My soul is oppressed in finding cause of blame in a man in whom I see so much to praise. Your character is not degraded by meanness, like that of the greater part of your brethren the poets; you have not prostituted your talents to adulation; do not tarnish them by incredulity, nor by a sort of persecution. Placed at the summit of the American Parnassus, a creditor of glory, you have sung in beautiful verses that liberty you defended with your arms; you came to render her homage at the bar of the national convention, where, as president, I answered in a manner that accorded with the principles you proclaimed. Our hearts were in unison.

The true foundation of political liberty is in the gospel, for it perpetually reminds men, that having all proceeded from the same stock, they compose only one family; that there exists among them, not a *species of relationship*, as has been said in a well known work, but a real consanguinity, whose bond is indestructible. The gospel unceasingly inculcates on men a spirit of charity and fraternal sentiments.—The christian religion would be perverted and disguised, if it were subordinate to the caprices of rulers and the passions; but well understood and rightly practised, it is the most certain guarantee of the purity of public and private manners. Under its wings my friend, your state of society was raised, and consolidated, and the domestic virtues hereditarily transmitted; it is to that, without doubt, that you owe, among other advantages, that of having a wife gifted with so many rare qualities and inestimable virtues. Ingratitude alone could mistake the benefits of this august and divine religion; it would be like despising the bosom of our mother.

I have discharged, my dear Barlow, a very painful task in censuring, without human respect what in your person offends christianity. The The work being public, I give the same publicity to my remonstrance; thus satisfying what is prescribed to me by my principles, my situation, my conscience, and my invariable friendship.

H GREGOIRE.
Former Bishop of Blois,
Senator &c.

Paris, 15th March 1809.

LETTER

To Henry Gregoire, *Bishop, Senator, Count of the Empire and Member of the Institute of France, in reply to his Letter on the* COLUMBIAD.

By Joel Barlow LL. D.
Fellow of the American Philosophical Society and of several other learned institutions.

[Editors of Public Journals, who have published Gregoire's letter, are requested to insert the following reply as soon as convenient. It is an act of justice due to him, and to the character of their Journals, as well as to the Author.]

LETTER

My Dear Good Friend,

I Have received your letter, at once complimentary & critical on the poem I sent you. Our venerable friend archbishop Carroll informs me that he has likewise received from you a copy of the same letter; and he has expressed to me in conversation, with the same frankness that you have done in writing his displeasure at the engraving which has offended you.

While I assure you that I sincerely mingle my regrets with yours and with his on this subject, permit me, my excellent Gregoire, to accompany them with a few observations that I owe to the cause of truth & to my own blameless character. Yes my friend, I appeal to yourself, to our intimate intercourse of near twenty years, when I repeat this claim of character. It cannot be denied me in any country; and your letter itself, with all its expostulating severity, is a proof of the sentiment in you which justifies my appeal.

The engraving in question is gone forth, and unfortunately cannot be recalled. If I had less delicacy than I really have towards you and the other catholic christians whom you consider as insulted by the prostration of their emblems which you therein discover, I might content myself with saying, what is the fact, that this engraving & the picture from which it was taken were made in England while I was in America; and that I knew nothing of its composition till it was sent over to me not only engraved, but printed and prepared for publication. My portion therefore in the crime, if it is a crime, is only the act of what our lawyers term an accomplice after the fact. But my affectionate regard for an offended brother will not suffer me to meet his complaint with so short an answer. I must discuss the subject, and reply to the whole charge as though it were all my own; premising, as I have already done, that I am sorry there is occasion for it, and regret that the engraving was ever made.

How much our religious opinions depend on the place of our birth! Had you and I been born in the same place, there is no doubt but we should have been of the same religion. Had that place been Constantinople we must have been musselmen. But now the musselmen call us infidels; we pity their weakness and call them infidels in our turn. I was born in a place where catholic christians are not known but by report and the discipline of our sect taught us to consider them, not indeed as infidels, but as a species of idolaters. It was believed by us, though erroneously, that they worshipped images. We now find that they employed them only as instruments of worship, not as the object. But there is no wonder that to the vulgar apprehension of our people it should appear as we were taught to believe; and that those nations who bow the knee before these emblems of deity, & address their prayers to them, should be considered as really worshipping them. This idea was perhaps corroborated by their prayers being uttered in an unknown tongue.

