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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

XXV.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777)

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 of

of knowing, and, therefore, more than he judged it necessary or useful for them to know. The imaginary want had, therefore, no other principle than metaphysical curiosity. It could have no other. Nothing could be wanting to the divine purpose where God had given, tho he had limited the means. How absurd, how trifling is it then to bring the opinion of philosophers concerning this want, and their hopes that it would be supplied, as a proof that the want was real, and that, after it had been long complained of, it was supplied? I pass over another pretended proof of the same kind. PORPHYRY, whom it is impossible to see ranked among the least superstitious philosophers without surprize, found, it seems, that the universal method of delivering souls was not sufficiently known by philosophers.

IN general, these men complained that sense reached but a little way in acquiring knowledge, that the human mind was weak, that the human life was short, and that the truth of things lay deep in darkness.* These complaints related to all parts of science, physical and metaphysical, to natural philosophy as well as natural theology, and I might, therefore, make the same use of them in one case, that CLARKE makes in the other. I might bring the imperfect knowledge of corporeal nature, and the sense philosophers had of this imperfection in proof that some necessary knowledge of this kind was wanting, and that they had reason to hope the defect would be supplied sooner or later, some how or other, in a natural or in a supernatural way. I might beg the question, like the doctor, and having assumed that they were ignorant of many things necessary to the physical, as he assumes with much less reason,

* *Angustos sensus, imbecillos animos, brevia curricula vitae, in profundo veritatem esse demersam, omnia tenebris circumfusa esse. . . .*

that

that they were of many things necessary to the moral advantages of life; I might argue, that they had reason to expect a time would come, when men would be rendered able to discover not only the second, but the first qualities of substances, to reason from a general knowledge of essences, not from a particular knowledge of effects, and to frame by these and other extraordinary means a complete, regular, and consistent scheme or system of the whole oeconomy of corporeal nature.

IN this manner I might represent the wants, the complaints and the expectations of the heathen philosophers. Thus I might argue, and my representation and my argument would be extremely ridiculous. But are those of CLARKE less so? I think not. These philosophers, such of them, at least, whose works are come down to us, were very ignorant in physics. But in natural theology, and in morality, their knowledge was not deficient, tho it was confined, in the former, to a very few general propositions. They had the same natural means of knowing that we have, and they knew, as well as we know, that “there is a first intelligent cause of all things, that the infinite wisdom and power of this Being made, and preserves the universe, and that his providence governs it.” They knew then, very fully, the relation in which they stood to this Being, the relation of dependent creatures and subjects; and this knowledge was sufficient, or none would be so, to enforce the laws he had given them; for the same means that discovered the divine existence, discovered the divine will in the whole extent of our moral obligations. We might have expected, that CLARKE would have specified some of these moral obligations which were unknown, or imperfectly known, to the philosophers, after all his insinuations concerning their ignorance. But instead of doing this, he insists, in the very place where his subject required it, on such observances, such doctrines,

and such speculations alone as have been since indeed imposed by the christian revelation, but as cannot be reckoned necessary parts, nor, in truth, any parts of the religion of nature and of reason. LACTANTIUS, whom he quotes so often, and whose suffrage is in this case of more weight, because his zeal for christianity was such, that he defended and taught it before he understood it, gives up the point. The philosophers, according to him, discovered the whole truth, and the whole secret of divine religion*. No doubt they did so, and the natural divine religion which they discovered, is the foundation of the christian. There is no one moral precept in the whole gospel, as I have hinted already, which was not taught by heathen philosophers. Even those refinements upon virtue, to which our divines are willing to suppose, that mere humanity could not reach, were taught by some heathen sages, and practised by some heathen saints, as well before as after the coming of CHRIST. Before this time, their religion, that I mean of some of the philosophers, was much more spiritual than that of the Jews. After this time, it vied for spirituality, for mystery, and for supernatural effects with the Christian. To be humble, to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world, to mortify the flesh, to be patient under afflictions, to forgive injuries, to return good for evil, were particular doctrines of paganism, as universal charity or benevolence was the broad foundation of their moral system. This matter is strongly and largely exemplified in the third book of the "alnetanae quaestiones"; for it served bishop HUET's argument in that place to shew, what it served Dr. CLARKE's argument in his Evidences to conceal.

