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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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XV.

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XV.

BESIDES the two manners that have been mentioned, in which civil societies were formed, there was a third very near a kin to the second, that came into frequent use, when the numbers of people increased in some countries faster than their industry, and the order of their government made provision for them; or when, for some other reason, the greatest part of a community, and the sovereign power in it resolved to drive out a smaller part that they judged noxious to the whole. This manner of establishing new governments when it was done by force, and it was seldom done with the consent of the invaded, was full as illegal, relatively to the law of nature, in the invaders, however softened by pretences of necessity, as the second. It was more bloody too, when they who defended their antient possessions were more able to resist, and they who sought new habitations were more numerous than either of them had been, when kingdoms and states were first formed, and colonies were first planted. The Inhabitants of Gaul were grown so numerous, that in the very beginning of the roman empire, in the reign of the elder TARQUIN, the celtic Gauls, who sacked Rome two hundred years afterwards, began to send their colonies abroad, at the instigation of their king AMBIGATUS*. He thought it necessary to exonerate his kingdom over crowded with people, “*exonerare prægravante turbâ regnum.*” He authorised the expeditions, by setting his nephews at the head of them, by giving them commissions to settle wherever the gods should direct by auguries, “*in quas dii dedissent auguriis fedes,*” and

* Liv. lib. v.

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by levying such formidable armies for this purpose as no nation should be able to resist, "ne quae gens arcere advenientes possit." This account, that LIVY gives of the celtic invasions, may serve, in some sort, for those which other nations made on the roman provinces, long after his time, and in the decline of that empire. The Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Vandals, and the Lombards, to whom the Franks, altho an assemblage of adventurers perhaps, rather than one people, may be added, were the principal nations, who broke down the barriers of the roman empire, and who established themselves in several provinces on the ruins of it. They were all detached to seek new habitations, from the various and numberless families and societies of people who inhabited Scythia, that is the immense extent of country beyond the Rhine and the Danube, as far as the Baltic northward, and the Euxine and the Caspian, at least, eastward. We know little about them, whilst they remained in their deserts, and that little is very confused, and no doubt very fabulous. But this in general is certain, their numbers increased so much in every society, and the fertility of the country, which every society possessed, as well as their skill to improve it, was so little proportionable to the wants of such numbers, that they were continually sending forth new colonies to seek new habitations, one at the expence of the other, driving and driven out by turns. The same necessity, and the same habits of invading continued when the roman empire, divided by CONSTANTINE, and weakened by his christian successors, was no longer able to repel their incursions. They had too, besides necessity, another strong temptation at this time. The expeditions they undertook, were in themselves more inviting than any of the former, "haud paulò laetiores viam dii dabant," as LIVY says, when he compares that of BELOVESUS into Italy, with that of SIGOVESUS into the Hercynian forest. They removed to better climates, to countries more

fruitful, or more cultivated, as well as more adorned than their own; and the surprize of ATHANARICUS, king of the Visigoths, who had made a peace with GRATIAN for presents, and principally for victuals, when he came to Constantinople, at the invitation of THEODOSIUS, is nothing less than surprizing altho JORNANDES describes it to have been extreme.

A MULTITUDE of examples might be brought of kingdoms and states, that arose from such transmigrations as these, of Greeks, of Phoenicians, and of other People. Sometimes they were formed by agreement, a few instances of which are to be found in history and tradition, but much oftener by violence, and sometimes by such circumstances of cruelty as were sufficient to exterminate the lawful possessors, one instance of which, besides those already pointed out, requires a particular mention in this place. It is not only to be reputed more authentic than any other, because it makes a part, and a principle part of sacred history, but it is more full and more marvellous in all the particular circumstances of it, and shews another occasion, besides that of a too great increase of people, on which one part of a community was desirous to seek out new habitations, or was compelled to it by the other. The wandering family of ABRAHAM, that had hovered long about Egypt, and had gone thither often for bread, to the want of which these pastors were much exposed, settled in that country at last, under the protection of JOSEPH, and continued in it above two centuries. That they did not attempt to establish a government of their own in it, like other strangers who came from barren into fruitful countries, is easily accounted for by the smallness of their number, as well as by the situation of JOSEPH, and their relation to him. But it is not so easy to account for the patience with which they bore, after the death of JOSEPH, a cruel servitude of fourscore years, to which the
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tyranny of the Egyptians had reduced them, when their number increased in every generation so vastly, that they could bring, at the time of the Exode, six hundred thousand fighting men into the field. This very increase might seem incredible in any other history, notwithstanding the calculations that have been made, to shew that it does not exceed the natural multiplication of a people, among whom polygamy and concubinage are established. But admitting these immense numbers, and this extreme patience of the Israelites, naturally impatient, rash, and unruly, to be consistent, admitting that the expectation of a promised land, whereof their father ABRAHAM had taken possession for them, by erecting altars in it, as the Spanish adventurers took possession of several countries in America, by erecting crosses in them, which they conquered afterwards, and claimed by virtue of this right of possession to belong to them; admitting this expectation, I say, as an additional reason why the Israelites submitted to their bondage so long, and made no attempt to establish an independent kingdom or commonwealth in Egypt; yet will it be hard to conceive how they could find it so difficult to withdraw themselves out of this country, when MOSES determined them to it. An army of six hundred thousand men was sufficient to have conquered Egypt. The Arabians probably, and the Persians certainly conquered it with a less force than they might have employed merely to march out of it.

