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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

VIII.

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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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has given us a law of our nature, with as great a certainty as inward conscioufness and outward observation can give us: and by these means, by which we acquire all other science, it is in the power of every rational creature to acquire as much of this science as the ends of his being make it necessary that he should. Natural law is founded in reason, which every creature, that has it, may exercise, and the creature, that has it not, is not subject to the law. Christianity is founded in faith; and faith proceeds from grace. He, who has not faith, cannot fulfil a law that consists, at least, as much in believing as in practising: and whether he shall have grace, or no, does not depend on him. Thus the difference between the internal proofs of the two laws stands in one respect. The contents of the law of nature are objects of such a certainty as the author of nature alone can communicate. The contents of the whole christian system, laid down in our scriptures, are objects of such a probability as may force assent very reasonably, in this case, without doubt; altho a concurrence of various circumstances, improved by the credulity of some men and the artifice of others, has forced this assent in cases not very dissimilar, and wherein it would have been more reasonably withheld. The difference here stated, between the manifestations of the will of God to man in the law of nature and in every other law, is so true, that every other law is controuled by it, and could not pass for the law of God if it was seen to be repugnant to the former. To say nothing of the law given to ADAM, nor of that given to NOAH, according to the Jews, all orthodox writers think themselves obliged to hold, for the honor of the mosaical law, not only that there is nothing contrary to the natural law enjoined by it, "id quod eâ lege præcipitur non esse contra jus naturæ," as GROTIUS says*, but also that all the obligations of the

* Lib. i. c. 1. De jure Bel. & Pac.

natural

natural law are contained in it, " *contineri quidem in facro illo corpore seu pentateucho,*" as Mr. SELDEN says; tho he owns at the same time that much chemical skill is necessary to extract them from it. That the christian law is nothing else than the law of nature, enforced by a new revelation, every friend to christianity admits, and the worst of it's enemies dares not deny, tho he denies the reality of the revelation.

ANOTHER internal proof of the divine original of the law of nature is the plainness and simplicity, which renders it intelligible in all times and all places alike, and proportions it to the meanest understanding. It has been made intricate by casuistry, that of lawyers and that of divines, as christian religion has been by theology. But there is a considerable difference between the two cases. The first principles of natural religion are so simple and plain, that casuistry has no apparent pretence to meddle with them, no more than it would have if it pretended to teach us to see things that lie obvious before us, at a just distance, and exactly proportioned to our sight. These principles want neither paraphrase nor commentary, to be sufficiently understood; whereas the very first principles of christian religion, concerning the fall and redemption of man, are so veiled in mystery of language, that without a comment, or with one, and even with that of St. PAUL, they give us no clear and distinct ideas, nor any thing more than forms of speech and words to pronounce. They who under this pretence, such as it is, introduce reason where reason has nothing to do, explain what revelation has left unexplained, and define articles of faith which are either defined in the word of God, or which no mortal has any right to define, introduce afterwards their theology, under the name of moral theology, where that has nothing to do,

do, and corrupt the unwritten law of God even with less pretence than they corrupted the written. I charge this double corruption upon them the more boldly, because every one, who is in the least conversant in their writings, is able to bring numerous instances of both, and to shew, that I may keep to my present subject, how they have established doctrines and decided cases of conscience, in direct opposition to the most known and the most sacred duties of natural religion, till they have rendered men infinitely worse than they would have been in HOBBS's state of nature, without any religion or law whatever. Two things alone have checked this torrent of iniquity, to some degree. The first has been the interposition of the civil power. The second has been the insuperable difficulty of determining men, generally and constantly, and out of some peculiar circumstances, to violate the laws of their nature, as individuals, or as members of society, by precept, by example, or by any authority whatever. The light of nature, like that of the sun, may be eclipsed: It cannot be extinguished.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the abuses of private and public morality, therefore, that the passions of some men may commit occasionally, and that the particular interest of others may invite them to propagate, even under the mask of religion, these two internal proofs of the divine institution of the law of nature, the conscious certainty that we have, and the plainness and simplicity of it, are in their full force, and superior to those of the same kind which any other revelation contains. It may seem strange to many that the plainness and simplicity of the law of nature should be brought as a proof of its divinity. They have been accustomed to think that types, symbols, figures, dark enigmatical expressions, and every thing that has the appearance of mystery, are essential

tial marks of a divine revelation. Such might a revelation made to superior Beings appear to us; and such would a revelation made to us concerning the divine nature, and the secret oeconomy of the divine providence, not only appear to be, but really be, mysterious and unintelligible, and therefore no revelation at all. For this very reason, it is agreeable to all our ideas of wisdom to believe, that no such revelation was intended to be made to us. Such means could not be proportionable to any end. The all-wise Creator could not mean to inform his creatures unintelligibly, nor to leave an explanation of his nature, and of the whole oeconomy of his providence, to be made by men who undertake both presumptuously, and who dishonor both, as far as man may be said to honor or dishonor God, by all the silly paradoxes they advance dogmatically, and without having, for the most part, any just notions even of the wisdom and dignity of human conduct in superior forms of life. Such mysterious means then could not have been effectual, unless our improvement in metaphysical knowledge had been the end of divine wisdom, which it would be impertinent to suppose: and if the end of this wisdom was to inform us of the divine will, to shew us the perfection of our nature, and to teach us to tend towards it in the pursuit of happiness, such means are quite unnecessary. They are, therefore, proportioned to no end. They are, therefore, unworthy of God.

