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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

VII.

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killed CLITUS *, he attributed to this prince the power that the poets attributed to Jupiter, the power to make particular and even occasional rules of right and wrong by will. The fault of HOBBS lay here, he put the supreme Being out of the case entirely, ascribed no legislative authority or no exercise of it to him, assumed all actions to have been indifferent not only before our system was created, but even after it was so, and till the civil magistrate had made a difference between them, by commanding some and by forbidding others.

MANY such general and fundamental absurdities as these are to be found in the writings even of those who have writ with the most applause on this subject; besides a multitude of particular questions, as frivolous as any that the schoolmen ever broached. I pass them all by with the neglect that they deserve, except one; some further notice of which is necessary to connect with what has been said, and to carry on my train of thoughts.

VII.

THE presumption of those, who pretend to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God, has so much theological authority on it's side, that the absurdity of it cannot be too often exposed and censured. There is fraud too, which I did not observe before, in this pretension; and fraud so manifest, that we may sometimes suspect it to be wilful. Instead of transferring from God to man, to use a phrase of CICERO, they transfer from man to God; and whilst they boast that man is made after the image

* PLUT. in ALEXAN,

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of God, they make God after the image of man. What they present to us for a copy, is the original; and what they present for the original, is in reality the copy. Tho we rise from the knowledge of ourselves, and of the other works of God, to a knowledge of his existence and his wisdom and power, which we call infinite, because the sensible effects of them go far beyond our utmost conceptions of wisdom and power, yet we cannot rise thus to a knowledge of his manner of being, nor of his manner of producing those effects which give us ideas of wisdom and power; and as little, or less if possible, can we rise from our moral obligations to his supposed moral attributes. I call them supposed, because, after all that has been said to prove a necessary connection between his physical and his moral attributes, the latter may be all observed in his wisdom. It is even more agreeable to the phaenomena, to believe that they are so, and that his wisdom determining him to do always that which is fittest to be done upon the whole, of which fitness we are in no degree competent judges, the effects of it give us sometimes ideas of those moral qualities, which we acquire by reflection on ourselves or by our dealings with one another, and sometimes not. The works of God would give us ideas of wisdom and power, if human actions and operations gave us none; and, in fact, the example of savage nations will shew, I think, that the first and strongest impressions of this kind come from thence. But it is evident, that the first and strongest impressions that we receive of benevolence, justice, and other moral virtues, come from reflection on ourselves, and from our dealings with one another, from what we feel in ourselves, and from what we observe in other men. These we acknowledge to be, however limited and imperfect, the excellencies of our own nature, and therefore conceiving them without any limitations or imperfections, we ascribe them to the divine,

vine. We do worfe: we ascribe our affections and passions to the divine nature. We make God so much a copy of man, that we design the worst, as well as the best, of our own features, if I may say so, in our representations of him: and as common as it is, no unprejudiced thinking man can hear, without astonishment, our perfections and our imperfections imputed to the Supreme Being, in the same breath, and by the same men; with this difference, at most, that the former are imputed directly, and the latter sometimes under the thin and trite veil of analogy. In a being thus constituted, they may well imagine that the moral virtues are the same as they are in our ideas: and theology may easily deduce from his attributes, the characters theology has given them. But a being thus constituted is not the supreme, the all-perfect Being: and a very short analyse of the excellencies of our own nature will be sufficient to shew, that they cannot be applied from man to God without prophaneness, nor from God to man without the most shameful absurdity. Let me allude, on this occasion, to a passage I have seen quoted from the ethics of ARISTOTLE. To what actions of the divinity can we apply, or from what can we deduce our notions of human justice? Both might be done, perhaps, by those who assumed, like TULLY, a community of gods and men, or by those who drew the divinity down to human conversations and human cares, to be immediately and, as we may say, personally an actor in human affairs, to be a contracting party in covenants and alliances with men. Nay, something of the same kind may be done by those who acknowledge the infinite wisdom of God, and yet include him in this system of rational agents, every one of which is obliged to promote the good of the whole; who acknowledge the infinite distance between God and man, and yet assert that they may be compared together on account of their rationality, and be said, not figuratively

but literally, to be of the same mind. But how shall we deduce fortitude from the attributes of God, or ascribe this virtue to him who can endure no pain, nor be exposed to any danger? How temperance, when it would be the most horrid blasphemy to suppose him subject to any human appetites and passions, and much more to some so inordinate as to require a particular virtue to restrain and govern them? I might bring many more instances of the same kind. But these are enough: and he, who will not be convinced by these, how absurdly the laws of nature are founded, by some writers, in the moral attributes of God, will be convinced by none.