SUCH considerations may lead one to think, that the accounts pagan authors give of their exode are not wholly fabulous, and that it is an example in point of the case I assumed, the case of people driven out of some communities, because they were for some reason or other not only burthensome but noxious to them. The Israelites were not guilty of sedition nor rebellion. They bore their stripes patiently. But as their stripes
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made them willing to leave the country, an epidemical infectious distemper in the lower Egypt might make PHARAOH desirous to drive the inhabitants of that part of his kingdom, into the neighbouring deserts, and if he followed them to the red sea, it might be rather to recover the jewels, and the vessels of gold, and silver, which they had stole under the pretence of borrowing, than to stop them and to bring them back. TERTULLIAN* has preserved a tradition which favors this supposition; for he relates that the Egyptians sent messengers to MOSES in the desert to demand restitution, that the Israelites on their side demanded to be paid for their labor whilst in servitude, and that an account being stated, the ballance seemed to be much in favor of the latter. Thus you see that the Egyptians robbed the Israelites, not the Israelites the Egyptians as it has been thought.

MR. SELDEN has given us the same story †, and two others as they are told with some little difference in the babylonian gemara, and a book called beresith rabba. This overlearned writer does not decide whether the facts are true, or whether they are rabinical inventions, “ingenii rabinici figmenta.” They deserve, however, to be mentioned, because of their immediate relation to the anecdote just now quoted from TERTULLIAN, and to the right the Israelites had to the land of Canaan. The anecdote is much the same. The scene where it passed, and the persons among whom are alone changed. JOSEPHUS, and others after him, and like him, have founded high the reverence and munificence, “reverentiam atque munificentiam” says SELDEN, which ALEXANDER THE GREAT, shewed to JADDUS the high priest, and to the whole nation of

* Adv. Marcionem. Lib. ii. c. 20.

† De jure Nat. & Gent. juxta discip. Ebraeor. Lib. vii. c. 8.

the Jews, when he received them under his protection, for they purchased his protection, much as the priests of JUPITER HAMMON did, one by flattering prophecies, the other by a flattering genealogy. Three controversies, then, were decided in their favor at the tribunal of this prince against the Egyptians, the Africans, and the Ismaelites, or Arabs, according to the rabbins, those great compilers of Jewish traditions. The Egyptians demanded restitution of the silver and gold which they had lent the Israelites about a thousand years before at the time of their exode, and insisted on the passage where MOSES says, that God gave his people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians*. But GIBEAH BEN PESISA the famous lawyer, who was council on the other side, pleaded that six hundred thousand of the Israelites, having served the Egyptians four hundred and thirty years, the former had a just demand on the latter for this service; and this debt, which was computed for a time so much longer than that of the bondage of the people of Israel, and for numbers, so much greater than theirs at any time perhaps, but certainly during the far greatest part of the time, that they were even known to the Egyptians; this debt, I say, we may well believe exceeded the value of a few jewels, and vessels of gold and silver, and some raiment, or old cloaths that they carried away with them. In short, the Egyptians were condemned, in this suit, at ALEXANDERS tribunal. So were the Africans who demanded the land of Canaan, as the estate of their father CANAAN, and therefore their inheritance. The lawyer of the Jews quoted the curse, pronounced against the son of HAM, more unfortunate than guilty; asked, if the possessions of slaves did not belong to their masters; insisted that the Africans were still such to his clients in equity, tho not in fact, and sent them away in confusion. The cause of

* Deum dedisse gratiam populo in oculis AEgyptiorum, ut postulata concederent eis, seu mutuo darent quae ipsi peterent.

