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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

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X.

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thor of it is by those of superstition and artificial theology. Some gleams of true light may be seen thro them. But they render it a dubious light, and it can be no better to those who have the keenest sight, till these interpositions are removed. Then, indeed, the objects appear in their full and genuine lustre to every sight; for that which hid them both could affect neither.

X.

MANY hypotheses have been made to account for the beginning of civil society, for the nature of it, and for the motives to it. All of them have some degree of probability, and might have some share in framing those political congregations and unions, by which mankind has been divided into distinct nations, and the great commonwealth, as the stoicians called it not improperly, into distinct states. But no one of these must pass for universal, nor be supposed to have done the work alone. In general we may say, that the foundations of civil or political societies were laid by nature, tho they are the creatures of art. Societies were begun by instinct, and improved by experience. They were disturbed early, perhaps as soon as they were formed, both from within and from without, by the passions of men: and they have been maintained ever since, in opposition to them, very imperfectly, and under great vicissitudes, by human reason, which is exercised in particular systems of law for particular states, in leagues and covenants between state and state, and in tacit agreements that constitute what is commonly called the law of nations.

THE first principles of every thing, that requires human understanding and human industry to be employed about it, are rightly laid in nature; they are obvious to our search, and we are able to discover and pursue the consequences of them in speculation and in practice. But in doing this, we are left, as I may say, to ourselves. We owe the first discoveries to our own observation, and the progress we make afterwards to the strength of our own understandings, to our application and industry. We may do this well or ill; we may do too little or attempt too much, according to the use, and the right or wrong judgment, we make of our faculties; for the "bona and mala ratio," that COTTA insists upon so much*, is nothing else.

IT is in great measure otherwise in the case of civil polity. In this we are not left to ourselves. We are not left to make the discovery, nor to proceed, in consequence of it, by the strength of our own understandings. We are led to it by the hand of God, as it were, and even before we have the full use of our understandings. When God made man, he made a creature, the happiness of whose being depended on his sociability with animals of his own species. He made him therefore a sociable animal, an animal capable of feeling the immediate pleasure and advantage of society. The necessity of natural precedes that of artificial society; and the former, which is connected by instinct, prepares us for the latter, to which we are determined by reason. We are made capable of both in their turns. The infant cannot conceive the nature of those covenants that constitute civil society, any more than he can propagate his species. Neither his mental, nor

* CIC. de Nat. Deor.

his

his corporeal powers are arrived at their maturity. The ignorant man does not know them, because he has not informed himself, nor been informed by others, about them: and he who is born stupid is out of the case. I say this the rather, to expose once more the futility of that argument which has been mentioned already. To prove that the child, whilst he is a child, and the ignorant man, whilst he is ignorant, can neither institute civil society, nor comprehend the nature of it, serves to no other purpose, than to compose to slumber a reader of common sagacity, who perceives at one glance the different senses, tho equally true, in which men are reckoned qualified for civil society, and fishes to swim, or birds to fly, or oaks to bear acorns*.

You poets have given beautiful descriptions of a golden age, with which you suppose that the world began. Some venerable fathers of the church have given much the same descriptions of another golden age, with which they suppose that it is to end, and which will make some amends for the short duration of the paradisaical state, since the latter is to continue a thousand years. Now, tho I do not believe that men were as good, any more than I believe that other animals were as tame, by nature, as you represent them to have been in the primaeval world; yet I do not believe neither, that such a state, as HOBBS assumed, ever did, or could exist, nor that men ever were in a state of absolute individuality at any time before the institution of civil society. How they came into the world, reason will tell us no better than history or tradition does. To suppose that the first of human kind were quickened into life by the sun, and were animated systems of mud, as the Egyptians did, I think, according to DIODORUS SICULUS, would be too absurd; neither could we conceive, if the hypothesis was admitted, how these human insects were

* Vid. PUFFEN. Lib. vii. c. 1.

able to provide for their wants, and to rear themselves up to manhood, whatever we assumed the physical constitution of the world to have been at that time. If we are persuaded then, that this world, and the inhabitants of it had a beginning in time, we must of necessity assume that the first men and the first women, or that one man and one woman at least, were produced in full strength and vigor of body and mind, prompted by instinct to an act of which they might not foresee the consequence, and prompted by self-love, when they saw it, to love themselves in their children, and to nurse and educate their off-spring.

