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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

XXIX.

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it was substituted to natural religion: the main principles of it, and even particular opinions, and local institutions have been variously mingled in different systems, and are to be discerned in them even now. This has happened naturally, and almost necessarily. All these systems lean on certain primitive notions, which the human mind is so prone to frame or to receive. The same affections and passions maintain them, work upon them, and direct them in different imaginations. The matter is the same, the form alone is changed.

XXIX.

AMONG many doctrines that were taught by those who pretended to explain the whole scheme, and order of divine oeconomy with respect to man, that of rewards and punishments in a future state was one. It began to be taught long before we have any light into antiquity, and when we begin to have any, we find it established. How powerful is the desire of continuing to exist? How predominant is the pride of the human heart? Nothing seems more natural to man, than to wish to live without restraint or fear, and yet how ready was the multitude, in the pagan world, to embrace the hope of immortality, tho it was accompanied with the fear of damnation? Like the elementary people of the cabalists*, one may think, they would have chosen to be damned eternally, rather than to cease to exist. But every one was flattered by a system that raised him, in imagination, above corporeal nature, as every one was at liberty to flatter himself further, that he should pass this immortality in the fellowship of the gods, "in contubernio deorum."

* Vid. BORRI's Letters.

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THE hypothesis of a life after this, especially when it was accompanied by that of a life preceding this, which was founded on a supposed metempsychosis that several systems of religion admitted, served two purposes. It furnished an answer to the accusation which atheists brought, and which theists were too ready to admit in those days, as well as in ours, of unjust dispensations of providence, in the distribution of good and evil. This purpose seems very unnecessary to me, who am firmly persuaded that the accusation is a mere sophism, and void of any foundation. But the other purpose was, no doubt, very necessary, since the belief of future rewards and punishments could not fail to have some effect on the manners of men, to encourage virtue, and to restrain vice. For this purpose the doctrine was strongly inculcated from time immemorial. Egypt was the great mistress of religion, as well as of arts and sciences, and the doctrines and rites of her church were dispersed wherever she sent her colonies; these of the "mythologia de inferis" among the rest. Whatever MELAMPUS, CADMUS, and others, carried into Greece, ORPHEUS carried these. He propagated them by his verses and his institutions. But it was your HOMER who spread them most, and gave them the greatest vogue by his *Odyssy* and *Iliad*, those stupendous works, which VIRGIL alone could imitate, and you translate, with success.

ONE cannot see, without surprise, a doctrine so useful to all religions, and therefore incorporated into all the systems of paganism, left wholly out of that of the Jews. Many probable reasons might be brought to shew that it was an Egyptian doctrine before the Exode, and this particularly, that it was propagated from Egypt so soon at least afterwards, by all those who were instructed, like MOSES, in the wisdom of that people.
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He transported much of this wisdom into the scheme of religion and government, which he gave the Israelites; and among other things certain rites, which may seem to allude or have a remote relation to this very doctrine. Tho' this doctrine, therefore, had not been that of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, and JACOB, he might have adopted it with as little scruple, as he did many customs and institutions purely egyptian. He had to do with a rebellious, but a superstitious people. In the first character, they made it necessary that he should neglect nothing which might add weight to his ordinances, and contribute to keep them in awe. In the second, their disposition was extremely proper to receive such a doctrine, and to be influenced by it. Shall we say, that an hypothesis of future rewards and punishments was useless among a people who lived under a theocracy, and that the future judge of other people was their immediate judge and king, who resided in the midst of them, and who dealt out rewards and punishments on every occasion? Why then were so many precautions taken? Why was a solemn covenant made with God, as with a temporal prince? Why were so many promises and threatenings of rewards and punishments, temporal indeed, but future and contingent, as we find in the book of Deuteronomy, most pathetically held out by MOSES? Would there have been any more impropriety in holding out those of one kind, than those of another, because the Supreme Being, who disposed and ordered both, was in a particular manner present among them? Would an addition of rewards and punishments more remote, but eternal, and in all respects far greater, to the catalogue, have had no effect? I think neither of these things can be said.

WHAT shall we say then? How came it to pass this addition was not made? I will mention what occurs to me, and shall

shall not be over solicitous about the weight that my reflection may deserve. If the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state, had been revealed to MOSES, that he might teach them to the Israelites, he would have taught them most certainly. But he did not teach them. They were, therefore, not revealed to him. Why they were not so revealed some pert divine, or other, will be ready to tell you. For me, I dare not presume to guess. But this I may presume to advance, that since these doctrines were not revealed by God, to his servant MOSES, it is highly probable, that this legislator made a scruple of teaching them to the Israelites, howsoever well instructed he might be in them himself, and howsoever useful to government he might think them. The superstitious and idolatrous rites of the Egyptians, like those of other nations, were founded on the polytheism and the mythology that prevailed, and were suffered to prevail among the vulgar, and that made the sum of their religion. It seemed to be a point of policy to direct all these absurd opinions and practices to the service of government, instead of attempting to root them out. But then the great difference between rude and ignorant nations, and such as were civilised and learned like the Egyptians, seems to have been this, that the former had no other system of religion than these absurd opinions and practices, whereas the latter had an inward, as well as an outward, doctrine. There is reason to believe, that natural theology and natural religion had been taught and practised in the antient theban dynasty; and it is probable, that they continued to be an inward doctrine in the rest of Egypt, whilst polytheism, idolatry, and all the mysteries, all the impieties, and all the follies of magic, were the outward doctrine. MOSES might be let into a knowledge of both, and under the patronage of the princess, whose foundling he was, he might be initiated into those mysteries, where

where the secret doctrine alone was taught, and the outward was exploded. But we cannot imagine, that the children of Israel, in general, enjoyed the same privilege, nor that the masters were so lavish to their slaves of a favor so distinguished, and often so hard to obtain. No. The children of Israel knew nothing more than the outside of the religion of Egypt, and if the doctrine we speak of was known to them, it was known only in the superstitious rites, and with all the fabulous circumstances in which it was dressed up and presented to vulgar belief. It would have been hard, therefore, to teach, or to renew this doctrine in the minds of the Israelites, without giving them an occasion the more to recal the polytheistical fables, and practice the idolatrous rites they had learned during their captivity. Rites and ceremonies are often so equivocal, that they may be applied to very different doctrines. But when they are so closely connected with one doctrine, that they are not applicable to another, to teach the doctrine is, in some sort, to teach the rites and ceremonies, and to authorise the fables on which they are founded. MOSES, therefore, being at liberty to teach this doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state, or not to teach it, might very well choose the latter; tho he indulged the Israelites on account of the hardness of their hearts, and by the divine permission, as it is presumed, in several observances and customs which did not lead directly, tho even they did so, perhaps, in consequence, to the polytheism and idolatry of Egypt. But I return to Greece.

XXX.

THE seeds of artificial theology and superstitious devotion, for they go always together, which ORPHEUS and other Egyptian missionaries had sowed, were cultivated
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