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the Ismaelites who pretended to be co-heirs with the Israelites came on last, but they were soon silenced by producing the will of ABRAHAM, as MOSES recorded it, and in which the patriarch gives all his estate to ISAAC, except some legacies to the children he had by his concubines. Well might SELDEN say, that these suits were of a wonderful nature, "*mirae sunt*" "*hae disceptationes forenses*", wherein both sides agreed to have the cause decided by arguments drawn from the law of the Jews, from their history, and from their interpretations of both, without any regard to a prescription of so many ages. But it is time that I return to speak of the manner in which the Israelites proceeded in the acquisition of new habitations, and in forming not only one commonwealth the more in the world, but the most singular establishment ecclesiastical and civil that ever was formed; for such it must be allowed to have been, unless any one shall think that it appears to us more singular than it really was, because we do not know all, as we know some of the laws, customs, and pretensions of other antient nations.

WHEN I include with the Israelites in this transmigration, many of the other inhabitants of the lower Egypt, and suppose that a common distemper rather than a common religion, unless that religion was idolatry, united them in it, nothing is assumed unreasonably, as every one, who considers how little fit the Israelites, so prone to idolatry themselves, were to convert others from it, must agree. But whatever the religion of his mixed multitude of Israelites and Egyptians was, before they put themselves under the conduct of MOSES, they became the same people in this, and in every other respect afterwards. They entertained the same hopes, and marched with confidence under the same leader to conquer new habitations. Well might they march with this confidence, when miracles accompanied them

them in one continued series, and it is even surprising that they should despond at any time, after the first miracle had been wrought at the passage of the red sea, tho JOSEPHUS goes out of his character on this occasion, and instead of magnifying diminishes the wonder, by comparing this passage to that of ALEXANDER'S army, who marched on the strand, or waded thro shallow water along the pamphilian coast.

THERE were besides the miracles many circumstances in this famous transmigration of the Israelites, which deserve our notice for their particularity. One of these is so much to the present purpose that it must be mentioned. The Israelites remained forty years in the desert, before they undertook the conquest of the promised land, a time sufficient to wear out the leprosy, if they were afflicted with that distemper, as prophane history asserts, the authority of which must not be lightly rejected, since Jews and Christians both are so glad to lean upon it, whenever it serves to explain or confirm any point of sacred chronology or history, and since the impertinence of thinking it sufficient for that purpose, and insufficient for any other would be too gross. There is another reason given, in the history ascribed to MOSES, why the Israelites were kept so long in the desert. When they came to the borders of the promised land, they mutinied, distrusted God, who was already declared their God, their king, and the general of their armies. They threatened to choose another leader and to return to Egypt. Upon this provocation it is said, that God resolved to keep them, as he did keep them, wandering in the wilderness till the whole generation, of twenty years and upwards, except JOSHUA and CALEB, was dead. Then, and not sooner, they passed the Jordan.

To this reason, founded solely in the anger of God, may we not presume to add another, which proceeded from political considerations? When, I say, political considerations, I mean those of Moses, not those of God. Far be it from me to account for the reasons on which the oeconomy of providence proceeds, when these reasons are not plainly revealed to me in the word, or works of God. Far be it from me even to assume that infinite wisdom is directed by considerations of human policy. But it is neither licentious, nor prophane, to guess at those which the lawgiver of the Jews might have, and I shall do it on this occasion without any scruple.

As soon as MOSES had brought the mixed multitude into the desert, the decalogue was given, and other laws were published. He kept them in this station more than a year, and during that time the sanhedrim was established, many laws political, judicial, and ceremonial were promulgated, and an entire system of religion and civil government was formed. All these institutions were enforced, not only by miracles, but by a most rigorous punishment of offenders; witness, among several, that massacre which the levites made of three thousand men in one day, when they were commanded, without any other form of proceeding, to take every man his sword, and to slay his neighbour. Seven or eight and thirty years of such government as this, of a theocracy, wherein MOSES who conversed familiarly with God, spoke in his name, and delivered, and executed his orders, could not fail to make strong impressions, and to form strong habits in a new generation of men, who had been bred up under it. To confirm these impressions, and these habits at the end of the fortieth year, just before the death of MOSES, this legislator renewed the covenant, so it was called, between God and this People, repeated the

the law, exhorted them by promises and threatenings to a strict observation of it, and sent them forward, not to conquer and subdue, but to exterminate a whole race, who were devoted by God to destruction, and whose country had been given to his favorite people, the Israelites, some ages before, even before they were a people.

