National Intelligencer.

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FOR THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

To the Roman Catholics of Charles, St. Mary's and Calvert Counties.

As one who feels a lively interest for universal toleration, and a general equality of privileges among all denominations, I have thought proper to address the following matters to your serious consideration: Nor am I under any apprehension, by addressing the members of one denomination, of giving the least umbrage to any liberal man of any other sect whatever, if I confine myself in what I shall have to say to the spirit of our national compact. For from that palladium of the dear bought liberties of our country every thing that savours of bigotry, intolerance, or a preference of one religious sect to another, has been wisely discarded, and I trust in Heaven that the same spirit ever will exist, while the love of liberty is cherished in America. My object, gentlemen, were it in my power, is to excite no jealousy, uneasiness, or any passion whatever, that might lessen the harmony that exists in this singularly favored nation, between all denominations of christians. I wish only to recal to your remembrance, what you have gained by the establisment of our independence; what you once were, and what under the principles of our government your present numbers and respectability yet entitle you to be, in common only, and not in preference to any other sect or denomination whatever.

It is enough that you should know that nine-tenths of my nearest and dearest connections are faithful members of that church, and that I have not yet lost the common feelings of humanity, to render it impossible for me to be altogether insensible to the standing in society, and to the rights and privileges of those persons in whose welfare I am, and must needs be, warmly interested. I could never trace in the pages of history the sufferings of my forefathers, without feeling a glow of indignation against their persecutors; and I ever feel a sensation of equal abhorrence for the malice and inveterate spirit of party bigotry, with which the respectable body of the church have been charged with the crimes and shocking enormities of obscure villains, murky assassins, and blinded fanatics: among whom a few miserable and half starved papists might have been discovered. It is impossible for me to enumerate the many hundreds that have been told, and wrote and read; nor do I feel any disposition to recall their disgusting recollection. But among the most unfounded of those charges, that stare in the face every reader of the English history, are the *gun-powder plot*,* and *Titus Oate's plot*;† Pardon me, gentlemen, for mentioning them. It is so seldom that they are contradicted, that they are very generally believed. Before our forefathers found an asylum in this then wild and distant land, narrow indeed were their privileges, and many their privations and hardships, and great was their slaughter in battle, and under the forms of law, in England and Scotland, and Ireland. The black catalogue of laws passed in the reign of Elizabeth, of Cromwell, and of William and Mary, are frightful to think of; and what is the most astonishing they stand *unrepealed* even now, in the present more liberal and enlightened times. True it is, that they are not all enforced in England, but they stand recorded and in force, in terrorem, and many of them are enforced in Ireland.*

Under these laws,† a Roman Catholic commoner cannot hold a seat in parliament—cannot be a juryman—cannot be a witness—cannot hold a commission of trifling importance in the army. It is confiscation and banishment to send their children abroad to Catholic countries for education—cannot take a degree in college without forswearing his religion—cannot go five miles from home without permission from five magistrates. It is outlawry to hear mass—death to receive, relieve, comfort, aid, or maintain, any jesuit, or seminary priest, deacon, &c. knowing him to be such, and outlawry to send them relief even beyond the seas. These are the words of the law.‡ This is not all, they were hunted down, hooted, and hissed and scoffed. Such gentlemen, is the spirit of the English laws. Our forefathers fled to this country to avoid this persecution. As the historian says, 200 Catholic gentlemen, with their families, and retinue, made the first settlement of Maryland, in St. Mary's; *and we are their descendants.* Here for a while they enjoyed some repose, to wit: just time enough to conquer the wild beasts, to pacify the Indians, to cut down the woods, and to enable them to reap the first fruits of their labor.

By this time the king thought it necessary to take the woodland stripling under his special care, and the very same laws, above hastily abstracted, though a little mollified, were introduced here, in order to administer only a moderate wholesome chastisement, to teach the lad while young, how to work for and be useful to his master then and after. There are numbers yet alive, who remember full well this degraded state of bondage. At length America, grown a little hardy by rough treatment, for it was not the Catholics alone, but all denominations felt an abundant portion of ill treatment; but they doubly in their religious as well as civil capacity, began to grow restive, and to think she was big and strong enough to manage her own affairs, without help of her severe step mother, and upon trial found she was not mistaken.