The decalogue of Moses had inspired us with an abhorrence for images, and for those who bow down to them and worship them; and hence arose our unhappy aversion to the catholics. We were told that their churches were full of pictures, statues and other visible representations, not only of the blessed virgin, of all the apostles and many of the saints, but of every person in the holy trinity. Our fathers had protested against that great section of the christain family which calls itself the mother church, not merely on account of the sale of indulgences, against which Luther had led the revolt, but likewise on account of its making these pretended images of the inimageable God.

The sect of puritans, in which I was born and educated, and to which I still adhere for the same reason that you adhere to the catholics, a conviction that they are right, were the class of reformers, who placed themselves at the greatest remove from the mother church, and retained the least respect for her emblems and the other ceremonials of her worship. They could suffer no bishops, no mitres, crosiers, crucifixes or censers. They made no processions, carried no lighted candles thro' the streets at noon day; neither did they leave them burning in their churches through the night, when no human eye was there to see them; having entirely lost sight of this part of the institutions of Zoroaster, Isis, and Ceres. They would not allow their prayers to be written in any language, not even in Latin, though they did not understand it. But they chose to utter their supplications extempore, like their other discourses, to communicate their own ideas, to express their wants and offer their confessions directly to the invisible God; through a mediator indeed, but without holding him in their hand, or haveing him fixed in effigy on a cross before their eyes. They had no organs in their churches, no instrumental music in their worship, which they held to be always profane.

These people made use of no cross but the mystical one of mortifying their sins; and if they had been called upon to join in a crusade to the holy land, they must have marched without a standard. They would have fought indeed with as much bravery as saint Louis or the lion Richard; but when they had reconquered the tomb of Christ they would have trampled on the cross with as fervent a zeal as they would upon the crescent. They were not conversant with what we call the fine arts; they spoke to the ear, but not to the eye; and having no reverence for images or emblems, they despised those that had, though they were doubtless wrong in so doing.

I mention these things, my worthy friend, not with the least idea of levity or evasion; but to prove to you how totally you have mistaken my meaning and my motive; to shew by what chain of circumstances, mostly foreign to our own merits or demerits, our habits of opinion, our cast of character are formed; to shew how natural it is that a man of my origin and education, my course of study and the views I must have taken of the morals of nations, their causes and tendencies, should attribute much of the active errors that afflict the human race to the use of emblems, and to the fatal facility with which they are mistaken for realities by the great vulgar of mankind; how the best of christians of one sect may consider the christian emblems of another sect, as *prejudices* of a dangerous tendency, and honestly wish to see them destroyed; and all this without the least hostility to their fundamental doctrines, or suspicion of giving offence.

I never supposed that those Hollanders who, to obtain leave to carry on commerce in Japan, trampled on the cross, as a proof that they did not belong to the same nation with the Portuguese who had done so much mischief in that island, really meant to renounce their religion as christians; when they trod upon its catholic emblem. The act might be reprehensible, as being done for lucre; but it must appear extremely different in the eyes of different sects of christians. To a catholic, who identifies the cross with the gospel, our only hope of salvation, it must appear a horrid crime; but to a protestant we may easily conceive it might appear of little moment, and by no means as a renunciation of the gospel.

You have now furnished in your own person an additional example, and a most striking one, of identifying the symbol with the substance. In your letter to me, you treat the cross and the gospel as the same thing. Had I been sufficiently aware of the force of that habit of combination among the catholics, especially in a mind of those accute perceptions and strong sensibilities which I know to belong to yours, I should surely have suppressed the engraving.

You must perceive by this time, that you have mistaken my principles and feelings in another point of view. You suppose I should be greatly offended "to see the symbols of liberty, so dear to me, trampled under foot before my eyes." Not at all my friend. Leave to me and my country the great realities of liberty, and I freely give you up its emblems. There was no time in the American revolution, though I was then young and enthusiastic, that you might not have cut down every liberty pole and burnt all the red caps in the United States, and I would have looked on with tranquility, perhaps have thanked you for your trouble. My habits of feeling and reasoning, already accounted for, had accustomed me to regard these trappings rather as detrimental than advantageous to the cause they are meant to support. These images we never greatly multiplied in this country. I have seen more liberty caps at one sitting of the Jacobin club in Paris, than were ever seen in all America.

