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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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XXXIII.

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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

mankind, and with whom he made a solemn covenant. Consider the whole series of miracles, that were wrought to convince, to persuade, to assist and defend, to reward and to punish this people occasionally. Add to all this, that God exercised kingly power amongst them for a time, and that the Shecinah, or his divine presence over the mercy-seat, continued amongst them till the destruction of their first temple. Consider this, and then consider that their history is little else than a relation of their rebelling and repenting, of their proneness to one, and of the extreme difficulty with which they were drawn, even by supernatural means, to the other. Consider that these rebellions were not those of particular men, surpris'd and hurried into disobedience by their passions, but national deliberate violations of the law, and defiances of the Supreme Being. Is it possible that any one, who believes the history of the bible true, should believe, after he has read it, that the want of a divine authority, and of a principle higher than reason, hindered the heathen philosophers from reforming the world effectually; that they would have succeeded, if they had really had them, as they sometimes pretended to them; and that, for this reason, which they were sagacious enough to discover, they desired and expected a revelation? Surely it is impossible.

THE Jews had not such continual and immediate communications with God by their high priest and their prophets, after their return from the babylonian captivity, as before it, neither were they eye-witnesses of such frequent manifestations of his glory and power, as their fathers had been: and yet what a reformation, in point of religion, was wrought among them after the re-establishment of their church and state? How much more zealously and steadily were they attached to their law? This difference was owing, no doubt,

to the institution of synagogues in every place where a congregation of ten persons could be assembled, and to other improvements of their ecclesiastical discipline and worship, which had a wonderful effect on the spirit of the people, raised it to enthusiasm, but preserved it orthodox. SOCRATES and PLATO then, to quote no others of the heathen philosophers, might have had the same success, in reforming the manners of men, and in restoring the purity of natural religion at Athens, without any divine mission, that ESDRAS and NEHEMIAS had at Jerusalem in reviving and improving more effectually the ceremonies and observances of judaism, by means which experience and good policy suggested to them, if the two greeks had been, as the two jews were, the legislators and second founders of their commonwealth.

THERE is so little pretence to draw the shadow of an argument, from the ineffectual endeavours of the heathen philosophers to reform the world, that the world has not been effectually reformed, nor any one nation in it, even by the promulgation of the gospel, even where christianity has flourished most in speculation and external devotion. The Son of God, God himself, came upon earth, was born of a woman, lived among men, preached a new covenant, wrought miracles, sent his disciples to all nations, who established his church among them. What has happened? This church has been so far from reforming mankind, that it stood in need of being itself reformed as soon as it was established. The gates of hell have not yet prevailed against it, and we are to believe that they never will. But the gates of hell have shook it extremely in all ages, and the prince of hell has made from the first most terrible incursions within the pale of it. Much zeal has been expressed about articles of faith, much regard has been paid to the outward service of God; and wealth, and power, and pomp, and dignity have been

been lavishly bestowed on an order of men, who affect to be thought successors to the apostles, and whose institution is avowedly directed to reform the manners of men as well as preserve the purity of faith. Every defect, except that of not living up to their doctrines, which is supposed to have rendered the preachers of natural religion incapable of reforming the world, has been supplied in the preachers of revealed religion. The doctrines of these men have been certainly enforced by a divine authority: and they have been assisted by an higher principle than philosophy and bare reason. They had anciently all the advantages of opposition and persecution. They have enjoyed ever since, and during a course of fourteen centuries, all those of support and of favor from civil government and of blind submission from the people, With all these advantages they have not wrought a more effectual reformation. Morality has not been better taught by them, nor better practised under their influence. On the contrary, having united in themselves the two characters of philosophers and priests, they have often sacrificed the former to the latter, not for the sake of revealed religion, which is founded on natural, and can require no such sacrifice, but, like the priests of paganism, for the sake of their craft.

EXAMPLES will be brought, I know, in opposition to what is here advanced. Examples of a religious zeal, which prevailed among all the primitive christians, to such a degree, that tho some of them declined, many of them courted, martyrdom; examples of particular men who have deserved a sort of apotheosis for the purity of their doctrines and the sanctity of their lives; and examples on the other hand of pagan ferocity and cruelty, contrasted with christian moderation and charity. It would not be hard, but it would be a long and invidious task, to shew, in a variety of instances, how partially these examples

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are produced, and these comparisons are made. Let us be content with a few general reflections.