After the glorious era of our revolution, all civil and religious incapacities were taken off, and the Catholics could once more breath unmolested, and dare to look their equals in the face. But so subdued were the minds of the generality of the Roman Catholics, and so few were their opportunities of giving their children any education, that we find few, very few indeed, in proportion to their wealth and numbers, taking any lead in the affairs of the country, and but for the noble and generous spirit of freedom, that pervaded this chosen land, their religious incapacities might have been renewed. Attempts were made in some states, which had not yet been able entirely to throw off the shackles of prejudice, although they had burst the bonds of slavery. In Virginia it required all the talents of Mr. Jefferson to atchieve this second and noblest conquest—*the emancipation of the human mind.* His memorable address in favor of universal toleration, in opposition to a bill then pending in the legislature of that state, to impose restrictions on those who differed from the established church, will do him honor while there remains a man to read the relentless persecutions the human race has undergone in the name of religion. In this state, the conduct of a certain character, conspicuous on the bench, in our legislature, will long be remembered by all who had cause. It was at that time that Athanasius Ford and Colonel Ignatius Fenwick,* sounded the tocsin of alarm to their brethren, and took the lead in St. Mary's, against so odious and detestable a measure. Now thanks to a gracious God, these narrow minded prejudices are confined to a very few indeed of the weakest and most harmless of every denomination. Now, it is impossible, for the greatest effort of any fanatic, if it should be attempted, to disturb the happy harmony that subsists between all denominations; and we have nothing to dread unless perchance from the cunning policy of some artful politician, who might be seeking popularity among the numerous and bitter Presbyterians of the North.† But yet notwithstanding, it is, at all times necessary for any set of men, who do not wish wholly to be forgotten in the distribution of national favors, that they should contribute their mite to public deliberations, take some share in the burthens and honors of our government. For the administration of our republican government is not altogether an affair of pleasure and profit; but is mingled with toil and pain, and cares innumerable, and dangers and responsibility certain. In these it is the duty of every denomination, possessing the requisite talents to participate, if they wish to do their duty as citizens, and expect to deserve to participate in any of its advantages and dispensations; and shall it be said that there is not one single Roman Catholic in Congress, not even in the state administration, notwithstanding the catholics in Kentucky are numerous, and the state of Maryland was first settled by Roman Catholics, and that they yet constitute a numerous, wealthy, and intelligent portion of this state?

Far be it from me, to awaken any odious controversy. No man can deprecate it more sincerely; but I know full well that no liberal man of any other persuasion can take the smallest exception at my observations. Popery is no longer a scarecrow; that raw head and bloody bones, with which the people of England scared their children, is now divested of all its terrors. I am not addressing the bigots of the ninth century, but the catholics of 1808—the sons of free America. The protestants of Maryland are so very far superior in numbers, and so far elevated above the mean and narrow prejudices that contract the brows of the Guelphs, that there is no hazard. And even those of this district know as well as you do, that if a religious controversy was to arise, which I am sure never will, they could at any time put it down, put it down with the weight of their hand, much more with their whole body. I mean no more, than that you should take your share in the labors of the commonwealth, if you expect to share its blessings and honors.

