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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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XXXII.

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THO I do not believe PLATO to have been a dogmatist, even when he appears such, on the faith of St. AUSTIN, any more than I believe ARCESILAUS to have disguised his real sentiments, and to have continued a dogmatist, even when he avowed scepticism, on the faith of the same saint, or of a passage in SEXTUS EMPIRICUS ; yet must it be owned that SOCRATES and he laid the foundation of a metaphysical dogmatism, which the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians revived long afterwards, and which prevails to this day. It was a maxim of theirs, that we may have knowledge concerning things perceptible by intellect, but opinion only concerning things perceptible by sense ; and it was on the strength of this maxim, perhaps, that the former, after he had brought philosophy down from the clouds, went up thither again to find the principles of morality, and the rules of human life. Whether we pretend, like those philosophers, to contemplate immaterial forms, and the eternal ideal archetypes that exist in God, or whether we assert, that all the relations of things appear to us what they are absolutely and necessarily in themselves, there is an infallible, tho human criterion established to which, says CLARKE, and he quotes the bible for it, even God himself appeals.

FROM such knowledge as this, knowledge which no man ever had, nor could have, the whole system of artificial theology, which corrupted natural religion, was deduced. It served in no sort to promote the reformation of mankind, and it involved the professors of it in a thousand difficulties and disputes that rendered them ridiculous to one another and every one perhaps to himself, unless there were some as enthusiastic

thufiaftical and as mad in thofe days as PLOTINUS, PORPHYRY, JAMBLICUS, and others grew to be after the beginning of christianity. Thus it came about that the great theological, that is, the platonic fchool went from one extreme into another. It fuited the vanity of thefe philofophers better to affert that nothing was to be known in general, than to own that the reputation of their fchool in particular had been raifed on a fantaftic fciences: and after exercifing their wit to prove that they were mafters of divine knowledge, they exercifed it to prove that they knew nothing, no not the exiftence of a Supreme Being.

THE truth is, that the philofophy of the academy became little more than an exercife of wit and eloquence. TULLY purges himfelf, in one place, from the imputation of engaging in the academical feft on thefe motives, or on that of loving to difpute*; and yet he confeffes, in the fecond Tufculan, that the cuftom of difputing on every fide pleafed him, becaufe it was “maxima dicendi exercitatio”. But whatever engaged him in it, his engagements carried him very far, as we may fee in his books of the nature of the gods. I cite thefe, becaufe they ferve extremely to my purpofe, which is to fhew, by contrafting the ftoicians and the academicians together (for the epicureans cannot have their place here, tho they too were dogmatifts) how unfit the philofophers of both thefe fchools were, from very oppofite caufes and different extremes, to eftablifh the fundamental principle of true religion, or indeed to eftablifh any thing. The difcourfe of BALBUS is a rhapsody of fenfe and nonfenfe, of very good arguments “à pofteriori” that there is a God, “effe aliquod numen praefantiffimae mentis,” of fophiftical fyllogifms to prove the fame thing.

* Oftentatione aliqua aut ftudio certandi.

“à priori,”

“à priori,” and of idle traditions, gravely produced, to confirm the whole by fact as well as reason. All this he advances with equal assurance, the weak and the strong, the false and the true. *BALBUS* could do no otherwise. He had the task of explaining and defending artificial, not natural theology, superstition, not religion. He was obliged, therefore, as all they are whose ultimate end is error, to proceed from the first on principles ill assumed, to reason falsely, and to conclude precariously, but dogmatically. The discourse of *COTTA* is an ingenious declamation, wherein he refutes the stoical system, and renders it ridiculous. But then he disputes so vehemently against it, and his arguments extend so far, that *TULLY** makes his own brother accuse the pontiff directly, and himself by consequence indirectly, of atheism. “Studio contra “stoicos differendi, deos mihi videtur funditus tollere.” What says *TULLY* in his own name? He tells his brother, that *COTTA* disputes in that manner, rather to confute the stoics, than to destroy the religion of mankind “... magis... “quam ut hominum delectat religionem.” But *QUINCTUS* answers, that is, *TULLY* makes him answer, he was not the bubble of an artifice, employed to save the appearance of departing from the public religious institutions, “ne communi “jure migrare videatur.” When you join to this short conversation, the expression, which concludes the third book of the nature of the gods, where *TULLY* says very drily, that the disputation of *BALBUS* seemed to him the most probable “ad “veritatis similitudinem propensior,” you will see that, if the academicians did not profess atheism, because they could profess nothing, yet some of them might esteem this to be the most probable opinion, as *TULLY* esteemed that of theism to be, even when the absurdities of the portic were blended with

* De Divin. L. I.

it or deduced from it. Thus doubt, concerning the existence of any superior Being, arose in the same school, from which so much artificial theology had been propagated: and the sublime doctrines of the divine PLATO ended in arrant scepticism as they led to it, and as he designed they should, if the man in the world who admired him the most, who seemed to have lived with him, and who would rather have erred with him, than have been in the right with others, all which are TULLY'S own professions, knew him better than St. AUSTIN or any modern pedant.

XXXIII.

THESE first and crude reflections may be sufficient to shew that the heathen philosophers were not unable to reform mankind, for the reasons given by Dr. CLARKE, but for reasons of a very different kind. I might even have saved myself the trouble perhaps of descending into so many particulars; since it would have been not only an answer "ad hominem," but a full answer to all that can be urged in favor of the same hypothesis, to have asked, whether the reformation, which heathen philosophers could not bring about effectually, has been effected under the jewish and christian dispensations? Under these, all the knowledge, and all the means, which are assumed to be necessary, and to have been deficient in the state of paganism, as well as some means really wanting to the philosophers, were amply supplied.

CONSIDER Judaism as a religion given by God himself, in the most ostensible manner, to a people whom he chose to be his peculiar people, whom he separated from the rest of
mankind