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Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

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XXIV.

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there were two hundred and fourscore different opinions. That there were so many may be doubted, but that they must have been extremely various is certain. The "summum bonum", or the supreme good of man, as it was understood and taught by the heathen philosophers, and which Dr. CLARKE calls, not without a designed ambiguity, the final happiness of man, was a subject whereon every man had a right to pronounce for himself, and no man had a right to pronounce for another. These disputes were, therefore, very trifling. But they should not be so strongly objected, since it is easy to shew that christian divines, the schoolmen especially, have trifled as much on points relative to natural and revealed religion both, as ever the heathen did on points relative to the former. Of the christian trifles too, we may say, what could not be said of the others, that they became serious: "hae nugae ad seria ducunt." They have divided the schools, and the schools have divided the world, with circumstances of rage and cruelty to be found among no other parties.

XXIV.

IF such disputes, as that which has been mentioned, were easy, or might be thought unnecessary to be determined, disputes of another kind arose when the heathen philosophers attempted, for they did attempt, to make a complete, regular, and consistent system or scheme of things, the want of which is objected to them. These attempts were pushed very far by pagan theists, but it must be confessed, that they served only to shew that men are fitted to know a little of some few things, and the whole of nothing. These men found soon, that no sufficient materials for such a system or scheme lay within the bounds of natural law, and natural theology. They had recourse

course, therefore, to metaphysical theology, which being a science of their own invention, it was easy for them to establish such principles in it, as they judged sufficient for their purpose. They proceeded, therefore, to reverse the whole order of reasoning in the search of truth, to reverse the pyramid; and instead of rising up from a broad foundation of particulars, laid in knowledge, to the lofty and narrow pinnacle of all knowledge, the existence of one all-perfect Being, they affected preposterously to set this pinnacle on the ground, and to raise the pyramid without any foundations at all. They not only reasoned concerning the nature and attributes of God himself, from mere imagination, but they gave him as many companions and ministers, gods, angels, daemons, genii, as they thought fit. CLARKE says, and most of his brethren agree with him, that to reason in this manner from the nature and attributes of God, is the very first and most necessary thing of all. His and their approbation of the reasoning of pagan theists, in consequence of this first and most necessary thing of all, would not be quite so full; and indeed it may seem to have been introduced for ornament, rather than for use, by those who made the one Supreme Being, according to the nature and attributes they give him, so immediately active in human affairs. But the pagan theists declined no help; and the service their gods, and other inferior beings were of, in accounting for the creation and government of the world, is known to every man who has been conversant in their writings, in those of PLATO particularly. When they wanted to account for the origin of evil, ditheism was invented; when they wanted to account for the supposed unjust distribution of good and evil, the "mythologia de inferis."

BUT to be more particular. CLARKE observes, that bare reason cannot discover in what manner, and with what kind
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of external service God will be worshiped. He might have added, that bare reason cannot discover how any external service, that man can pay, should be acceptable to the Supreme, and all-perfect Being, except a compliance in all our words and actions, with his known will, revealed in his works, an inward adoration of his unknown nature, a gratitude for benefits, and an entire resignation to his providence. The heathens knew that all the duties of natural religion are contained under these heads, but that the divine will concerning any external service, with which God would be worshiped, had been signified relatively to none of these duties. They might, therefore, as the best and wisest of them did, approve the political institutions of an external service, as political institutions, and as far as they helped to keep up a lively sense of these duties in the minds of men, and to promote the practice of them. But they, who presumed to reason boldly, about the nature and attributes of God, were not so content. They represented the one Supreme Being, to themselves and others, under as many different characters as they represented their different gods. The most general representation of him, because it was thought the most proper to intimidate mankind, and to answer the ends of government, or because it was that which natural and superstitious fear could the most easily frame, was framed under the image of an absolute tyrannical monarch. From such notions, these reasoners "à priori" deduced all those, whereby they took men out of the relation of creatures to their creator, and placed them in that of slaves to their tyrant. From hence those numberless, ridiculous, and cruel rites of paganism, which were held as necessary to obtain the favor, and to avert the anger of heaven, as the strictest observation of morality; nay more necessary, if we may judge, as we may most reasonably, of antient by modern, and of pagan by christian theology.

