

General Intelligence.

(* Universal Register.')

VALUE OF CELIBACY AND MONASTIC ORDERS.

"In its warm recommendation and extensive adoption of the virtue of continence, the Catholic Church has been only writing a practical commentary on the instructions of its founder. The Gospel expresses the highest approbation of this virtue; and it is a matter of just surprise, that the admirers of scriptural knowledge should close their eyes on St. Paul's encomiums of virginity.* Tho' in condescension to human weakness, he permits widows to marry, yet he expresses a wish that they would live in continence, like himself: and it is the special privilege of virgins among the host of the blessed, that they follow the Lamb wherever he goeth. The estimation in which this virtue was held by our Redeemer and his apostles will easily account for the value that has been set on it by the Catholic Church. It will likewise account for its extensive diffusion among all classes, and explain why thousands have cheerfully submitted to a privation to which the honours of the world could not hitherto reconcile the passions of men. Though so strongly supported by the most venerable authorities, there is scarcely any point of Catholic discipline against which Protestants inveigh with more warmth, than against the vows of celibacy. Nay some of them are quite offended at the fathers, for having employed all the strength of their eloquence in setting forth the merits of continence. St. Ambrose, in particular, is honoured with the enmity of those writers whose only claim to the title of philosophical may be traced to their adoption of the voluptuous maxims of Epicurus.

"It will not be expected that I should dwell long on the views of those profound writers, who, in discussing the merits of celibacy, contemplate it only as far as it may influence a country's population. A nation's prosperity is not to be estimated by the number of its inhabitants; else Ireland at this moment might be ranked amongst the most flourishing nations of the earth. But the monastic institutions, we are told, have had an influence in checking the population of those countries, where they have been fostered. The striking contrast between the former flourishing state of the east, when it was thickly planted with monastic colonies, and its present miserable condition, may serve to illustrate this important inquiry. Has the population of the Protestant states of Europe advanced by the suppression of the monastic orders and the abolition of celibacy beyond the proportion of Catholic Europe? Italy, which might be deemed the nursery of monks as well as of sages, though the theatre of almost continual wars, was more po-

pulous in the last century, than in the most flourishing period of the Roman Empire.

"But why introduce such a view of this institution, instead of developing the moral advantages of which it is productive to society? The tide of prejudice which ran against the practice of celibacy, has lately taken a contrary direction; and the complaints of our modern philosophers and statesmen, arise from the evils of an evergrown population. Unlike Augustus, who encouraged marriage, in order to multiply the number of his subjects, our legislature is only anxious to diminish their rapid increase; and many of our philosophical legislators are expending their wisdom or their folly, in devising artificial checks to arrest the mighty mischief. Like confession, which Protestants were anxious to restore after having felt the evils of its abolition, the world is obliged to confess that the celibacy of persons who devoted themselves to the instruction of others, was an advantage. Though they may not relish the peculiar discipline of the Catholic Church, in enforcing the celibacy of its priesthood, still they acquiesce in the justness of the principle in their attempts to introduce a similar practice. The inconveniences now complained of, reveal one important truth; namely, that while many enter into the married state, for the purpose of preserving society, its interests also require that another portion should devote themselves exclusively to its moral improvement. But these different vocations, in order to be effectual, must be free; and one of the fittest and most necessary qualifications for any situation in life, is to have voluntarily contracted its obligations. Man's will cannot be controlled by penal enactments; and hence, the vast difference between the discipline of the Catholic Church, which leaves a life of celibacy at the choice of one's own will, and modern theories, which by forcing such a system on any class of society without a previous choice, would be offering violence to nature. No legislative authority can sanction unnatural laws. The human heart would instantly mutiny against the intolerable oppression, and surely it would be a most striking inconsistency, were any human legislature to attempt to impose by force an obligation which was deemed absurd when freely contracted; and when its burden was made sweet by the meek influence of religion.

"Supposing however, that a thick population is always an advantage to the state, how many other causes besides celibacy operate to its diminution? These causes are found to exist as well in prosperous as in poor countries; and even sometimes, increase with their prosperity. In the most flourishing and commercial states, though there may be a great influx of wealth, there is necessarily a vast inequality of conditions; and the depression of