* Totam igitur veritatem, et omne divinae religionis arcanum philosophi attigerunt. L. 7.

How

How trifling is it, after this, to insist on the disputes of a theological kind; for of a moral kind there were, properly speaking, none that arose among the philosophers? They were disputes about words, or about some very insignificant speculations, and no more; for the morality of ZENO, and of EPICURUS, reduced to practice, was the same. But to proceed; how strongly might this objection be retorted on the fathers of the christian church? To object that the heathen had no one complete scheme wherein all the moral duties were collected together, instead of being taught occasionally, is ridiculous, since the same objection might be made, if it was one, to christianity likewise. But the divines who object this mean something more. When they say that the philosophers were unable to comprehend the truth of religion, tho they discovered and explained almost all the particulars wherein it consists*, they mean by the entire scheme they refer to, the summary of their own theology, wherein the fall and the redemption of man, and all the mysteries of christianity are contained. This they call the whole doctrine, and design of true religion from the original to the consummation of all things, and of this indeed the heathen philosophers might well be ignorant, since no man could know it who was not taught by St. PAUL, or by some christian doctor.†

THUS their ignorance of true religion is accounted for not a little hypothetically. But even thus their complaints are not justified, nor the expectations imputed to them rendered reasonable. They must needs be ignorant of true religion, if natu-

* Quamvis ea fere, quibus summa ipsa constat, et viderint, et explicaverint. LACT. L. 7.

† Verum autem non nisi ejus scire est, qui fit doctus a Deo. Ib.

ral religion was a part of it only, even at that time, as it is at this. They could not know a revealed religion, nor any real want of it before the revelation was made, and the knowledge they had was such as the Author of nature had thought sufficient, since he had given them no more. Their complaints and their expectations, therefore, were founded in proud curiosity, and vain presumption. The use which CLARKE makes of them is something worse. To approve them, and to deduce from the supposed reasonableness of them the necessity of a further revelation, is to weigh his own opinion, and theirs, against providence. It is to say, that they saw before, and that he has seen since this further revelation was made, the necessity of it to reform mankind effectually, by opening to them the whole doctrine and design of true religion, which were opened in part only to the heathen world; and that the event has justified the complaints, and the expectation. This latter has been a topic of much theological triumph. Bring me a man, says LACTANTIUS*, who is choleric, who is given to rail, who is unruly and fierce, with a few words of God I will render him as tame as a sheep. Bring me one who is given up to his lust, and so he goes on. "Numquid haec philosophorum aut unquam praestitit, aut, praestare si velit, potest?" Did any one of the philosophers do so much, or could he, if he would? "It was hard, says St. AUSTIN, where he mentions the letter of PORPHYRY to ANEBO, "it was hard for so great a philosopher to discover, to expose, and boldly to convict the whole diabolical society, which every little old christian woman discovers at once, and detests openly. Quam quaelibet anicula christiana nec nosse cunctatur, et liberrime detestatur." Thus the triumph of the gospel over ignorance and immorality, and the reformation

* Vid. the quotation in the Evid.

of the world, by the publication of it, are frequently magnified. But when we consider the means of reforming mankind, which the heathen philosophers, and the christian divines, have had in their turns, and compare the progress made in this great work by both, it will appear that the former had not sufficient means, (so far their complaints were well founded) nor the latter a success proportionable to the means they had. In short, if CLARKE'S way of reasoning be good, some extraordinary and supernatural assistance to reform the world, is still wanting; for it would be impious to say, that a further revelation is just as necessary now as it was before the coming of CHRIST.

XXVI.

TO speak of the want of sufficient means to propagate natural religion, distinctly from the want of a sufficient knowledge of it, which are often purposely confounded together, that the first which is true, may cover the last which is false, must be our next task.

THERE was no creed, nor any act of uniformity imposed on the heathen philosophers. But still it is not true, that the system of moral obligations, or natural religion, was to them a wide sea wherein they wandered without knowing their way, or having any guide. It is not true, that they were unable to make out upon what principles originally, and for what end ultimately, the choice of virtue was to be made*. They had better guides than CLARKE, whom it was in their power to follow, nature and reason; one pointed out their way with a

* Vid. Evid. p. 176. 191.

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