THUS natural societies and paternal governments began. I shall not inquire how far the latter is founded in that blind act of generation, whose motive and end is the mutual pleasure of man and woman alone. Much less shall I mispend any time in comparing the opinion of GROTIUS^a, which is favorable to paternal, with that of HOBBS, which is so to maternal authority^b. This only I will observe, by the way, that if HOBBS advanced a paradox, it was such an one as he might have maintained with advantage against GROTIUS, and even with more against FILMER, who left the word "mother" out of his quotation of the fifth commandment. GROTIUS did not presume thus far, but he gives the preference to paternal authority, in the case of any dispute between the two, on account of the pre-eminence of the sex, "ob sexus praestantiam." Another writer would have urged, that if the right of parents over children was acquired by generation, as GROTIUS^c affirmed, the right of the mother ought to be preferred, in case of any dispute, since her right by generation can never

a) Lib. ii. c. 5.

b) De Cive c. 9.

c) Generatione jus acquiritur parentibus in liberos.

be doubtful; the father's may. She is always a real mother: he may be often a reputed father, and the argument "ob sexus praeftantiam" is, in this particular instance, more applicable to the woman. But however this may be, the paternal authority, arising from education, is clear: and that instinct, which determines parents to take care of their children, gives them, by the law of nature, all that authority over them*, without which they could not take this care. This authority is and must be absolute, whilst their children are unable to judge for, and to direct themselves. It becomes limited, when their children are able to do this without their help, and yet continue to live in the same family. It ceases, when their children go out of their family, and acquire independency, or even paternal dominion of their own.

Thus far the law of nature is plain: and this is sufficient to shew, how we are led by the hand of God, that is, by the circumstances in which he has ordained that we should be born; by the necessary dependance of children, by the instinct of parents, by information, by habit, and finally by reason; how we are led, I say, to civil thro natural society, and are fitted to be members of one, by having been members of the other. This is the case of every one in particular, and has been that of mankind collectively considered.

ALL the inhabitants of some other planet may have been, perhaps, from their creation united in one great society, speaking the same language, and living under the same government; or too perfect by their nature to need the restraint of any. But mankind is constituted very differently: and altho the natural law of our whole species be the same, yet we are by nature incapable, on many accounts, of uniting under one

* GROTIUS, *ib.*

form

form of government, or of submitting to one rule of life. Our nearest approaches to this state are vastly distant from it; and even these were made by slow degrees, and with great variety of imperfection; altho nature herself, by directing the first, made all the rest the more easy, as she made them the more necessary. Men were never out of society; for if they were divided into families before they were assembled into nations, they were in society still from their original: and the want of comprehending that which is natural, and that which is artificial, properly distinguished, under the same general term, has produced much confusion in reasoning on this subject, and has served to maintain many a false argument. BAYLE*, for instance, denies that the peace, the happiness, and even the preservation of mankind, depend on society. How does he support his paradox? As ill at least, as he supports the inutility of religion to government. He cites SALLUST to prove that the Aborigines in Italy, and the Getulians and the Lybians in Africa, had neither laws, nor magistrates, nor forms of government. He cites POMPONIUS MELA, and he might have cited many other authorities antient and modern, to much the same purpose; for authors, by repeating one another, propagate the same mistakes very often, and increase the number of witnesses, without strengthening the testimony; which may have happened on these occasions for aught he knew. But this he knew, this he should have observed, and this he would have observed, if the observation had made for him in this place, for he makes it in all those where it does make for him, how much authors are apt to exaggerate in their descriptions, and the characters they draw. How barbarous were those nations, who broke the Roman empire, represented to be, the Goths for example, or the Lombards? and yet when they came to settle in Italy, and to be better known,

* Pens. diver. 118.

