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**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

LXXXI.

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tyrant to fate the ambition, or avarice of a brother, a sister, a nephew, a niece, a whore, or a bastard.

LXXXI.

IT is true that this exorbitancy has been restrained within two centuries; and this restraint is due to the reformation. We shook off the tyrant and his tyranny at once. You have filed the fangs, and blunted the teeth of the beast. He may mumble and bruise, he cannot tear, and bite, and devour as he did. But still the instances that have been cited are proper, and the reflections that have been made just. The instances are proper, because they are instances of the use that was made of this doctrine in the whole christian church during several centuries. The reflections are just, because tho the same use is not made of it now, even in your communion, that was made formerly, yet the same moral arguments are employed to maintain it; arguments, which cannot be reconciled, as it seems to my apprehension, to the belief of an all-perfect Being.

To demonstrate the existence of such a being by appeals to the inward conscioufness of their own existence, to the senses, and to the reason of men, is not a difficult task. But he who has succeeded in it, runs the risque of undoing what he has done, when he appeals at once to the senses and to the passions, of men for the injustice of God's dispensations here; and to their reason alone prejudiced by the former, for the justice of his dispensations hereafter, tho the actuality of these must be always hypothetical, and the equity of them not so much as problematical. The divines of our communion run
2 this

this risque even more than yours, because when they presume to reason they have not the same reserve of church authority, which yours have, to stop the mouths of gainfayers. They put the truth, or rather the belief of God's existence, in all they preach, and all they write, on the cast of a dye. They may confirm their hearers, and their readers in the doctrine they teach, but they may shake too the fundamental principle of all religion. Nay, they may drive into absolute atheism the man who is weak enough to be moved by one part of what they say, and not weak enough to be convinced by the other. No matter. They not only repeat the moral arguments, and the bold assertions that have been mentioned already, but they tell us sometimes, that the rules of evangelical perfection, such as self-denial, mortification, and others, are of so exalted a kind, that God gave the hope of future rewards to encourage us to the practice of them*. According to this doctrine then he is so cruel a being, that he will make none happy hereafter who have not made themselves miserable here. The man who will be saved must be initiated into the fanatical austerities of some religious order to make his salvation sure, for aught I can see; and when he is so, he may have good reason perhaps to renew the question *DIODECES* asked, "num PATRAECIONI
" furi, quod initiatus fuerit, fors erit melior post mortem, quam
" EPAMINONDAE?" They tell us sometimes, that the temporal promises made to an holy and virtuous life extend no further than to food, and rayment, and to daily bread; and they demand, who would be contented with such a scanty provision, when he sees the greater prosperity of bad men who dissolve in ease and luxury†? The proper answer to this question is to be made ad hominem, by asking another.

* ATTERBURY.

† SHERLOCK, not the righteous bishop, but his father.

Who would not be contented with this scanty provision here on the same terms, and why are not you, why do you, good man, repine at the greater prosperity of the wicked, when you know that eternal happiness is laid up in store for you, and eternal misery for them, who will want even a drop of water to cool their tongues in the next world, after dissolving in luxury here? They tell us sometimes, that without the hopes of another life virtue is but a dead and empty name*. Nay, there are those who have not scrupled to assert, that if there is not another world, all difference between good and bad is taken away in this world †. To steal, to poison, to stab, to forswear, in short, to commit any action that brings either profit, or pleasure, is reasonable: it is so far from being a crime, that it becomes a duty, in as much as it promotes the happiness, that is, the chief end of the man who commits it. The two first of these doctrines are the very quintessence of theological absurdity, the two last are abhorrent from all the principles of natural religion, and none of them come up to the purpose for which they are advanced. If there is no other life, virtue is but a dead and empty name, they say; and yet the infinite wisdom of the Creator has constituted the state of mankind, and the order of things in this world so, that human happiness rises and falls, is acquired or lost in proportion to the practice or neglect of virtue. Crimes are reasonable, vice becomes a duty on the same supposition that there is no future state, they say; and yet vice is as opposite to virtue in it's effects, as in it's nature, according to the same constitution, and the same order of things. Neither the immortality of the soul, nor future rewards and punishments can be demonstrated on princi-

* TILLOTSON.