You will say, perhaps that it is the difference of national character which makes the distinction. This is doubtless true; but what has been the cause of this difference in the character of our two nations? Has not the universal use of embleins in one, and the almost universal disuse of them in the other, had as great if not a greater effect than all other causes, in producing such difference? I do not say that our national character is better than yours; far from it. I speak frankly. I think you undervalue the French character. I have a high esteem for that nation. They are an amiable, intelligent, generous, hospitable, unsuspicious people. I say nothing of their government, whether regal, revolutionary or imperial. In private friendship they are as disinterested and unshaken, at least as any people I have seen. Of this I could cite numerous examples, both within my own experience and that of others; though it would establish my position in my own mind if I were able to mention none but you.

It would indeed be paying too high a compliment to any nation on earth to cite Gregoire as a sample of its moral and social character. If all catholics had been like you, the world at this day would all be catholics. And I may say, I hope without offence, that if all pagans had been like you, the world had all been pagans: there might have been no need of catholics, no pretext for the sect of puritans.

This is an amicable discussion between you and me. The suavity of your manner does honor to the fortitude with which you defend your principles; though it is not easy to perceive against what opponent you are defending them. Your letter expatiates in a wide field and embraces many subjects. But really, my friend, the greater part of it has nothing more to do with me than one of Cicero's letters to Atticus. You begin by supposing that I have renounced christianity myself, and that I attempt to overturn the system by ridicule and insult. Neither of which is true; for neither of which have you the least color of proof. No, my honest accuser, the proof is not in the book. Review the work with all the acumen of your discernment, and you must, you will recall the hasty accusation. I defy you and all the critics of the English language to point out a passage, if taken in its natural, unavoidable meaning, which militates against the genuine principles, practice, faith and hope of the christian system, as inculcated in the gospels and explained by the apostles whose writings accompany the gospels in the volume of the new testament.

On the contrary, I believe, and you have compelled me on this occasion to express my belief, that the Columbiad, taken in all its parts of text and notes and preface, is more favorable to sound and rigid morals, more friendly to virtue, more clear and unequivocal in pointing out the road to national dignity and individual happiness, more energetic in its denunciations of tyranny and oppression in every shape, injustice and wickedness in all their forms, and consequently more consonant to what you acknowledge to be the spirit of the gospel, than all the writings of all that list of christian authors of the three last ages, whom you have cited as the glory of christendom, and strung them on the alphabet, from Addison down to Winkelman. Understand me right, my just and generous friend; I judge not my poem as a work of genius. I cannot judge it nor class it nor compare it in that respect because it is my own. But I *know* it as a moral work; I *can* judge and *dare* pronounce upon its tendency, its beneficial effect upon every candid mind; and I am confident you will yet join me in opinion. But let me repeat my prayer that you will not mistake the spirit of this observation. It is not from vanity that I speak; my book is not a work of genius; the maxims in it are not my own; they are yours, they are those of good men that have gone before us both; they are drawn from the gospel, from history, from the unlettered volume of moral nature, from the experience and the inexperience of unhappy man in his various struggles after happiness; from all his errors and all his objects in the social state. My only merit lies in putting them together with fidelity. My work is only a transcript of the tablet of my mind imprest with these images as they pass before it.

You will see that I have nothing to do with the unbelievers who have attacked the christian system either before the French revolution, or during or since that monumental period. I am not one of them. You say I resemble them in any thing else; you will now add that I resemble them not in this.

So far as you have discovered a cause of the failure of that revolution in the renunciation of the christian faith by those who held, in stormy quick succession, the reins of your government, I thank you for the discovery. I was in want of more causes than I had yet perceived, to account for the unhappy catastrophe of that gigantic struggle of all the virtues against all the vices that political society has known. You have discovered a cause; but there is such a thing in logic as the cause of a cause. I have thought, but perhaps it is an error, that the reason why the minds of the French people took the turn they did, on the breaking out of the revolution, was to be found in the complicated ceremonials of their worship, and what you yourself would term the non essentials of their religion.

The reasonable limits of a letter will not allow me to do justice to this idea. To give it the proper developement would require five times the volume that I shall give to the present communication. The innumerable varieties of pomp and circumstance which the discipline of the church had inculcated and enjoined, became so incorporated with the vital principles of faith and practice; and these exteriors were overloaded with abuses to such a degree, that to discriminate and take them down, without injuring the system, required a nicer eye than the people can possess, a steadier hand than can comport with the hurried movement of a great revolution.

