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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

XIV.

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this was due to gratitude, to habitual reverence, or to circumstances of conveniency, and, in no sort, to any natural right that the father had. To deduce therefore from hence a right and power, such as FILMER would ascribe to kings, is perhaps one of the greatest absurdities that was ever committed to paper. A very commendable zeal to explode these false notions of government, and to assert the cause of liberty, carried LOCKE into another extreme, very unnecessarily, as I apprehend. He assumed the state of nature to be such as could never exist, and the method of establishing civil societies to be such as could never be executed. Will it be said that he meant only to give an abstract system of the natural rights of mankind? I shall ask, if it be said, to what purpose it was to make an abstract system of rights, that never did nor could exist, and of a method of establishing civil government that never could be taken? It could serve surely no other purpose, than to give us a notion of natural liberty very different from the real constitution of nature, by which we are less able to preserve liberty without some sort or other of government, than we are liable to lose it by the abuse of government. I shall ask, in the next place, whether the right of mankind to be governed by law, and not by will, under every form of civil government, be not as well established by referring the original of all these forms to the consent of men assembled in families, as to the consent of men dispersed, God knows why, after having been educated in one kind of society, and assembled, God knows how, to establish another.

XIV.

AS it is much more reasonable to judge, in all cases, by a consideration of the actual constitution of human nature, than

than to run the risk of mistaking what is true by imagining what may be so; it is likewise both reasonable and necessary, on the subject spoken of here, to look as far back as we have any light on the natural and political state of mankind, in which review we shall find sufficient inducements to think that the state of nature was not a state of anarchy but a state of government, and that some form or other of it subsisted at all times and in all places, however these forms may have varied. We distinguish between natural and political society; but the real difference between them is not so great as we imagine. Nature instituted the former, but we cannot doubt that reason and experience improved it, without changing the form, from time to time, as the circumstances of families altered. When these were altered so far that the same form would do no longer, men altered the form itself. They kept nearer to it in some societies, and went further from it in others. The institution ceased to be that of nature, it became that of art. But in all other respects there was no more reason, perhaps, to say, whenever and wherever this happened, for it would be ridiculous to assume that it happened every where at once, that a new state of mankind arose in those places and at those times, than there has been to say so on every great revolution of government since, when monarchies have changed from elective to hereditary, when aristocracies or democracies have been raised on their ruin, or mixed governments on those of all three.

MENTION has been made of the Egyptians who appear to have been, if any people we know of were such, the Aborigenes of their country. The accounts which history gives of their political constitution, and those anecdotes which tradition has preserved concerning the original of it, incline, and almost determine, one to think that it was formed in the manner
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which has been assumed of forming political societies for mutual advantage, or common defence; that the union of families composed several small dynasties, and the union of dynasties one great empire; that it was so formed on principles of common utility, and without the insociable design of invading others, till *SETHOSIS*, or *EGYPTUS*, or *SESOSTRIS* and other conquerors arose, who invaded the nations of Africa, of Asia, and even of Europe, as the Ethiopians and Arabians invaded Egypt. The other great empire, the babylonian or assyrian, of which the grecian antiquaries, who knew nothing of China, relate so many wonders, seems to have been formed in another manner.

LAWYERS speak of illegal communities of bodies of men who unite under certain conditions, and become societies to break all the rules of sociability; to rob, and to plunder, like the antient Greeks spoken of by *THUCYDIDES*, or the modern Arabs and Tartars. Some of these have never settled in civil governments. They have gathered from time to time, like vapors in to clouds, have produced storms, marked their course by devastation, and done great, but transient, mischief. Other confederacies there have been, as illegal as these in their institution, designed to invade the possessions of others, and to form political societies by conquest against the laws of nature, instead of forming them by compact agreeably to it.

