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THE TABLET.

No. LXXXV.

"From annexing different ideas to words, men must always be at variance in their speculative reasonings."

A LITERARY correspondent has favored the editor with the following Essay respecting the use of certain terms as applied by some religious sects. The learning and good sense it discovers, induce us thus early to lay it before the public.

FOR THE TABLET.

IT is said that the manichean system of Theology, excluding a few absurdities, forms a part of our orthodox creed. The principal difference in the two systems is this—that the Manicheans believe the *evil principle* to be co-equal with the *good principle*; and both supreme in their respective departments; one the sovereign author of good; the other, of evil. The christian scheme places this point on a consistent footing, by informing us that there is but *one supreme*; but at the same time, it makes the devil, a subordinate being, the immediate author of evil. It informs us that the first sin in paradise was caused by the instigation of this evil spirit or principle, and the whole tenor of scripture proves that he has still a material influence over human actions.

The heathen systems of mythology all supposed a number of created inferior deities, or demons,* both good and bad spirits, which were instrumental in executing the purposes of the Supreme Being. The scripture declares this to be a fact—the angels are ministering spirits, and the devil and his fellow apostates may be permitted to execute the decrees of heaven upon the wicked.

All nations seem to have had some notions of a chaos, prior to the creation. The scripture says the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep? The Edda, † which contains the opinions of our Gothic ancestors, says, "Before creation, all was one vast abyss."

The scripture tells us that the "world and all things that are in it shall be destroyed by fire." The Edda says, "Surtur, the black, shall come at the end of the world—vanquish the Gods, and give up the universe a prey to the flames."

The bible informs us, that woman was made out of the man's side or rib. The Edda, represents, that "Ymer, the first man or giant, slept and fell into a sweat, and from the pit of his left arm were born male and female."

The scripture gives us a particular account of a deluge that destroyed the whole human race, except eight persons. The Edda says, "the sons of Bore slew the giant Ymer, and all the giants of the frost were drowned, except Bergelmer, who was saved in his bark." In all these particulars, we can see a striking analogy of ideas; and a strong proof of some original revelations, from which these notions were derived.

The ancient northern nations believed in one supreme being; but they supposed that in the *Agard* or divine abode, he had twelve names, of which *Allfader* ‡ was the first or most considerable. They had likewise some idea of a place of misery, as opposed to the *Agard*, the abode of the Gods. This they called *Hela*, which signifies, *Death*, and is the origin of our word *hell*. The English therefore, like the Latins, who used *inferi* or *imus*, for the inhabitants of the lower regions, as well as for the regions themselves, have no word for *hell* which signifies anything more than the *place of the dead*.

The opinions which nations had of a *Deity* may be collected from the names which they used to denote his existence. The Greek word *Theos* is derived from a verb that signifies *to run, to move ones self*—a term that proves they considered him as a *self-moving power*; but it is said this word was originally appropriated to the stars which they worshipped as deities. The Latin word *Deus* is perhaps a derivative of *Theos*; the Romans however did not use it to express the One Supreme; but generally to denote one God of many. It was equivalent to *le Dieu* in French, or *the God*; and it implied a plurality of Gods. The

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* The word *daemon* originally signified a good spirit as well as a bad one. So it is used by Herodotus, Book 7, speaking of the Grecian oracle, he says "Such was the will of the *Dæmon*."

† This is said to have been written in Teutonic or Scandinavian language, by Snorrio Sturleson, an Icelander, who lived in the 12th century. It was translated into French by Mon. Mallet.

‡ This word may be a compound of *all-father*, that is *father of all*, like the Jupiter of the Greeks; or it may be a Hebrew-Gothic word, from *el* and *fader*; *el* signifying the beneficent.

Greeks and Romans seem to have had some idea of a supreme, independent, self-existing power; but their *Theoi, Dei, Divi* and *Dæmones*, were considered as spirits merely superior to man, and having an influence over their actions and the events of the natural world.

Were the English to found their theological creed upon the literal meaning of the two words *God* and *Devil*, they must all be *Manicheans*; for originally *God* was the same word as *good*, and *DEVIL* is but the contraction of *THE EVIL*, or *DE EVIL*.

Our northern ancestors therefore made use of the word *good*, to convey their idea of the *cause of all good*; & of the word *evil*, to express their belief of the existence of a malignant spirit or principle. They were not indebted to christianity for the names, nor the ideas expressed by the names; for both existed among the ancient Scandinavians, long before their knowledge of the christian religion.*

Christianity has corrected our ideas of those beings, and the appropriations of the names—for we do not use the word *God* by way of eminence, merely to express an idea of superior excellence; but we use it to express the scripture ideas of *Jehovah*, the supreme self-existent being. The word *devil*, or *the evil one* we use to denote the *demons* or bad spirits mentioned in scripture, and particularly to denote the *chief* of the apostate angels.

Much depends on the copiousness of a language. The Ethiopians had but one word for *nature* and *person*; consequently were not capable, on the promulgation of christianity, of comprehending the doctrine of Christ's incarnation. The Chinese, it is said, have no word for *Deity* but that which signifies *sky*.

Mr. Heriot, who was one that attempted a settlement in Virginia, under Sir Richard Grenville, in 1585, observes that in explaining the christian religion to the savages, he found their curiosity excited, but he could not make them understand the scheme, on account of the poverty of their language. Hence the absurdity of an attempt to christianize the savages, before their languages are enlarged and rendered capable of expressing metaphysical ideas. It is doubtless impossible to convert rude nations into *rational christians*, till their minds are in some degree improved by science, and their languages enriched with words for expressing abstract ideas. †

NOTES.