OBEDIENCE

OBEEDIENCE to the law of nature is our first duty, and our greatest interest: the happiness of our whole kind, wherein every individual is included, depends on it. Obedience carries its reward, disobedience its punishment along with it in the general system, and God has not made particular systems, nor established particular providences for particular nations, much less for particular men, as far as we can discover by the help of reason and experience. The same causes produce the same effects every where, with some little variety of circumstances, and as the precepts of the law are common to all men, so are the sanctions of it. In short, as all men sin against the order of nature more or less, so the imperfect state of mankind shews that they suffer more or less by the uniform course of it. But neither reason nor experience will shew us, in the author of nature, an angry revengeful judge, or a bloody executioner. Neither reason nor experience will lead us to inquire what propitiation God will accept, nor in what manner a reconciliation between the Supreme Being and this worm man is to be made*. Natural reason does not stop here, nor expect with impatience the aid of some particular revelation. She stops much sooner. Repentance, as it implies amendment, is one of her doctrines, a necessary consequence of her principles, and she does not so much as suspect that any further revelation is wanting to establish it. But the reasoners "à priori" did on false principles, in this case, and in many others, what an unreasoning vulgar had done thro ignorance, and without any principles at all, except those of superstition. They took off from the real perfections of the Supreme Being, and they added imaginary excellencies to the human nature: like PROCRUSTES, they stretched out humanity, and lopped

* CLARKE in his evid.

off from divinity ; with great metaphysical pains, as much as they could ; and when they found that one of these lines was still too short, and the other still too long, to answer their purpose, of making them nearly commensurate, they spun a thread out of imagination, to lengthen the shortest.

ON such notions of the divine and human nature, Egyptian, Chaldaean, Magian, and almost all the theists of antiquity, founded their theology, on the authority of which they instituted various forms of worship, and promoted superstitious opinions, by their attempts to discover the whole scheme and system of things, some of which infected even the fathers of our church in antient times, and would be avowed at this time by none but rosicrucians, and fanatics as mad as them. In fine, this was the source from which so many religious ceremonies and observances, that had no direction to promote natural religion, tho' pretending to derive their institution from the author of it, arose. Sins were multiplied, and the terrors of superstitious minds increased. But even if these terrors had been rightly and solely applied to real crimes, not of sins of arbitrary discipline, they would have been of little effect, since the means of reconciling all sinners to an offended deity were made by this theology extremely easy. Strange means indeed they were, and such as cost the offender little. Such were expiatory sacrifices, wherein the blood of an innocent beast, or man, was shed to atone for the guilty person, as if God was appeased whenever the priests were glutted with roast meat, or as if it were indifferent to him whose blood was shed, provided his altars reeked with gore. This expiation was pushed to such a degree of pious inhumanity, that fathers made burnt offerings of their children to MOLOCH. I call it pious, because they who never offered up themselves seemed however to prove their repentance, as ABRAHAM was ready to prove his
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faith much better, by sacrificing their children, than a ram or an ox. They sacrificed what they held dearest next to themselves; and they might think that they had the example of the Gods, to authorise the practice; for SANCHONIATHON, it is said, related, that SATURN had offered up his only son in the time of a plague. "Coelo patri in holocaustum obtulit."

THIS was one effect of theological engraftments on natural religion. The Supreme Being was represented so vindictive and cruel, that nothing less than acts of the utmost cruelty could appease his anger, and that his priests were so many butchers of men and other animals. Another engraftment of the same kind was deduced from a very contrary notion, from a notion that God was constantly attentive to the affairs of men, to the least, and to the most important alike; that he entered into the closest familiarity with some, and gave audience at all times to all. Astonishing instances of this sort, as well as of the former, might be cited; for the same theology, which represented the all-perfect Being rigorous and severe without any regard to his mercy, or even to his justice, represented him, with most theological inconsistency, on other occasions gracious, conversable, affable, without any regard to his majesty, or to the infinite superiority of his nature. But these instances are so easily found, and they are so shocking to every sincere theist who frames the most elevated, and therefore the least unworthy sentiments he is able of God, that I am willing to save myself and you the trouble of reflecting on them. "Ita taetra sunt, ut ea fugiat & reformidet oratio.*" How should they be otherwise, when ignorance and superstition were first to produce them, and when the eternal unal-

* CIC. Tusc. Disp:

terable reason of things, the knowledge of which is claimed by men, who approve some of the most detestable of these instances, and who produce others of their own growth, but upon the same principles, is for the most part nothing else than the reason of party, of prejudice, of profession, and of authority? Let me, therefore, mention one alone. It shall be one that is common to all religions, and that carries with it, in general practice, more matter of ridicule than of horror. The instance, I mean, is prayer; or, to speak more properly, the abuse of prayer. To keep up a due sense of our dependance on God, for which purpose this institution may be a very useful, and consequently, a very rational expedient, is the duty of every man. But then it must be practised in a manner reconcileable to other duties of religion; in the first place, to an awful reverence which consists in the inward sentiment wholly, and so little in outward demonstrations that when these are carried too far they become a ludicrous pageantry of devotion, and serve rather to destroy it in most minds than to maintain it in any; to an absolute resignation in the next place, one act of which is preferable to ten thousand collects. Men are fond of access to the Supreme Being. Nothing can flatter humanity so much. As soon, therefore, as they are taught that they may have it, not only by their proxies, the priests, but by themselves immediately, they use it familiarly and impertinently. They put up contradictory petitions to heaven in all the churches of the world. Some would be hurtful to themselves if they were granted, and almost all would be so to others. If the true God could be importuned, as LUCIAN represents JUPITER, he would be importuned to change at every moment the dispositions of his infinite wisdom, and to accommodate the whole oeconomy of his providence in a manner that implies often contradiction, to different and opposite interests, nay to the different and
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opposite caprices, not of nations alone, but of particular men, women, and children.

