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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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XXX.

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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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by theistical philosophers, and the doctrine of a future state particularly. If PYTHAGORAS reported, that the soul of HESIOD was tied to a brazen column, and the soul of HOMER hung upon a tree, for their temerity in ascribing human passions, and the rules of human conduct even to the father of gods and men, as some traditions say, one would be tempted to think, that he applied this doctrine of a future state to enforce natural religion alone. But we should deceive ourselves greatly if we thought so. We have none of his writings, if he did write. But we know from DIOGENES LAËRTIUS, from PORPHYRY, from JAMBlichus, and from other authorities, that he imported from Egypt and the eastern nations an immense stock of the theology, and superstition which were in vogue amongst them. If inspiration was not the least, it was not the greatest of his pretensions. He enveloped his doctrines in mystery to make them pass for divine, laid the foundations of them out of the ken of human reason, and acquired a great reputation in metaphysics and divine philosophy, by the usual method, by not being understood.

I pass to SOCRATES and PLATO. The first devoted himself to the reformation of his countrymen with unexampled zeal, and as St. PAUL was the apostle of the gentiles in revealed, we may say that SOCRATES was the same in natural religion. There was greater simplicity, and less heat of imagination, in the master than in the scholar. Sober prose was the language of one. A poetical enthusiasm was that of the other. One was fitter to reform his own age by his discourses, the other to create the admiration of posterity by his writings. Good sense and truth served the purpose of one much less than wit and beauty of style served the purpose of the other. The very extravagancies of PLATO, for which he deserved at least as much as HOMER to be banished out of his
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his own Utopia, recommended him to after ages; and there have been many, as there are still some, who would say, like TULLY in one of his rants, "errare meherculè malo cum PLATONE, quam cum istis vera sentire." But notwithstanding the difference I make, and which is true, in general, between these philosophers, notwithstanding the accusation which XENOPHON, who took minutes of the discourses of SOCRATES, laid against PLATO for corrupting the doctrine of their common master, it is certain, and XENOPHON himself might be brought to prove, that if SOCRATES did not say every thing which PLATO made him say, yet he lost himself sometimes in clouds of metaphysics, as much as he was afraid to do in those of physics, from whence he has been so much applauded for bringing philosophy down to the affairs of human life, to things of real use, and to knowledge within our reach. How could it be otherwise? SOCRATES was a great reasoner "à priori" as well as PLATO, even in the establishment of natural religion. To contemplate God, or the eternal ideas which exist in God, and to abstract the soul from corporeal sense were soon made, by the encouragement which this school, the senate of philosophy, gave to such theology, the two great objects of it; so that the best of theistical philosophers were, in effect, eunomians, long before that bishop of Cyzicus lived, who boasted that he knew God as well as God knew himself. Such were the principles of that artificial theology which the Greeks had brought from Egypt and Asia, which they carried back thither with all their own improvements, which was dispersed from these countries north and south, east and west, and in the glare of which men lost sight of natural religion.

WHAT philosophers began, priests carried on with no small advantage to themselves, but without any to religion. I will

not say, as generally as some have done, that they made it no part of their business to teach the people virtue, nor any thing more than the tricks of religion*, because it is not strictly true, and Mr. LOCKE, in his zeal against priest-craft, asserted a little too much. The schools of the philosophers were indeed the schools of morality; but even the tricks of religion had some intention to promote it. This only I will say, and it is enough. The reformation of mankind was not their principal aim, and the little they did to deter men from vice was done in a method that could not fail to have, as, in fact, it had; a contrary effect. The observation of ceremonies, of feasts, and solemnities that had no foundation in reason, and that were arbitrarily prescribed by ecclesiastical discipline, tho sometimes under the pretence of revelation, were made the chief means of pleasing the gods, and of pacifying them when they were angry. From hence two great mischiefs arose. Religion became form and ceremony, and the observation of forms and ceremonies of greater moment than the practice of moral duties, tho the practice of these was recommended too. This cannot be illustrated better than by the example of your church. No one can say, that she allows men to cheat and to rob one another. On the contrary, she requires that they should be just in all their dealings. But yet absolution for fraud or theft will be obtained from the priest, who cannot give it for eating a slice of meat on the vigil of some saint. Thus artificial theology and superstition oppressed true religion, and priests found the secret of persuading mankind, that God was better pleased with obedience to their laws than to his own.