CLEARNESS, precision, and a true conformity to the nature of things are the perfections of human, and much more of divine laws. Tho the nature of the universe, and the rules by which God proceeds in the government of every system contained in it, of ours among the rest, are unknown to us, yet is the nature of our own system, as far as the morality of actions is concerned, sufficiently known to us, and the laws of

of our nature consequently, since they result from it. Here then is all the clearness, all the precision, and all the conformity to the nature of things that God can give, or man desire. From hence we may, and we ought, to form our judgment of all laws that are assumed to be divine. They must not be incomprehensible; because, tho they proceed from the divine intelligence, they are adapted to the human. God does not shew his own nature in them. He shews us our nature, and our duty; by the first of which we stand in the lowest relation of intellectual creatures to their Creator, and by the last in that of subjects and servants to a gracious and beneficent lord and master, who gives us laws neither ambiguous nor captious, and who commands us nothing which it is not our interest to perform.

ANOTHER internal proof of the divinity of natural law must not be passed over without mention. As all is simple and plain, nothing is mean nor trifling in it. This religion shews us a Supreme Being, veiled in the majesty of his nature, but manifested in all his works, to be the true and only true object of our adoration. In the existence he has given us, and in the benefits that attach us so strongly to it, this religion shews him to be the first and greatest object of our gratitude; in the established order of things, subject to so many vicissitudes and yet so constant, to be the reasonable, as well as necessary object of our resignation; and finally in the wants, distresses, and dangers, which these vicissitudes bring frequently upon us, to be the comfortable object of our hope: in which hope, the religion of nature will teach us, no doubt, to address ourselves to the Almighty, in a manner consistent with an entire resignation to his will, as some of the heathen did. But this religion will not teach us to pray, as if we informed omniscience, or expostulated with omnipotence, as those who pretend

tend to be the most reformed among christians are accustomed to do; nor to make religion a service of shew and outward gesture, as your pretended catholic church has done. The religion of nature teaches to worship God in spirit and in truth, that is inwardly and sincerely. It neither confounds spiritual pride and enthusiasm, nor theatrical pomp and superstitious rites, with devotion. Fraud, envy, malice, silent and secret vices, more dangerous often to society than those of greater eclat, have lurked behind the former. The latter, tho they affect the senses without touching the heart, have passed in general, and still pass, for divine worship. God has been served, in a manner which the most sanguinary tyrant would abhor, by some people. By others, with all the circumstances of that low adulation which earthly monarchs require, and whereof the priests themselves have claimed a share. That there is a middle proceeding fit to be observed, between a theatrical worship and a worship stripped of all outward solemnity and pomp, I am ready to admit. In this, and in a multitude of cases, the law of nature or right reason may approve such laws and institutions as nature or reason has not prescribed; because they may be proper, and even necessary means to promote the observation of this law. But then they ought to pass for forms directed to this purpose, for human not for divine ordinances. Let the priest wear a ridiculous cap and breast-plate, or fringes and bells on his robe, but let it not be said that the Supreme Being took care of his attire, or that such trifles as these were the institutions of divine wisdom.

THERE is nothing in the law of nature unworthy the author of it; and much less can it, or does it, contain any thing inconsistent with itself. The rules by which God governs even the system to which we belong are unknown to us; but this
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we know most certainly, that he cannot command in particular, what he forbids in general. He who has made benevolence to all rational beings the fundamental law of our nature, can never command some to rob, or to murder others; to usurp on the rights of their fellow creatures, and to exterminate whole nations. In short, the internal proofs of the divinity of the law of nature, both positive and negative, are such as render this law the true criterion of every law and religion that pretend to the same original. It may be disputed, perhaps, whether our abstract notions of the moral fitness and unfitness of things afford a sufficient rule, whereby to judge of the truth of any religion that is said to come from God. But there is no room to dispute, whether the conformity or nonconformity of such a religion to that law which God has given to all his human creatures, enacted in the constitution of their nature, and discernible by the use of those faculties he has given them likewise, is a rule sufficient for this purpose. Was it otherwise, we should have no sufficient rule at all. Men might dispute eternally about the dictates of right reason, and the will of God would be entirely out of the question; or it would be made determinable by an indeterminate question, what those eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things are, according to which, and in a dependency on which, the will of God must proceed, and be signified to his creatures. That this would be so, is evident in the different opinions that have been entertained, ever since theology was made a science, concerning the existence of evil as well as good, and concerning the distribution of them. But if we confine ourselves to the revelation God has made of his will in his works, and to the knowledge we have that his will is necessarily determined by his wisdom, we shall have a certain and sufficient rule by which to judge of his laws. What is the will of God, is a

question easily answered. What ought this will to be, is a question we cannot presume to answer without absurdity and impiety both. To answer the first, we need to go no higher than the moral obligations that arise in our own system, and of which we have very adequate ideas. To answer the last, we must go up to the nature of the author of nature, and to a multitude of other natures, the assuming of which puts the Supreme Being just in the case of his creature man. The nature of the human system is independent on man; and yet he is obliged to derive the rules of his conduct from it. Just so, upon this assumption, the abstract natures and eternal essences of things are independent on God; and yet God was obliged to make, and is obliged to govern his system according to them.

By employing our reason to collect the will of God from the fund of our nature, physical and moral, and by contemplating seriously and frequently the laws that are plainly, and even necessarily, deducible from thence, we may acquire not only a particular knowledge of these laws, but a general, and in some sort an habitual, knowledge of the manner in which God is pleased to exercise his supreme power in this system, beyond which we have no concern. We do not see the divine painter, if I may employ so low a comparison on so high a subject; but we grow accustomed to his manner, and we learn to despise those who present us a sign-post dawbing, and call it impudently the work of RAPHAEL.

IX.

AS certain, as plain, as important and as consistent as the law of nature is, it has been blended with many absurd and contradictory laws, in all ages and countries, by legislators who published them, sometimes in their own name, and