SINCE I have mentioned this part of divine worship, among other external services, it may be proper to take notice of the second Alcibiades which Mr. CLARKE quotes, and which will serve, if I mistake not, my purpose better than his. In that dialogue, SOCRATES insists on the danger of addressing particular petitions to the gods, lest we should ask what is evil in itself, or what may prove so in the event. He recites the prayer of some antient poet, which is little else than a short act of resignation. He commends the Lacedaemonians for addressing themselves in much the same style to the gods, when they asked in general "pulchra cum bonis." He mentions the preference given by the oracle of JUPITER HAMMON to the prayers of the Lacedaemonians over those of the Athenians, and the rest of the Greeks. The authority of HOMER is brought, as PLATO, PLUTARCH, and generally the antient writers are apt to alledge it on all occasions very impertinently, to prove that the gods are prone to be angry, and to bear hatred even to whole nations. But SOCRATES concludes very rationally, that if they are so they are not to be bribed by sacrifices, by offerings, and by external services, and that they regard the purity of the heart alone. SOCRATES thought that human errors about the will of God, and the duty of man, proceeded from pride more than ignorance, and therefore advised ALCIBIADES, of the purity of whose heart he had no very good opinion, "since he would not make use of the general resigned prayer of the Lacedaemonians, because of his pride, to wait till he had learned how to behave himself towards the gods and towards men." He adds, "that one who had a concern for him, and a wonderful care of him, would be his instructor, and would dispel the darkness of
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“his mind, as MINERVA in HOMER takes the cloud from before the eyes of DIOMEDE, that he might be able to discern “what was good from what was evil.”

WHETHER it be as difficult, as CLARKE imagined, to suppose that SOCRATES meant himself, in this passage, I examine not. Let it be that he meant the daem^{on} of ALCIBIADES. Since the master had an attending daem^{on} who dissuaded and restrained him when that was necessary; the scholar might have one who would inform, and determine him whenever that should be necessary. Nay more. Let it be as some learned men* have observed, that PLATO began to write immediately after the three last prophets of the Jews, as if God had raised up him to supply their place. Let them cite in favor of this opinion, another passage wherein this philosopher says, “that if a perfectly just man should appear in the world, “he would be imprisoned, buffeted, whipped, and crucified, “which must needs have been a prophecy of CHRIST, because “CHRIST was whipped and crucified; whereas SOCRATES “only drank the poison by which he was condemned to die.” Let the same learned men take this passage too, in the second Alcibiades, if they please, for another prophecy of the coming of CHRIST, and of a divine revelation, since remote events, and a distant time are often signified by immediate events, and the present time, in prophetic language.

SUCH prophecies in PLATO will not be readily, nor generally admitted, I think; neither does CLARKE insist that they should. But it must be admitted, that PLATO insinuates in many places the want, or the necessity, of a divine revelation to discover the external service God requires, and the expiation

* DACIER.

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for sin, to give stronger assurances of the rewards and punishments that await men in another world, concerning which, however, he had received particular information, by one who returned from thence on purpose, and to frame a system of the whole order of things, both in this world and the next, that is, of the whole oeconomy of God's dispensations to man, and of his government in heaven and on earth.

XXV.

IT was on some of these subjects SOCRATES had discoursed, when SIMMIAS spoke to him in the manner quoted by CLARKE. He had owned that he did not expect to attain a full knowledge of these things, till the soul was separated from the body, and entirely purified in that other world, of which he gave so topographical a description. The conclusion was, "that since they could not acquire a certain knowledge of the truth here, they should fix on the best and safest of human reasons, and venture on that bottom thro the storms of life, unless they could get one still more firm, such as some divine revelation would be, to render their passage less dangerous." This now is the second of the proofs brought to shew, "that the best, wisest, and least superstitious of the philosophers confessed their sense of the want of a divine revelation, and hoped for something of that nature." The proofs are pompously introduced, but the whole force of them amounts to no more than this, that SOCRATES, if in truth SOCRATES did say all that his scholar makes him say, was much in the wrong for not adding curiosity to pride, among the causes of human error, concerning the will of God, and the duty of man; but SOCRATES himself had a great mind to know more than God has made his human creatures capable
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