The scaffolding of your church, permit me to say it, had so enclosed, parforated, overlooked and underpropt the building, that we could not be surprised, though sorely grieved to see the reformer lay hand his like a blind Sampson, to the great substantial pillars, heave and overturn the whole encumbered edifice together, and bury himself in the ruins. Why did they make a goddess of reason? Why erect a statute of liberty? A mass of dead matter for a living energetic principle! Have the courage, my good friend, to answer these questions. You know it was for the same cause that the people of Moses, made their golden calf. The calf Apis had from time immemorial become a god in Egypt. The people were in the habit of seeing their divine protector in that substantial boval form, with two horns, four legs and a tail; and this habit was so interwoven in the texture of their minds as to become a part of the intellectual man. The privations incident to a whole travelling nation subjected them to many calamities. No human hand could relieve them; they felt a necessity of seeking aid from a supernatural agent, but no satisfaction in praying to an invisible God. They had never thought of such a being; and they could not bring themselves at once to the habit of forming conceptions of him with sufficient clearness and confidence to make him an object of adoration, to which they could address their supplications in the day of great afflictions.

Forty years of migration were judged necessary to suppress the habit of using idols in their worship; during which time their continual marches would render it at once inconvenient for the people to move the heavy gods, and to conceal them in their baggage; while the severity of military discipline must expose their tents and their effects to the frequent inspection of their officers.

Shall I apply this principle to the French nation in her revolution? No, my friend, it is too delicate a task for a foreigner who has received her hospitality; I will leave it to your own compassionate and philanthropic mind. You will recollect how often I partook of your grief during that scene of moral degradation. No sooner did you and the other virtuous leaders in the revolution begin to speak of *august* liberty, *holy* reason and the *divine* rights of man, than the artizans took up the hammer, the chissel and the plaister of Paris. They must reduce these gods to form before they could present them to the people with any chance of their being understood; they must create before they could adore. Trace this principle through five years of your history, and you will find why the catholic religion was overturned, morality laid asleep, and the object of the revolution irretrievably lost, at least for our day.

My dear Gregoire, I am glad you have written me this letter, though at first it gave me pain. I was sorry to find myself so entirely misconceived by a friend so highly valued; but I see your attack is easily repelled, a thing which I know will give you pleasure, and it furnishes me an occasion at the same time to render a piece of justice to myself in relation to my fellow-citizens. You must know I have enemies in this country. Not personal ones; I never had a personal enemy, to my knowledge, in any country. But they are political enemies, the enemies of republican liberty, and a few of their followers who never read my writings; that is my writings that I wrote, but only those that I did not write; such as were forged and published for me in my absence; many of which I never have seen, and some of which did not hear of till ten years after they had been printed in the American gazettes.

It has even been said and published by these christian editors, (I never heard of it till lately) that I went to the bar of your convention, when it was the fashion so to do, and made a solemn recantation of my christian faith, declaring myself an atheist or deist, or some other anti-christian apostate; I know not what, for I never yet have seen the place. Now, as an active member of that convention, a steady attendant at their sittings, and my most intimate friend, you know that such a thing could not be done without your knowledge; you know therefore that it was not done; you know I never went but once to the bar of that convention, which was on the occasion to which you allude in the letter now before me, to present an address from the constitutional society in London, of which I was a member. You know I always sympathised in your grief and partook of all your resentment while such horrors and blasphemies were passing, of which these typographical cannibals of reputation have made me a participant.

These calumnies you see could not be refuted by me while I did not know of their existence. But there is another reason which you will not conceive of till I inform you. The editors of newspapers, you know, ought to be considered as exercising a sacred function; they are the high priests of public opinion, which is the high court of character, the guardian of public morals. Now I am ashamed to inform you that there are editors in this country who will publish the grossest calumny against a citizen, and refuse to publish its refutation. This is an immorality unknown in France since the death of Marat.

A private letter of mine, written from Paris, was mutilated in this country, made to say things that I never wrote nor thought, and published in all our anti-republican papers. I saw it a year after the date and immediately wrote an explanatory letter, which re-established my first intention. This last I then published in Paris, London and Philadelphia. Not one editor who printed the original mutilated letter has, to this day, printed my answer; though it was published in all those places ten years ago. And perhaps not one person in twenty who read the first has ever seen the second, or yet knows of its existence, except those editors who refused to publish it.

You must not suppose from this statement of facts that I am angry with these people. On the contrary, I pity and forgive them. And there is no great merit in this, for they are not my enemies. They only do the work they are set about by their patrons and supporters, the monarchists of America. Their object is not to injure me, but to destroy the effect of my republican writings.

They now publish your letter with great avidity because they think it will tend to decry my poem. It may have this effect in a small degree; but I still thank them for multiplying your publication. There is no work of yours that I do not wish to see universally