As I assume with more probability on my side than such hypotheses have generally, that the reigns of the most antient kings of Egypt were called the reigns of the gods, on account of the wise laws and institutions by which they promoted the peace, and happiness of that people; so we may assume, that the assyrian empire was founded and supported, from the first, by violence. Who *NIMROD* was, or *BELUS*, or any of those
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that have been named in the variety and uncertainty of traditions, among the founders of this empire, when they lived, and what they did, it is impossible to say. Even MARSHAM, who labored this point so much, with all his sagacity, and all his learning, left it, as he found it, in the dark. But as NIMROD stands represented, in the mosaical history, a mighty hunter before the Lord, he gives us the idea of a warrior, and we may believe, without straining the sense of antient anecdotes too much, that BEL, BELUS, or BAAL, who was so sanguinary a God, had not been a king of great moderation, nor had acquired power by persuasion rather than by force, by the arts of peace than by usurpation and war. JUSTIN says that NINUS was the first, not to make war, but to change the nature of it^a, and to extend his empire by subduing his neighbours. The egyptian SESOSTRIS, and the scythian TANAUS much more antient, had made war for fame alone, and content with victory, had abstained from empire^b. Their kingdoms, which each nation reputed to be the most antient of the world, and which were so perhaps of the world they knew, had been established long before these wars begun. Arts and sciences were more improved among the Egyptians: primitive simplicity among the Scythians. But it is probable, that neither of them engaged in wars, till self defence made them necessary, or till the ambition of their princes gave occasion to them. Then SESOSTRIS harnessed monarchs to his chariot. Then the Scythians imposed a tribute on Asia, rather as the trophy than the reward of their victory^c. The first assyrian kings, on the contrary, established their monarchy by force, in an age when the illegal confederacy of a few families was sufficient to give the most forward, and the most popular man, amongst them the title of a mighty hunter, and the

a) Avitum gentium morem. b) Contenti victoriâ, imperio abstinebant.

c) Magis in titulum imperii, quam in victoriae praemium.

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means of forming a political society on a principle of ambition, and by usurpation on the other little states, unskilled, and unable to resist: “ rudes ad resistendum.”

THERE must needs have been a multitude of numerous families, or little states, in these early days, and in the countries we speak of here, since JOSHUA conquered one and thirty kings in the land of Canaan. It is easy, therefore, to conceive how such a man as we assume NIMROD to have been, on the authority of scripture, and BELUS after him, if they were different persons, for that one was the SATURN and the other the JUPITER of the Greeks is not so very certain, that such a man, I say, might unite by consent both men and families of men, as fierce as himself, in confederacies to invade others. Whatever use they made of this, whether they contented themselves to conquer and to ravage, or whether, as they had united by consent, they obliged their neighbours to unite with them by force, it seems that NINUS profited of their success to do the last. He extended his dominion by victory, and as he extended it, he confirmed it. Thus the babylonian empire was founded by force of arms, and thus it was maintained; till as force had raised it, force destroyed it, and illegal confederacies put an end to what illegal confederacies had begun.

IF we consider the true ends of society, to which the general nature and reason of things direct mankind, we shall find it hard to conceive how they could be induced to unite their families on any other motives than those of common utility, and common defence, against the little robbers that have been mentioned; or how, when a superior force made them safe from these, they should choose to become great robbers themselves, and to invade and conquer as if their happiness had depended more on subduing other governments than on a wife
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and just constitution of their own. But if we consider the particular nature of man, wherein there is one principle that directs him agreeably to the general law of nature, and another which is nothing more than the impulse of appetites and passions that are of subordinate use in the human oecconomy, but were not designed to be the laws of it, we shall easily conceive how the conduct of mankind has become in these cases, and almost in all others, repugnant to nature, reason, and their own common sense.

THE first impressions that are made on societies, like those on particular men, last long, and the worst longest. The character of a few eminent persons, nay of some one who has acquired fame, authority, and power, especially if he has had the legislative in matters religious as well as civil, becomes that of a nation, grows confirmed by custom, and passes for natural and reasonable in despite of nature and reason. This happens in particular states, and this has happened in the great commonwealth of mankind. If some men have been deified for the good, many have been so for the hurt they did; and conquerors, the most noxious of all animals, have become objects of adoration. However unlike nations may be to nations in their dispositions and manners, all of them, even the weakest, seek their own advantage real or imaginary, at the expence of others. Thus have the civil societies of men acted towards one another from their primitive institution; for if some set the example, the others soon followed it, and whilst every particular state has gone thro various forms of government and revolutions of fortune, the universal state of mankind has been little less than a state of perpetual anarchy. Families kept men out of that state of individuality which HOBBS, and even LOCKE, supposes. But political societies have been always individuals.