A fair opportunity now presents itself. A well-tried and faithful member of your community, Major James Fenwick, by sore indignities and gross and vulgar abuse has been driven from that beloved retirement, too generally sought by Roman Catholic gentlemen, and offers his service as a representative for this district. True to the principles he holds most sacred, and from which he has never swerved, he has avowed that he is no duellist, and that fact was known many years. How else could he be constant in the observance of the rites of his church? He had his choice, to renounce his religion or the vanities of the world—his conduct has been consistent. It does not become me to dwell on the merits of this man; they are known to all who know him, and need no repetition. The people of the district can trace his life from his youth to the present day, and can truly say of him as of Nathaniel, in him there is no guile. His enemy, the only one he has on earth, and he from party rancor, accuses him of vauntings and egotisms, and other things too absurd to repeat. It is true, that once in his life, contrary to the whole tenor of it, he was driven by unheard of and sudden ill treatment for an unoffending man, to an excess of passion; in which, for the sake of rousing the public mind, and the dormant politicians of Charles, to the real dangers of the freedom of speech, he tells that man, "that he has ample talents to strip him of his terrors, and that he is as far superior to the little arts of the leaders of disorganization and jacobinism (for that is what he meant) as the splendor of the meridian sun is to the dimmest star; that he will lower the tone of arrogance," &c. &c. All this is true, and I will answer for its truth, letter for letter, and word for word. Does any one who knows him believe that the good, mild, plain, unassuming, and peaceable James Fenwick could have been roused to make use even of those expressions, had he not have been urged to it by the severest ill treatment. It is impossible! The affair was so sudden he had no time to reflect. He returned home in a furious gust of passion, and without one friend or a single adviser with him, to curb his wrathful effusions, he sent them to the press. Gentlemen, remember it was the *first* quarrel he ever had in his life. His manners can provoke no one, unless it be a man determined to be angry. Such is the man who offers to represent your district, from which a Roman Catholic never was sent to Congress, and never will be, unless you exert yourselves. Will any man object to your having a representative once in an age, to let the world know that you are not extinct; that you yet form a portion of the commonwealth, and to speak in your behalf, on any matter of business or objection that might arise, relating to you—in other words to be your centinel? The only one you have a chance of having at the seat of government. Many of you may object to the present candidate, because he differs with you in politics—that is a subject of opinion, so is religion; which is the greatest? He is a friend to the present administration, which has been very far from shewing the hostility to religion so often most falsely prophecied. Mr. Jefferson, in particular, has never shewed any prejudice against the Catholic religion. His actions rather speak the contrary. His daughters, I am told, were educated in a convent—he guarded your privileges in the Virginia assembly most ably and successfully. In a treaty with the Kaskaskia Indians, he agreed to provide an annuity for a Catholic clergyman that was established among them. He has, I know, contributed liberally out of his own purse, to the building of Catholic churches as well as others. He has never objected to appoint a Roman Catholic to an office, that he had talents to fill. Many instances could be mentioned, in some their politics opposed to his own. His household, I am told, consist nearly altogether of Catholics, and above all, he has universally preferred peace, to the desolation of the human race by war and bloodshed, where it could possibly be avoided with dignity. In the present calamitous and disastrous state of the world, when all Europe is torn to pieces by the most terrible convulsions, when such is the shocking rancor with which war is carried on by the two great belligerents, and such the demoniacal hatred they bear each other, that a neutral cannot have the smallest intercourse with one, without given offence to the other, and when under a variety of pretences of annoying each other they forget all law, all justice, and all respect to the flag and independence of those who will take no part or share whatever in their eternal quarrels and interminable and infernal wars, and when under these pretences they seize our ships in every sea, and one power attempts to lay taxes on our trade, and both pretend to regulate it—

There was but a choice of these three evils, viz.

1. To join in their quarrels and wars.
2. To submit and abandon independence.
3. Or to withdraw and keep retired within ourselves till they were done with their unprincipled conduct.