BUT now, as absurd as these doctrines are, we must not imagine that the law of nature wants any proofs of a divine sanction, or a divine original. They are both contained in one: and the punishment, which attends the breach of this law, results, as necessarily as the law itself, from that nature which God has been pleased to constitute, according to his good pleasure. Let it not be said, that this punishment is only temporal, and the sanction therefore insufficient. Let not this be said, particularly by those men, who talk so much of a positive law given by God to his chosen people, the sanction of which was no other than temporal pains and penalties. Let it not be objected further, that the penalties, which make the sanction of natural law, affect nations collectively, and not men individually; for which reason, they are less proper to enforce the observation of the law. The penalties annexed to the breach of the law of MOSES were of the same kind, in general, oppression, famine, pestilence, wars and captivities: and when particular punishments were inflicted by virtue of this law, it did no more, than what is done every day and in all countries, with less tumult and with better order, in consequence of the law of nature, and
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for the preservation of society. Once more, let it not be objected, as it has been, that this law is not universally known. It is universally given, and if it is not known, and practised alike by all mankind, many of the first great principles of it are so in every human society, even in those of the least civilised people; whilst the far greatest part of the world are invincibly ignorant of the first principles of christianity, without the knowledge of which, and without faith in which, they are all condemned to eternal punishment.

INSTEAD of making objections so insufficient as these, and so liable to be retorted, let the same men confess that the divine institution of the law of nature rests on fuller and more convincing proofs, both external and internal, than any that have been found, or could be given, of the divine institution of christianity. The latter has all those which the manner in which it was revealed, and the nature of it, allowed it to have. But the manner in which the former has been revealed to mankind, as well as the matter of it, admitted of proofs of both kinds, much more evident, and much more proportioned to the human understanding. The good news of christianity was published by CHRIST and his Apostles; it was confirmed by miracles, and the proof was no doubt sufficient for the conversion of all those who heard the publication of this doctrine, and saw the confirmation of it. One can only wonder, that any such remained unconvinced. But this proof became, in a very little time, traditional and historical: and one might be allowed to wonder, how the effect of it continued, and increased too, as the force of it diminished, if the reasons of this phaenomenon were not obvious in history. Nay, tho they are so, one may still wonder why they, who propagate christianity, have not met oftener with the answer which ETHELRED the Saxon king
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made

made to AUGUSTINE, "I cannot abandon the religion of my fathers, for one that you would persuade me to receive on the authority of persons quite unknown to me." He came however afterwards to a better sense, either by the supernatural effects of grace, or by the natural effects of the cajolement or importunity, perhaps, of BERTHE. The revelation of the law of nature is of another kind. Whether the word of God is his word may be, and we see has been, disputed by theists. But whether his works are his works, neither has been, nor can be, disputed by any such. Natural religion therefore being founded on human nature, the work of God, and on the necessary conditions of human happiness which are imposed by the whole system of it, every man who receives the law of nature receives it on his own authority, and not on the authority of other men known or unknown, and in their natural state as fallible as himself. The revelation is not communicated to him only by tradition and history: it is a perpetual, a standing revelation, always made, always making, and as present in these days, as in the days of ADAM, to all his off-spring. The external proofs then, for these are properly such, of the divine institution of the law of nature, are conclusive to every theist. Let us examine the internal, and compare them with the proofs that are contained in, or deduced from, the scriptures, to shew their divine original.

VIII.

NOW the unwritten law of God, unwritten even in the hearts of men, how early soever instinct disposes them to receive it, is an object of knowledge, not of belief. We know that God exists, with a certainty little inferior to that which we have of our own existence. We know that he
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