THAT a religious and enthusiastical zeal animated many of the primitive christians, both the orthodox and the heretics, is most certain. But to make the example prove what it is designed to prove, this zeal should have been singular, a peculiar effect of christian revelation; whereas nothing is, nor has been ever more common. The zeal of the Jews, whilst they lived in the midst of revelations and miracles, was not comparable to that which they shewed when they had nothing but the foolish comments of their Mishnicl doctors, instead of one, and enthusiastical visions and superstitious signs instead of the other. We shall find the same if we go for examples to many of the pagan nations. We shall find not only particular men, but whole bodies of men, among them, as well as among christians, ready to devote themselves to death, not only for their absurd religions, but for their attachment to a party, or to the most whimsical point of imaginary honor. It is not much to that of revelation, therefore, to ascribe to it what may be the effect of imposture and error: and enthusiasm is no more a proof of true religion, than martyrdom is of a good cause.

THE examples of men, reputed saints for the purity of their doctrine, and the holy austerity of their lives, will avail as little to shew that the christian revelation reformed the world, any more than the endeavours of heathen philosophers. Their doctrines, the doctrines of these saints I mean, were such as related either to the metaphysical speculations of theology, and to the practice of ceremonies and rites established for outward worship and ecclesiastical discipline, or to moral obligations and the duties of natural religion. About
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the first, and second, it must be confessed that the pastors of the church were in those days, as they are in ours, extremely intent. But the disputes that arose among them, on all such occasions, and the scandal with which they were carried on by all sides, leave it very doubtful to whom this purity is to be ascribed, and much more probable that it was to be ascribed to none. It seems that no side had a good claim to it, in many cases, whilst the disputes lasted. When they were determined by councils, however this determination was procured, a standard of purity was assumed to be fixed; and authority did what neither reason nor revelation could do, it ascertained orthodoxy in belief and practice, till new disputes arose, or till old ones were revived. These doctrines and these rites have been so far from reforming the world, that they have promoted, by the disputes raised about them, more hatred, malice and uncharitableness, than ever was in it before. They have diminished the flames neither of ambition nor avarice. They have added fresh fuel to them, and have kindled new flames of their own. In short, the examples of these saints, with respect to these doctrines, will never prove the utility of revelation: and with respect to those that regard moral obligations, and the duties of natural religion, they either neglected them, or taught them more imperfectly than several of the heathen philosophers. When I say that they neglected them, this I mean. The theology contained in the gospel lies in a very narrow compass. It is marvellous, indeed, but it is plain, and it is employed throughout, to enforce natural religion. This seems to be the end, and revealed religion the means, both which it would have been for the honor of christianity and for the good of mankind to have left so. But the saints, that have been quoted, took another course from the first. Instead of making theology, and the external duties of religion, serve as means, they insisted

insisted on them as if knowledge in metaphysics, ceremony and ecclesiastical dominion, had been the principal ends of revelation. They insisted on them so constantly and so voluminously, that natural religion held but the second place in their system, and that righteousness of faith became much more important than righteousness of works. On this account we may say that they neglected, in some sort, the doctrines of natural religion: they practised them ill, and they could scarce fail to teach them both imperfectly and erroneously; since they derived them, "à priori," from principles of their own theology, and from the ideas they framed of the divine attributes, instead of deriving them "à posteriori" from the constitution of the human system. To this we must ascribe the wild allegories, with which they perplexed the plainest dictates of reason, the affected refinements, which are impracticable in any national society, and the immoral doctrines which ought to have been banished, with the saints who taught them, out of all societies. The charge, I bring, is not that of passion, nor prejudice, no, nor of ignorance. I am able to justify it in all its parts, by some instances: and if you would see it made good by more, and by more learned authorities, consult such writers as BARBEYRAC, who was provoked by a saucy monk, to publish his book, "La moralité des peres." Consult other critics, of whom there are many. Nay, consult the authors who deny his charge: and I will appeal to your judgment on what you find even in them, provided you weigh the facts in the ballance of common sense, and pay no regard to their judgments.

Thus much for purity of doctrine. Much less needs to be said about holiness and austerity of life. The histories of saints have been in all religions, even more than those of any other eminent persons, little better than panegyrical romances.