Mr. Jefferson chose retirement, and offered them a good school boy's bargain, viz. "if they would let him alone he would let them alone." They might fight as long as they pleased, but he was determined not to suffer all our vessels to be seized, under one pretext or other, and our whole commerce to be destroyed. Every one who reads, and has good sense and candor, and is not too deeply interested in the approaching election for President and Vice-President—for Congress, and state delegates, must known that it is the British orders in council, and the French decrees, and the distracted state of Europe, that has destroyed our commerce, and that it will be destroyed, so long as those orders in council, and French decrees are in force, let the embargo be taken of when it will. The Embargo is evidently then not the *cause* of the destruction of trade. Can any man suppose that had the British orders in council, and the consequent French decrees, the seizure of our vessels, and the violations of our harbors and territory, the murder of our citizens and the impressment of our seamen, not taken place, that any embargo could have been laid in this country? It is out of the question! The embargo then, is surely a *consequence*, & not a *cause* of the destruction of our commerce, and was no doubt intended for its protection. If it was so desperate a measure as designing men represent it, could any of the federal members of Congress so eager and willing to take exception vote for it? I only ask the question. I believe many of them did. The good policy of the embargo is well known & acknowledged by many candid and honorable men in the opposition; were it not for the aspiring ambition of certain individuals, who are galled and sorely vexed, not a breath of complaint would have been heard in this district, or throughout the Union, by the virtuous, and nobleminded freemen of America. Besides real Americans and the friends to the glorious independence of America, of all parties, in a contest between their country and foreign nations would acquiesce *while the contest lasted* in the measures of their government, even if they disapproved of them. We will state a plain case: suppose a council of war was called on the eve of a great battle, and in council a great difference of opinion arose, as to the policy of an engagement, and the subject caused serious and spirited discussion. Yet when the affair was decided in favor of battle, would it not be the duty of every officer who loved his country to acquiesce, be silent, and do his duty like a brave and loyal soldier? And would it not be mutinous, seditious, jacobinical and treasonable to stir up the privates to disaffection, and by that means to strengthen their enemies, merely from vexation and chagrin because their opinion was superceded in council? The cases are not exactly alike; but differ only in form: for many people are of opinion that attacks upon our national ships and the murder of our citizens, are acts of hostility amounting in fact and substance to a declaration of war. Acts relating to the interior and municipal regulations, are surely very different things from measures adopted against foreign unfriendly nations. The first are here at all times a fair subject of argument and difference. The latter only when the cause is withdrawn, and then, and then only, will they be a fair question of Executive responsibility. Until then, they ought to be supported, right or wrong. Because our independence as a nation, and the loyalty of every individual freeman of this indivisible commonwealth is at stake; we have stuck and must go through. Many very good men are not aware of the effect of their terrible outcry abroad, and the mischief it does over the water. Our enemies are watching us, and anxiously waiting, and striving a little too, for an insurrection; and there is no doubt, if they did not calculate on it, they would give way and do

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* Osborn a protestant writer, plainly confesses that it was a neat device of the Secretary, page 34.

Mr. More in his History of the English Province, page 310, says, there was no light suspicion of a Peer's knowing the conspiracy long before the discovery, who cunningly pretended ignorance.

Further light is thrown on this dark piece of business by Sanderson, page 334—also by a book called a plain and rational account of the Catholic Faith, page 171.

† It was under an accusation of being concerned in this plot that the good and venerable viscount Stafford lost his life, besides six Jesuits and and five Catholic peers, under a goodly act of Parliament too. Stafford died like a hero protesting his innocence to the last—*Millot vol. 5, p.* 193. It was for a like crime that Sir John Fenwick was murdered by law—*Hume*. These are noted cases, not to mention numberless other unfortunates. It was of these times that a candid historian speaks when he observes "A phantom of a Popish plot generated almost incredible disturbances, and a worthless impostor caused that to be received as certain, which common sense ought to have rejected.—*Millot, vol. 5, p.* 190.

* Poor Ireland! She has groaned under superinhuman oppression for 700 years and under religious persecution even to the present day.

† See Hales P. C. under the heads "Religion, Supremacy, Clergy, Heresy, Recusants."

‡ 27 *Elizabeth, cap.* 2—*Act* 1, *Eliz. cap.* 1. disables them from making a will—*Swinburne on Wills, part* 5, § 6. or doing any legal act *Co. Lit.* 133; 35 *Eliz. cap.* 2, prohibits not to remove five miles from London. By 13 *Eliz.* the offence as well in the bringers in of Papal Bulls as Executors thereof is made treason, death and confiscation; besides a man incurred a premunire if he did not take the Protestant sacrament, if he did not go to their church, or if he attended his own church—refer to the above acts, and the reader will see a great deal more than could be copied conveniently in many pages.

* Father to the present candidate James Fenwick, and a revolutionary veteran.

† I have frequently been told that something of that kind was meditated during the administration of John Adams, though I cannot vouch for its truth; yet from what I knew of New England, I thought it highly probable that an established church would be pleasing and popular, or at least some pre-eminence and distinction.