* Vid. Reasonab. of Christianity.

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THUS too sins were multiplied, and with them the terrors of an incensed deity. But the same priests, who spread the terrors, shewed easy means of expiating the sins that caused them. Wherever superstition prevails, those sins which the priests make, by forbidding what the law of nature has left indifferent, or by imposing duties that have no relation to true religion, will be always esteemed the greatest. Sins, therefore, which are no sins, may be expiated very properly by punishments, which are no punishments, and several ceremonies performed may atone for several omitted. But the abuse is abominable when the same expiations and atonements are applied to real sins, and priests do little else than dispense arbitrarily with the laws of nature which are the laws of God. That no repentance was required in these cases by the pagan divines, I do not say. The very forms used in the celebration of their mysteries seem to shew that it was, and that the impenitent could not be initiated. But this very repentance was little, if any thing, more than matter of form, confession, some temporary penance, ablutions, purifications, and other tricks of regeneration. Amendment, without these, was impracticable or insufficient, and with these, which might be repeated as often as occasion required, unnecessary; so that Mr. LOCKE had reason to say the priests sold good penny worths. On the whole matter, if men were more powerfully allured to virtue, and deterred from vice, by the hopes and fears of a future state held out to every one in particular, than they could be by the consequences to mankind, in general, of observing or violating natural religion, and by the force of civil laws; yet, in the religions we speak of, one part of the system defeated the other. Some body has observed, MEZERAY I think, that the monstrous crimes so frequent in the devout, that is in the bigot ages of the christian church, were encouraged.

raged by this very devotion. Men were enough bigots to believe, that the pardon of God might be obtained for money, or possessions given to his priests, and that crimes of the blackest dye might be expiated by undertaking a pilgrimage, in person, or by proxy, to Rome, "ad limen apostolorum." This traffic, for such it was, became so frequent, that, even in times less antient, the church of Rome found it necessary to publish a tariff, or book of rates, which I have seen in print*, wherein the price is set over against every sin, lest purchasers should be imposed upon; and such sins are specified, as the most polluted imagination would hardly conceive. If this abuse was not so exorbitant in the pagan as in the christian church, something of the same kind must have been practised wherever men were taught to fear an angry God, and to believe, at the same time, that they could pacify him with offerings and sacrifices, or, to use an expression of PLATO's, compound with him as they would with an usurer.

THIS single reason will account better for the small progress that was made by the heathen philosophers, in reforming mankind, than all those that CLARKE brings. But there is another, and a greater, mischief still behind. Religion gave occasion to atheism, as dogmatism did to scepticism. Superstitious worship, founded in absurd opinions concerning the divine nature, had an effect, in that age, which I wish it had never had since. DIAGORAS, for instance, might assume that such a superstitious worship as he beheld could be paid to fictitious gods alone, and seeing no other worship, he might conclude there were no other gods. From the ridiculous worship, and the absurd theology that prevailed in all the countries they knew, both he, and THEODORUS, who lived

* In the late CHARLES BERNARD's Library.

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more than twenty olympiads after him, and many more avowed or concealed atheists, might draw the same conclusions, and be mad enough not to discern that a few local observations were not sufficient to invalidate a proposition that might be true independently of them, and that there might be a God, and a true worship of him, tho all the gods of Greece were fictitious, and the adoration of them was mere superstition.

THESE men were plunged at once, and by indignation, as it were, into atheism; whilst others went into it by dint of philosophical refinements more leisurely, less directly, and some of them against the primitive doctrines of their own schools.

XXXI.

LET us consider what happened in the academy, and what the consequence was of all that metaphysical theology which the founder was supposed, by his immediate successors, and by other philosophers, to have taught dogmatically. If SPEUSIPPUS, XENOCRATES, CRATES, CRANTOR, and POLEMO, did not teach exactly the same dogmas, they taught on the same principles of chimerical knowledge that their founder had done; and, in this sense, it might be said, "quae acceperant tuebantur." Other sects of dogmatists arose at the same time, and among the rest one which gave a principal occasion to that revolution in the academy which ARCESILAUS began, and CARNEADES improved. The sect, I mean, was that of the stoics, concerning whom it is true to say, that their theology and their moral philosophy were alike absurd. By one they drew the divinity down to be a
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