† WILKINS, cum aliis.

ples of reason, notwithstanding all the metaphysical, theological, and even geometrical attempts that have been made, with the same evidence as all our moral obligations may be. The religion of nature, therefore, teaches the latter independently of the former. There may be rewards and punishments reserved to another life; but whether there are, or are not, the religion of nature teaches, that morality is our greatest interest, because it tends to the greatest happiness of our whole kind in this life, and our greatest duty, because it is made such by the will of that Supreme Being who created us, and the system to which we belong. It is false, therefore, and impious to assert, as these divines do, that, if there is no other life, there are no moral obligations; or, as PASCAL does, that if there were no other life, the directions of reason for our conduct in this world would not be such as they are.

BUT to have done with such absurdities for good and all. I cannot close these minutes better, than by observing how wide a difference there is between natural and artificial religion. It has been observed*, that the difference between the things of nature and those of art appears to our great surprise since microscopes have been in use: and this surprise increases in proportion as they are improved. The things of nature appear to be adapted to useful purposes, wherever these purposes can be discerned; they are elegant, they are finished, and the mind is ravished into admiration. The things of art are adapted often to purposes that are hurtful, and to whatever purposes they are adapted, when we see them such as they really are, they appear to be clumsy,

* By bish. WILKINS in his treatise on nat. relig.

bungling,

bungling, coarse, and imperfect instruments. A just and easy application of this remark might be made to things intellectual, and especially to those of a theological kind, and to the reasonings of men about them. Thus, to take an instance of the highest and most important object of human speculation, let us reflect once more on the notions that philosophers and divines have entertained and propagated concerning the Deity: for these are the fountains of all religions; and as they are pure, or impure, so must the streams that flow from them be. Right reason neither stops too short, nor goes too far in attempts to frame such notions as these. She frames them in that light which comes reflected from the works of God, and in which alone we may say that he shews himself to man. Imagination, on the contrary, knows no bounds, but proceeds from one hypothetical reasoning to another, till she has framed all those notions of the Deity, which the prepossessions, the habits, the professions, and the interests of the men, who give her this loose, require. The consequence has been, and it could be no other, that natural religion represents an all-perfect Being to our adoration, and to our love; and the precept, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," will be effectual in this system. In the other, in that of artificial theology, I apprehend that it cannot be so; for I have learned from doctor BARROW*, that in the frame of the human soul "the perceptive part doth always go before the appetitive, that affection follows opinion, and that no object otherwise moves our desire than as represented by reason, or by fancy, good unto us. This," he says, "is our natural way of acting; and, according to it, that we may in due

* Ser. xxiii.

" measure

“ measure love God, he must appear proportionably amiable
“ and desirable to us. He must appear to be the fountain
“ of all good, the sole author of all the happiness we can
“ hope for.” Can any man now presume to say, that the
God of MOSES, or the God of PAUL, is this amiable Being?
The God of the first is partial, unjust, and cruel; delights
in blood, commands assassinations, massacres, and even ex-
terminations of people. The God of the second elects some
of his creatures to salvation, and predestinates others to
damnation, even in the womb of their mothers. This pre-
cept of the gospel, therefore, cannot refer to such a God as
either of these: and indeed, if there was not a Being infi-
nitely more perfect than these, there would be no God at all,
nor any true religion in the world. But there is most af-
furedly such a Being; and he who proposes any system of re-
ligion, wherein this all-perfect Being is not to be found, may
say that he is no atheist, but cannot say with truth that he
is a theist.

F I N I S.

...and desirable to us. He must appear to be the fountain
of all good, the fountain of all happiness, we can
hope for. Our own new problems, that the
God of Israel, or the God of Yem, in his infinite
The God of the East is partial, unjust, and cruel; delight
in blood, commands abominations, murders, and even the
termination of people. The God of the second world some
of his creatures to salvation, and probably others to
damnation, even in the words of their mothers, that ex-
cept of the gospel, therefore, cannot seem to be a God as
either of these; and indeed, if there was not a living God,
nearly more perfect than these, there would be no God at all.
nor any true religion in the world. But these are made
truly like a Man; and he who speaks any thing of re-
ligion, wherein this all-perfect Being is not to be found, may
be that he is not really, but cannot say with truth that he

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