* The word *good* was originally spelt *God*, and varied in the Saxon form. *Nom. god. Gen. godis, &c.* See Hicke's Saxon Grammar. In the German, the name of the Supreme Being is *Gott*; *d* being changed into *t* after the usual manner.

† Languages, in their infant state, contain few words but names of sensible objects.

THE OBSERVER.—No. XV.

AN assumption of the State debts, is an event which many think must eventually take place: there may be doubts, and difficulties to obviate, which will occasion a delay; but the efforts of the Union, and of the States, to systematize their treasuries, will probably ultimate in this measure.

Doubtless there will be persons enough to raise objections, and with an honest design; for there needs much deliberation to see the propriety of new measures, which will have so extensive an effect. If any of the States should now think the measure against their interest, a short time will open their eyes, by the confusion which must ensue from a continuance in their present situation. If the State debts should be assumed, it will become a serious question, how shall funds be provided for the aggregate sum? Every possible revenue from trade will be inadequate, and the Treasury of the United States, must be furnished with other ways and means. The people will cheerfully pay what justice requires, for it must be as much their interest as it is their duty; and a principal difficulty will be in conciliating the public feelings to a system of uniform operation thro the whole.—I will mention the several propositions which have occurred to my hearing. There yet remains a very small number, who tell us that the old method of requisition is best; leaving every State to its own way of taxing and collecting the sum demanded.—They say further, that Congress now possesses the power of coercion, and after a State hath proved delinquent, will be a proper time for the general government to exert its coercive authority, and enforce a payment.

The very proposition appears to me to be fraught with evil, and must soon end in a subversion, either of the general, or of the State governments, and probably of the latter. To make a requisition on the States will be easy; but there is every reason to suppose some of them will prove delinquent, which must lead to universal

delinquency. In this case who is the subject of coercion? If it be the delinquent State in its corporate capacity, it can be done only by levying war on the whole people, and subverting their existence as a State; if the private citizens considered as subjects of the United States are to be coerced, the process will be loaded with a thousand difficulties, for which an antidote cannot be provided. Perhaps the delinquent State has made a grant of the demanded sum; part is collected and in the State treasury, part in the hands of speculating collectors, over whom the general government hath no power, and part unpaid in the hands of the people; some districts have contributed their whole quota, and others no part of it; in this stage of the business how shall the general government take hold and coerce a collection? and to new assess the whole sum on the people, would be a manifest injustice by the operation of the two governments.

Or suppose the delinquent State neglects to make any grant of the requisition; will it not be an ungrateful business, and have a most powerful tendency to destroy all respect to State authority, for the United States to come in and tell the people "we have made our demand on your legislature, and they have not done their duty—they have shewn themselves to be either ignorant or dishonest; we are therefore under a necessity of taxing you directly without their intervention, your sister States have paid their proportion, and criminate your delay, blame not us but your own assembly." Will a measure of "this kind be pacific in its tendency? Will it not look like a kingdom divided against itself? Will it not be a source of contention, and either destroy the union, which I think cannot now be done, or annihilate all respect to the State government where it happens? Ye friends to the dignity of your own States, be careful how you spread a snare to destroy their legislative reverence.—The doctrine of requisition on the States, in every point of view, is a dangerous and impracticable one. Those who tell us, that it is become feasible, since the general government have a power of coercion, either do not foresee consequences, or intend gradually to subvert the government of individual States.

That the general government possesses a coercive power over an individual State, is allowed on all hands; but the matter ought to be so conducted, that they may never have occasion to use it. In a conflict of this kind, we know that any one State must ultimately bow to the joint decision of all the others; but I should consider such an event unpropitious. If we intend to preserve a respectableness to the separate States, we must give the United States, original and sole jurisdiction and executive power of all matters in their nature national; and a general system of finance, and providing for the payment of the whole debt, by whatever name called, is conceived to be such. If the general government must ever use coercion, let it be to execute their own laws and grants; and let individuals and not States be the subjects of it. These truths must lead every friend of the union and of the separate States to reject the idea of requisitions. If we design to preserve a respectableness to the State legislature and executive, let us cordially, and in the first instance give up all those matters, which may be better conducted, by a national assembly and executive.

I have also heard another proposition which is this. Let there be an apportionment to each State of its quota of the sum needed; let Congress directly tax the inhabitants, following in each State the mode of taxation and collection, which is used by their own government. This, it is said, will be more familiar and pleasing to the people than any other possible method. On this I observe, that the proposition keeps up the idea of a previous apportionment on the States; which ever hath been, and while continued must be a source of jealousy. By such jealousies nothing is gained and much endangered.

This plan proposes as many modes of taxing and collecting, as there are States, for no two have a similar procedure—there must be thirteen bodies completely organized with limbs, joined to one head, the treasury board of the United States—is it possible for this head to preserve order, controul and give motion to so great a number of bodies? Is it possible for the treasury board to comprehend and act on so complex a system? Is the general government to have a complete set of officers of their own appointment, or to make use of those appointed by the States? If the former, their number will be immense; if the latter, they will feel no dependence on the union and cannot be brought to account.

The operation of a taxing system is much more expeditions in some, than it is in other States; in some it often runs into an arrearage of years.