, Rabener, Rousian, Robertson, Sherlock, Spenser, Steele, Thompson, Wolfe, Washington, Usher, Woodward, Young, etc. and with those madmen, worthy of pity, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, la Bruyere, Copernicus, Corneille, d'Aguesseau, Descartes, Despreaux, Fenelon, Galileo, Gassendi, Houbigant, Mallebranche, Massillon, Nicole, Pope, Pascal, Racine, Winslow, Winkelman, &c. all sincere catholics; but to speak seriously, it is pleasant to lose ourselves in such a brilliant company.

I must add, that, in wishing to undeceive us in regard to what you call *prejudices,* you err in the choice of means; for conviction can only be the effect of reasoning; man cannot detach his affection from the object most dear to him, unless the motives that support it are destroyed. But if injuries that revolt are substituted for arguments that convince, we are sure to strengthen the adhesion to principles which are rooted in the mind and the heart. If to convert a mussulman, instead of proving to him that Mahomet was an impostor, I should commence by placing before his eyes a picture, in which the Koran and the Crescent were trampled under foot, his heart embittered, would cloud his understanding, and prevent all access to my attempts. Apply these reflections to the true religion, and see if you have not failed entirely in a deplorable design.

Persecution, my dear Barlow, does not consist only in exiling, incarcerating, and assassinating men: Julian invented more cunning, and not less cruel vexations. They have been refined among us at the end of the 18th century, in harassing and lacerating the catholics without cessation, by repeated invectives, by a multitude of those little means, whose application was continued torture; impious verses, songs, epigrams, caricatures, every thing was made use of. You are very different from such men; but why resemble them in any thing? Your engraving is an offence against the freedom of religion; a sort of persecution which your heart disavows; reflection will bring on regret. Believe me, my friend, that these injured catholics will not make use of reprisals; true piety opens her bosom to erring brethren, without opening it to error; to enlighten them, she places the torch of truth in the hand of charity. Having but a moment to exist in this world, we should love our fellow men, be benevolent towards all, whatever may be their religion, their colour, or their country. Jesus Christ has given us both precept and example in their turn; he displayed alternately firmness and goodness towards the [illegible]; his parable of the Samaritan is a perpetual judgment against persecutors.

If you should say [illegible] that [illegible] offers examples worthy of [illegible] tion, and that, provoked [illegible] Americans, my zeal should be [illegible] ed to convert [illegible] from weakening the [illegible] fortify it. I would say that, in a country where so many truths have returned to their wells, we see printed and circulated freely the obscene poetry of a member of the national institute, and the rhapsodies of romance writers, who serve up afresh [illegible] so many times [illegible]. I would say too, that, without respect to the first body of the state, which ought to give an example of decency, immorality is authorised, by peopling the garden of the palace with licentious statues, to such a degree that virtuous mothers dare not conduct their children thither.

You see that I am far from avoiding objections; but my disapprobation of an offence, in which I have no share, and against which my colleague, Lanjuinais, protested vainly in full senate, though with the general assent of the senators, I have reserved to myself the right of telling you, that to recriminate is not to answer; and that what might be alleged as an example to follow, cannot be but as an abuse to reform. Gorani observes that the licentiousness of painting and sculpture had exercised a disastrous influence over Italy; that the master pieces of the arts had drawn away sound minds from useful and necessary studies, had depraved their manners, enervated their courage, and fomented the most hateful vices.* When public shame is extinct, do not expect to preserve the private virtues; and when religion is publicly insulted, it is a wound to morality, a national calamity.

Many times I have repented having employed so many efforts to defend the arts and those who cultivate them against Vandalism; not that those arts which are called *fine,* and which are not always *good,* are bad in their very nature; but, almost always, they are flatterers and corrupters, which, by an inconceivable fatality, precede, bring on, escort, and follow depravation. Even in his time the illustrious Gerson † complained of it, to whom France owes a monument, and whom she has almost forgotten; he was grieved to see scandalous pictures, and a libidinous work, the *Romance of the Rose,* exposed to the eyes of youth. At the moment I am writing, we are menaced with a new edition of it.

What will be the fruit of my remonstrance? You are not one of those men who are afraid to acknowledge that you are wrong. A man is always honored in doing an act of reparation. I appeal to your loyalty, to your delicacy; this is to put you at strife with yourself.

* Discourse on the opening of the national council of 1801, p. 2.

* B. 6. c. 32.

* See the preface to the *Mémoires secrets et critiques des cours des gouvernemens, des mœurs des principaux états de l'Italie,* by Gorani, Paris 1793.

† Vide his works, edit. Dupin vol. ii. p. 191, &c.