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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**

XI.

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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



MANETHO more, very probably, than he did the truth, have delivered them down to us in such a broken, transposed, interpolated condition, that nothing almost which is probable can be collected from them. Why should we not believe, that his thirty dynasties were cotemporary, not successive? Why should the Egyptians not have been under the dominion of several petty kings, as well as their neighbours, when the title of king was bestowed so very liberally? On the whole, it cannot be doubted, I think, that the first societies of men were those of families formed by nature and governed by natural law, nor that kingdoms and states were the second.

NEIGHBOURHOOD, an intercourse of good offices, and, in a word, mutual conveniency, might give a beginning, by the union of independent families under compacts and covenants, to civil societies. But the principal cause of such artificial or political unions was of a very different kind. We cannot suppose, that all the members of every family lived in a state of uninterrupted concord. There was a quarrel, and one brother assassinated another, even in the family of the first man. But still in societies, as confined as these, the father's eye was over the whole community; paternal authority, not the royal fatherhood of that ridiculous writer FILMER, was always ready to interpose, and the remedy of separation was always at hand when every other failed. The state of mankind altered extremely when families had been long separated, whatever the cause of separation was; and when the natural bands were not only loosened, but lost and forgot in the course of generations; when there was no longer any regard to one common ancestor; when there was no authority to interpose between different people, and to influence and direct their conduct, as paternal authority had done, where different members of the same family were alone concerned; then mutual injuries became more frequent, and their consequences more fatal.

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As fast as the distribution of mankind into families, and as paternal government ceased, men went out of a natural into a political state. The former was so little what is has been represented, a state of individuality, that individuality could never be properly ascribed to creatures born in society, and members of it as soon as born. Individuality belongs to communities, not to persons. Families might be conceived as individuals, tho not men, in the state of nature; and civil societies much more so in the political state. The reason is plain. We have a natural sociability, that is, we are determined by self-love to seek our pleasure and our utility in society, as it has been said; but when these ends are once sufficiently answered, natural sociability declines, and natural insociability commences. The influence of self-love reaches no further. Societies become in all respects individuals, that is, they have no regard to others except relatively to themselves; and self-love, that promoted union among men, promotes discord among them. Like the philosopher of MALMESBURY'S wild men, they act as if they had a right to all they can acquire by fraud or force: and a state of war, so far from being the cause, has been the effect of forming distinct societies, tho by the general plan of nature the propagation of mankind makes it necessary to form them. Such is our inconsistency, such are the contradictions that unite in the human character.

HOBBS, and CUMBERLAND in opposition to him, have said much about the societies of ants and bees. I shall compare them with those of men no further, than the comparison is immediately apposite to my present purpose. The bees then, for it will be enough to speak of one species, and the comparison will hold best with that of which we have most



experience; the bees, I say, co-operate visibly to one end, the general good of their respective communities, not by choice, nor compact, most probably, nor by authority neither, for their monarchs have no stings to punish the disobedient or the lazy; but by one invariable and constant direction, that of instinct. If reason could supply the place of instinct, be always at hand, and determine with as much force, men might be as good citizens as bees. But the rational creatures neglect their reason, or degrade her, in the intellectual oeconomy, and make her the vile instrument of their appetites and passions. This is so much the case, that men would have been what HOBBS assumes that they were, if the divine wisdom had not constituted them so that they are, as soon as they come into the world, members of societies which are formed by instinct and improved by reason. What reason cannot do by herself, she does in some degree by the adventitious helps which experience enables her to acquire, by orders and rules of government which every man concurs to maintain; because every man is willing to controul the passions and restrain the excesses of others, whatever indulgence he has for his own. I said, in some degree; for, even with these adventitious helps, reason preserves human societies unequally, and by a perpetual conflict: whereas instinct preserves those of bees in one uniform tenor, and without any conflict at all. The passions rebel against reason: but instinct is reason and passion both.

Thus bees live with bees in their several hives, and have much advantage over men in domestic life. But their sociability goes no further. Whenever any of these families, for to such they may be compared, transmigrate or send out colonies to seek new habitations, cruel wars ensue, if you will take the word of VIRGIL, as good a naturalist at least as  
HOMER,



HOMER, for it. I have read somewhere, that ORIGEN thought God had thus determined them, to set an example of making war to men. I had rather believe the father misunderstood or belied; and assume, that the same instinct governs these animals no longer, when they forsake the hives; so that their own ferocity, or that of their kings, carries them to all the excesses of infociability. Every king is a JOSUAH, or an ATTILA, and under his command

“ corpora bello  
“ Objectant, pulchramque petunt per vulnera mortem.”

As long as he lives there is no composition, no peace, no truce to be had. They fight “ usque ad internecionem”. As soon as he falls, they plunder their common hive, and the family or little state is dissolved.

“ Rege incolumi, mens omnibus una est.  
“ Amisso, rupere fidem, constructaque mella  
“ Diripuerunt ipsae, et crates solvere favorum.”

It is not quite the same in the case of mankind. Their families or hords, and the colonies they send out, unite sometimes for mutual utility with others, as I have hinted. Reason, which had co-operated with instinct before, takes the place of it now. They coalite amicably by covenants, they make laws by common consent, and from being members of a natural, they become such of a political society. It seems, however, that these political societies have been more frequently formed by compositions after wars, by a forced submission to the law of conquerors, and by associations made to prevent conquest. We easily conceive that the infociability of families made the strongest invade the weakest, and the weakest

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unite against the strongest. When larger communities were thus formed, the same infociability, and therefore the same policy, continued; so that fear may be said to have been a principal inducement in this manner to mankind, not to form societies, as it has been understood, but to submit to civil government.