how

how much less barbarous did they appear, even than the Greeks and the Romans? what prudence in their government? what wisdom in their laws? But I touch this without insisting on it. Let it be, that the Aborigines, the Getulians, the Lybians, and the inhabitants of the inward parts of Africa, had neither written laws, nor civil magistrates, will it follow that they had no customs which were among them equivalent to laws, no fathers nor elders that supplied the place of civil magistrates, no forms of government because they had not those of civil government? Will it follow, in short, that they lived without society, because they lived without political society? The very passage cited from POMPONIUS MELA shews the contrary. They were dispersed in families indeed, and these families were governed by no law common to them all, nor by any joint consultations. "In familias passim et sine lege dispersi, nihil in commune consultant." Just so are the Arabs of the desert, many of the Tartars, and other vagabond people at this day, not united by any national constitution; but so far from being without society or government, that their several families, or tribes, or hordes, are so many societies, and often better regulated than those that appear to be more civilised. BAYLE, and the authors he cites, had nothing in their minds but political societies of human institution, and did not advert to those that are natural. When he affirmed, "that these people multiplied, and preserved themselves without living in society," and denied, on the authority of these examples, "that social life is absolutely necessary to the preservation of the human race," he did not enough consider, that it was impossible they should multiply without forming societies, and that he might have said just as well, that a country, over-run with independent companies of soldiers, had none in it, because these companies were not yet formed into legions or regiments.

ANTIENNT traditions, sacred and prophane, how imperfect and uncertain soever they are, give us sufficient reason, by their concurrence in this general account, to believe that mankind was at first disperfed in families, which formed so many distinct societies under paternal government. The mo- faical history contains the descent of one, that of SETH, down to the flood. There was no need of mentioning that of CAIN, which was to be wholly destroyed in this terrible catastrophe. The descent of the family of SEM, after the flood, is most carefully recorded, and those of HAM and of JAPHET are occasionally mentioned: for which difference a very good reason may be found, since the genealogy of the patriarchs, and of the people of God, was to be deduced from SEM. Our divines find a further reason. The Messiah was to proceed, above two thousand years afterwards, from a branch of the same family: and therefore the greatest care possible was taken to preserve the genealogy, as well as to perpetuate the race; of the latter of which PATRICK gives a most remarkable instance in his commentary on Genesis. If the daughters of LOT committed incest with their father, we are not to ascribe it to unnatural lust, but to their innocence, their simplicity, and a laudable concern for the preservation of their father's family; for they believed all mankind destroyed, according to IRENÆUS; or, at least, they might believe that none were left who might go in unto them, "juxta morem "universae terrae.* Our learned bishop assumes, much more ingeniously and with greater regard to virgin modesty, that these young women had the same eager desire, which then possessed the hearts of good people, to fulfil the promise of the Messiah. It was that which put them on this otherwise

* Vid. lib. Gen. c. xix.

monstrous

monstrous crime. It was that which sanctified it, in the intention, tho not in the event; for the two accursed races of Moabites and Ammonites were the fruits of this incest.

XI.

I HAVE not spoken of this family to introduce the anecdote just mentioned, instructive and edifying as it is, but to shew, by an illustrious example, what the first societies of men were, and how civil societies arose out of natural, as natural societies arose out of one another. When any of these grew too numerous to inhabite the same country, or dissensions arose among them, as it happened in the case of ABRAHAM and LOT, and of ESAU and JACOB afterwards, they separated. When the father of the family preferred one of his sons to all the rest, as ABRAHAM had done, and as it was necessary that ISAAC should do in order to give JACOB the pre-eminence over ESAU, and the Israelites over the Idumeans, the families separated likewise, and new families were formed by the swarms that issued from antient hives. The increase of families was not only great in those prolific ages, as we may observe by the numerous posterity of the two brothers ESAU and JACOB; but we may conclude, from reason and analogy both, that if families sometimes separated, they sometimes united too, for mutual conveniency; and that in this manner several little dynasties were formed, which had more settled establishments than the vagabond families. How little these dynasties were, we may judge by the defeat which ABRAHAM gave, with an army of three hundred and eighteen of his servants, to the four kings who had beat the five, and pillaged SODOM and GOMORRAH. There has been much learned dispute about the Egyptian dynasties: and they, who have corrupted