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William Williams to the Printer

Hartford, Conn., *American Mercury*, 11 February 1788

Since the Federal Constitution has had so calm, dispassionate, and rational a discussion, and so happy an issue, in the late worthy Convention of this state, I did not expect any members of that honorable body to be challenged in a newspaper, and especially by name and by anonymous writers, on account of their opinion, or decently expressing their sentiments relative to the great subject then under consideration or any part of it. Nor do I yet see the propriety or happy issue of such a proceeding. However, as a gentleman in your paper feels uneasy that every sentiment contained in his publications (tho in general they are well written) is not received with perfect acquiescence and submission, I will endeavor to satisfy him, or the candid reader, by the same channel that I am not so reprehensible as he supposes, in the matter referred to.

When the clause in the 6th Article, which provides that “no religious test should ever be required as a qualification to any office or trust, etc.” came under consideration, I observed I should have chose that sentence, and anything relating to a religious test, had been totally omitted rather than stand as it did; but still more wished something of the kind should have been inserted, but with a reverse sense so far as to require an explicit acknowledgment of the being of a God, His perfections, and His providence, and to have been prefixed to, and stand as, the first introductory words of the Constitution in the following or similar terms, viz.: *We the people of the United States, in a firm belief of the being and perfections of the one living and true God, the creator and supreme Governor of the world, in His universal providence and the authority of His laws: that He will require of all moral agents an account of their conduct, that all rightful powers among men are ordained of, and mediately derived from God, therefore in a dependence on His blessing and acknowledgment of His efficient protection in establishing our Independence, whereby it is become necessary to agree upon and settle a Constitution of federal government for ourselves, and in order to form a more perfect union, etc., as it is expressed in the present introduction, do ordain, etc. And instead of none, that no other religious test should ever be required, etc. And that supposing, but not granting, this would be no security at all, that it would make hypocrites etc.; yet this would not be a sufficient reason against it, as it would be a public declaration against, and disapprobation of, men who did not, even with sincerity, make such a profession, and they must be left to the Searcher of Hearts; that it would, however, be the voice of the great body of the people and an acknowledgment proper and highly becoming them to express on this great and only occasion, and, according to the course of Providence, one means of obtaining blessings from the Most High. But that since it was not, and so difficult and dubious to get it inserted, I would not wish to make it a capital objection; that I had no more idea of a religious test which*