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The reason of which is obvious enough. No man, for instance, is so silly, I presume, at this time, unless he be a rosycrucian, as to give any more credit to the biographers of the egyptian hermits, ANTHONY and PAUL, than to those of PYTHAGORAS and APPOLLONIUS of Thyana. All their relations are stuffed alike with the most evident falsehoods, the most puerile absurdities, and the grossest superstitions; for many of these were common to pagans, jews and christians: and yet the first of the biographers, I mention, who yield in none of these respects to PORPHYRY, JAMBlichus, PHILOSTRATUS, or any other compiler of lying legends, were famous saints, ATHANASIUS and JEROM. But further, if we allow the sanctity and austerity of some particular men, or of some particular orders of men, to have been, and to be, as great as they are represented; this will be far from proving the reformation of the world by christianity. There were antiently, among the heathens, chaldaeans, gymnosophists and others, and there are now, both among them and the mahometans, particular men, and orders of men, of great sanctity of life, nay of greater than any among christians; if sanctity be to be measured, as they who would make the objection I answer measure it, by austerity. It is unnecessary to quote the instances, which are to be found in all our books of travels. Even SIMEON STYLITES, who stood fasting and praying on the top of a column so many years together, has been outdone by multitudes. What now can be said? If these examples are not sufficient to prove that heathen philosophers and mahometan doctors have reformed the world, will examples of the same, or of an inferior kind, prove that christianity has?

IT will not be said, I think, that luxury and debauchery have been restrained by christianity. It was a proverbial saying "Daphnicis moribus vivere:" and CASSIUS, if I remember

member right, would not suffer his army to encamp at Antioch, lest his soldiers should be corrupted by the manners of the place. But where is the court or city, in which christianity is professed, to which this phrase might not be applied? I know of none, nor is there any good reason to believe there was any such antiently, neither that of CONSTANTINE, whatever his panegyrist advances, nor that of CHARLEMAGNE, tho your church has thought fit for other reasons to make saints of both these princes. Upon this, therefore, divines will be ashamed to insist, or may be easily made so; since it is not difficult to shew them, that the men of their own order, who did not mend their manners afterwards, were famous even in the fourth century for following those of DAPHNE. But it will be founded high that the patience, moderation and charity, which christianity inspires, softened the turbulent, fierce and cruel temper of paganism, and wrought, by doing this, a wonderful reformation in the world. You must remember that this fact has been asserted to be undeniable, and yet it is false: the very contrary is true. CONSTANTINE did, I believe, expect that the establishment of the christian religion in the empire would have this effect. But his expectation proved vain: and I might appeal to the ecclesiastical and civil history of the last fourteen hundred years, that is, from his days to ours, to vouch for me. The whole tenor of them proves that revolts against government, and disorders of every kind, have been at least as frequent in the christian world as in the pagan. There were never more, nor more unjust, nor more cruel wars than christians have waged, and the persecutions and massacres, that may be reproached to them are such, in all circumstances of inhumanity, as can be reproached to no other people, except the Jews. That any part of these evils ought to be ascribed to gospel-christianity, I neither say nor believe. They cannot be reconciled to the principles of it.

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But this I say, and believe, that the christian revelation has not effectually reformed the world. There never was in itself a more risible, nor in it's consequences a more lamentable, absurdity imposed on mankind than this, that a certain order of men should be instituted, not only to preside in the exercises of public worship, and to exhort others to the practice of their known duties, but to think for the rest, and to dictate opinions to them on matters of nice speculation concerning which they themselves were never agreed, and which have no immediate connection with these known duties. This absurdity, however, has prevailed in the christian as in other religions of positive institution: and in this, as in them, the spirit of the clergy has become the spirit of the religion. They, who should have preached concord, have preached discord; and they, who should have promoted peace, have animated to war. They have given continual pretence to ferocity and cruelty; they have often irritated them above their usual excesses; and the prophane application of a scrap* of the gospel has served to deluge whole nations in blood. A private opinion, however true, that was not exactly conformable to an ecclesiastical decision, was termed heresy: and against such heresy, as against the greatest of crimes, the passions of men were inflamed under the name of zeal.