COMMUNITIES, formed by the union of different families, were not only more numerous than any particular families, but they were composed of heterogeneous parts, of members unconnected by consanguinity, or the habit of living together, and connected only by accidental circumstances, and the tie of covenants. These circumstances, or the dispositions they had produced, might alter; and the tie of covenants, without a supreme power to enforce the observation of them, could not hold. Paternal authority, therefore, which had been sufficient to maintain, in some degree, peace and good order in societies composed of a few, and those few members of the same family as well as of the same society, might be insufficient, on both these accounts, to maintain the same degree of peace and good order in communities more numerous, and incorporated rather by art or by force, than by nature. Thus it became necessary to establish a power superior to that of the fathers of families, and, as fast as men went out of the state of nature, to substitute artificial to natural government. This was not done all at once, I suppose, nor every where in the same manner. But it seems most probable, that these governments were in general monarchical. I know that some writers have thought otherwise; but they have no more right to affirm than I have, who am far from affirming. We must all guess, and probabilities must be weighed. It has been said, "that when men, who were in a state of natural freedom  
" and natural equality, resolved by common consent to sub-  
" mit



“ mit themselves to civil government, they chose the democra-  
 “ tical form, in order to keep this government in their own  
 “ hands; and that the fathers of families, who had been used to  
 “ independency, must have concurred in the same choice\*.”  
 Now the very reverse of this seems more probable to me. The  
 fathers of families, who could not all be kings upon this change,  
 would have preferred aristocracy to democracy, and the multi-  
 tude would have preferred monarchy to both. The former  
 would have been desirous to retain some image of their anti-  
 ent authority, and the latter would have slid into a form of  
 government that resembled the paternal, to which they had  
 been accustomed, much more easily than they would have  
 constituted one entirely new, and the nature of which, for  
 want of experience, would not have been very obvious to  
 their apprehension. This easy transition, from paternal go-  
 vernment to monarchical, seems to have been very well un-  
 derstood by LYCURGUS, who, when he was advised to establish  
 a popular government in Sparta, bid his adviser try in the first  
 place to establish democracy in his own family †. One may  
 conceive equally well how monarchy changed, by the abuse  
 of power, into aristocracy, or democracy; and how these  
 changed, by the usurpation of power, into monarchy. But  
 the most antient traditions, and the authority of antient writ-  
 ters, I think, concur in establishing this matter of fact, that  
 monarchy, I do not say absolute monarchy nor tyranny, was  
 the first form of civil government. There are many passages  
 to this purpose that might be collected, if it was worth my  
 while. But there is one in the beginning of ARISTOTLE’S Po-  
 litics so much in point that it must by no means be omitted.  
 He says “ that regal government was the first; because they,  
 “ who by their uniting formed the first states, had been be-

\* PUFF. L. vii. c. 5.

† PLUT. in vita LYCUR.

“ fore



“ fore that time under the same regimen in families, which  
 “ they afterwards continued in kingdoms.”

I KNOW that the power of these kings was limited, as their kingdoms were small, in the heroical ages. But still they were kings, and not the less, but the more properly and the more truly such, because they were restrained from being tyrants. When JUSTIN says, that in the beginning of things the government of people and nations was monarchical <sup>a</sup>, he confirms the opinion I am of. When he says that the people were bound by no laws, and that the will of princes held the place of laws <sup>b</sup>, we must not imagine that these first monarchies were governments of mere will <sup>c</sup>. The tenor of tradition contradicts any such proposition. I might quote the authority of THUCYDIDES, and others, against it; but I choose to quote that of JUSTIN himself against it, who says, in the same place, that it was not ambition, but a moderation tried and approved by all good men, that raised up princes to this dignity <sup>d</sup>. Thus the Medes, weary of that anarchy into which their families were fallen, chose DEJOCES, a man famous for wisdom, integrity, and justice, to be their king. It was not by virtue of their royal prerogative that these first kings gave laws written or unwritten, permanent or occasional; for it is probable, that in those antient days there were few or no written bodies of law: and you can tell better than I can, whether HOMER once mentions the word in his poems. But however this might be, the first kings had neither arbitrary nor legislative power by virtue of any regal prerogative; on the contrary, they were chosen kings, because they were chosen legislators, and the goodness of their laws recommended them

a) Principio rerum, gentium nationumque imperium penes reges erat.

b) Populus nullis legibus tenebatur, arbitria principum pro legibus erant.

c) Just. l. i. c. i. d) ---- Quos ad fastigium hujus majestatis non ambitio popularis, sed spectata inter bonos moderatio, provehebat. ib.



to the throne, and maintained them in it. The power of making laws was so far from being originally, and exclusively, annexed to monarchy, tho it sometimes made monarchs, that DRACO, who never was one, imposed his laws, which were said to be writ in blood because of their extreme severity, on the Athenians; that SOLON, who never would be one, repealed these laws, and established others; and that PISISTRATUS, who made himself one, far from repealing those of SOLON, governed by them. The first kings were limited monarchs. They earned the sovereignty by great and good actions, held it from their people, and were accountable to their people for the exercise of it. Such I mean as came to their crowns by consent, and in countries where common utility united families in civil society, and neither conquest nor the fear of it.

## XII.

THE attempts which so many learned and ingenious men have made, with infinite labor of study, to fix points of chronology and history concerning antient nations, that of the Egyptians particularly, have seemed to me, ever since I knew what they are, extremely ridiculous. They have seemed so the more, because some general and useful truths may be collected, without any trouble, from the broken and fabulous materials they employ with so much trouble, and to so little useful purpose. The original of the Egyptians and the order of their dynasties will never be known. The most antient traditions, sacred and prophane, supposing them all authentic, would be still insufficient for this end. But they are sufficient for another. They shew us the nature of government, and the character of mankind, in those early ages. They shew us the first kings, and the primitive government of Egypt, such as I have described; and such they continued to be as

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