OTHER nations, those for instance who established new governments in several provinces of the roman empire, conquered, and subdued, but did not seek to exterminate. The Franks proceeded thus in Gaul, the Visigoths in Spain, the Ostrogoths and the Lombards in Italy. Driven out of their old habitations by force, or by want, they sought for new ones in better climates, and countries more fruitful than their deserts. Their spies visited the lands they designed to conquer, and as that "which flowed with milk and honey" tempted the Israelites, those that abounded with bread, and fruits, and wine invited them. But when they had defeated all opposition by the force and terror of their arms, they ceased to be enemies, and the victorious and the vanquished soon became one people. They mixed together and lived under common laws. But this could never be the case between the Israelites and any other nation. The first principle of their policy, ecclesiastical and civil, was infociability, and accordingly their manners were rendered unsuitable to the common nature and genius of mankind, as that great divine Dr. BARROW expresses himself, in his exposition of the creed. "They were a chosen people, they were holy, and the rest of mankind profane." God dictated their law, he instituted, nay he administered their government, for which purpose he resided amongst them, and the levites carried him before them in a wooden trunk, between the cherubim*, as

* --- Arca cherubinibus instructa, dei vehiculum, et praesentiae suae pignus. SPEN. de Theo. Jud.

your priests pretend to carry him about in a gold or silver box. In a word, as abject as this people had been in Egypt, MOSES had taught them to think more highly of themselves in the desert, and they came out of it the most insociable nation upon the earth. So insociable that they could be nothing less than tyrants when they conquered, nor any thing better than slaves when they were conquered. This has been their case too. Their traditions boast a few centuries of prosperity and triumph; but in almost all ages, before the coming of CHRIST as well as since, they have been what TACITUS calls them, "*vilissima pars fervientium.*" As they were formed to this character of insociability and inhospitality in the desert, so they came out of it, like beasts of prey, thirsting after blood. The Huns, begot by devils, who inhabited mount Caucasus, on Scythian witches*, shewed less inhumanity, when they were conducted by an hind, whom they followed as a guide sent them by the gods, into Europe†. ATTLA extended his conquests further than JOSHUA; but it may be doubted whether he shed more blood. More cool blood he did not most certainly. ATTLA gave quarter often, JOSHUA never; and the five kings who hid themselves in a cave at Makkeda, and who were murdered by the latter, after he had destroyed their armies, and made himself master of their country, would have been spared by the former. It was criminal among the Israelites in his time, and it was so much later, to be content with conquest, and with spoil, or to shew mercy to those they had robbed.

By such a conduct as we have described, agreeably to the scriptures, this Egyptian colony established itself in Palestine, and formed a civil society in the last mentioned manner.

* IORN. Hist. Got. † Ib.

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There was not above one city I think with whom they made peace. None escaped the edge of their swords, except such as they could not conquer, and such as found refuge in foreign countries. Some found it among the Phœnicians, for to say that the Phœnicians descended from these refugees, is to affirm what neither has been nor can be proved. Some found it in other countries, in Afric very probably*, since PROCOPIUS speaks of pillars that remained in the Tingitana with this inscription, “we are they who fled from the face of JOSHUA the robber, the son of NANE.” Thus you may see how the prophecy of NOAH was fulfilled, which seems so plain to BOCHART, and other great scholars, and which is so little intelligible in the terms and in the application of them. But whatever becomes of the prophecy, the conquest of CANAAN by this colony from Egypt is the strongest example that can be produced, of the mischiefs brought on mankind in the establishing of civil societies by violence, and therefore much to my present purpose.

XVI.

THOUGH the establishment of civil societies originally, and the maintenance of them since, have caused, in the order of providence, perpetual wars, and much of that misery which injustice and violence bring on the world, “tot bella per orbem, tam multae scelerum facies,” yet the necessity of establishing and maintaining them arises from the constitution of human nature, and is therefore indispensable. The great commonwealth of mankind, cannot be reduced under one government, nor subsist without any. Just so we may observe, that the laws and constitutions of particular societies are every

* In Vandalicis.

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