THO I avoid to descend into particulars, let me just compare natural ferocity and cruelty with religious, by mentioning one example of the former, and two of the latter. The barbarous people, who broke into the Roman empire, had no motives but those of plundering wealthy provinces, and settling in better climates. Religion was so far from being a motive to these enterprises, that they embraced generally that of the

* Compel them to come in.

nations they conquered. They were guilty, no doubt, of great violence and cruelty; but when you have read the most exaggerated accounts of their proceedings, read those which are contained in the Bible, of the invasion of Palestine, and those which Spanish authors themselves give of the invasion of America. These events that happened at an immense distance of time, and were brought about under very different oeconomies of religion and policy, are, therefore, the more proper to shew how religion may furnish a pretence to natural ferocity and cruelty, as well as aggravate both; and that it has always done so either by it's own spirit, as in the case of judaism, or by that of it's teachers, as in the case of christianness. When the Israelites marched to the conquest of Canaan, the ark and the priests marched before them. An antient promise, which God made to ABRAHAM, when he made that covenant with him which was the foundation of their religion, was the foundation of the justice of this expedition, and the immediate commands of God were urged to authorise such extirpations of people, as no other history can parallel, as it is impossible to read without horror, as were unnecessary to give them a secure possession of the country, and as neither this reason, nor any other, could excuse. When the Spaniards failed to the conquest of America, silver and gold were their objects, but the propagation of the gospel was their pretence. That wretch, pope ALEXANDER the sixth, made them a donation of an entire hemisphere: and priests and monks were sent, that they might add the fury of bigotry to that of avarice.

I might rest the matter here, having said enough to shew how false and trifling the argument is which CLARKE endeavours to draw from an incapacity in the heathen philosophers, both for want of knowledge, which was not, and for
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want of other means, which was their case, to reform mankind, and from the assumed sufficiency of revelation alone to produce this effect. But I chuse to wind up the whole, by desiring you to retrace, in your mind, the progress made in sociability, civility, and every moral virtue, in the heathen republics of Greece and Rome, before and since the christian revelation. Authors may declaim as much as they please, to aggravate particular vices, and to take off from the lustre of particular virtues; they will persuade no man, who reads and judges for himself, that the practice of piety and virtue has increased among the Greeks, from the time of CONSTANTINE downwards, under the influence of christian pastors, as it did, under the influence of heathen philosophers and legislators; from the time when THUCYDIDES represents them like lawless savages, who went pirating and ravishing about, to the days when Athens and Sparta flourished. As little will the same authors persuade that the distance in virtue between that rout of shepherds and outlaws who formed a state under ROMULUS, and the citizens of Rome in the best ages of that commonwealth, was not vastly greater than any improvement of the same kind, that was made among them, from the time that Rome became christian.

If it appears now to be true, in fact, that neither reason nor revelation, neither heathen nor christian philosophers, neither human nor divine laws, have been able to reform the manners of men effectually; may we not, nay must we not conclude that such a reformation is inconsistent with the original constitution of the human system? Must we not conclude that appetites, passions, and the immediate objects of pleasure, will be always of greater force to determine men than reason, and the more remote object as well as complicated notion of happiness? Such is the imperfect state

in which we are placed; a state wherein the vice and virtue of our moral, like the good and evil of our physical world, prevail in their turns, and are often at the best, and in the most favorable circumstances, but equally ballanced on the whole. Why there is such a state as this, and how to reconcile it to the ideas of holiness and goodness, let those men inquire who say that God appeals to man, who take him at his word, and presume to judge him accordingly. But let you and I pronounce; that since there is such a state as this in the universal system, it was fit and right that there should be such a state. On this head we may, we ought to be dogmatical.

XXXIV.

WHAT has been here laid down is so far from making natural, or revealed religion, or any means that tend to the reformation of mankind, unnecessary, that it makes them all more necessary. Since our state is so imperfect, since it is so hard to keep the virtues that are intimately connected with the happiness, and the vices that are intimately connected with the misery of mankind, even on a ballance, nothing should be neglected that may give the advantage to the former, by enforcing moral obligations and all the doctrines of natural religion. As nothing should be neglected, so nothing may seem in speculation so proper to this purpose as a true revelation, or a revelation believed to be true: and if experience has not confirmed speculation in the case of a revelation we believe to be true, if christianity, which has enforced natural religion in some respects, has corrupted it in others, the maxim may still remain unshook. The natural, the genuine effect of the gospel has been defeated and perverted, and much has been done towards lessening