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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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XXXIV.

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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

fening the authority of it, by the manner in which it has been propagated.

IF it had been propagated with the same simplicity and plainness, with which it was taught originally, by the author of it, natural religion would have been enforced, and could not have been corrupted by christianity; but a voluminous and intricate system of artificial theology was grafted on it, both which observations have been made already, and must be often repeated for the honor of the gospel. This system was framed soon by habits contracted in the schools of judaism and paganism. In the first, their second or oral law, that is their traditions were taught: and what this science was may be seen in the collection of them made a century and an half after CHRIST, by one of their Rabbins*; the small obligation of being acquainted with which we ignorant persons owe to the labors of several great scholars. What the science taught in the others was we know from the remains of Pythagorean doctrines, and from the writings of PLATO, that are come down to us, and that were in great vogue among the first teachers of christianity. Well might these men grow credulous in one, fantastical in the other, and superstitious in both. Such were they whom we call very properly fathers of the church, since they begot the discipline, and much the greatest part of the doctrines of it. Easily imposed upon, and prone to impose, like the Jews, fond of mystery and of principles of knowledge laid beyond the bounds of all knowledge, like Pythagoric and Platonic metaphysicians, it is no wonder that they ran into theological obscurity with the light of the gospel shining before them. Accustomed to declaim rather than reason, and to employ figurative style even on subjects

* Judah Hakkadoth, or the holy.

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that require the most exact determination of ideas and precision of terms, like the rhetors of Greece and Rome, accustomed to advance intrepidly whatever served to the present purpose, without any regard to truth, like the sophists of those ages, which practice St. JEROM* defended and imputed to St. PETER and St. PAUL, it is no wonder that they opposed sometimes error to error, and very often jargon to jargon.

SUCH science as this, and such habits as these, produced infinite absurdities, grounded on precarious tradition and false reasoning, with which I shall meddle in this place no further than the subject before me requires. To seek the will of God, and the duty of man, in the constitution of the world, and of the human nature, wherein they are most evidently revealed, would have been deemed too low a manner of philosophising for those men to take, who pretended to gifts of the spirit, whilst that opinion was rise among the first christians; and when it was so no longer, their successors had a recourse that served them almost as well. They sought the will of God, and the duty of man, in their own comments and paraphrases of scripture, in the abstract reason of things, and in the eternal ideas, where SOCRATES and PLATO had sent men to find whatever is unknown on earth, as ARIOSTO sends them to the moon to find whatever is lost on earth. They deduced moral obligations from the divine attributes, of which they might think themselves more competent judges than others, because they thought themselves better informed by the Jews of his manner of government, and by christian tradition, if I dare to say so, of his private life and conversation.

* Vid. Comm. in Ep. ad Gal. C. 2.

THESE

THESE methods of framing and defending a system of religion were very convenient. They were in the hands of the fathers, what the cabbala was in those of the rabbins. If they did not make an oral, they made a second law, necessary like the other in pretence to the perfection and to the intelligence of the first; and that gathered as it rolled on, till it became as voluminous, and, by dint of explanation and commentary, as abstruse. Among other recommendations, insisted on by CLARKE, of these methods of reasoning, from the divine attributes, and the eternal reason of things, to the moral obligations, under which we were laid by the will of God, whereof I speak particularly here, and to the designs of God in creating the world and man, as well as to the conduct of his providence, in the government of the whole, whereof I shall speak hereafter, the universality of them is one. Now it is this very universality which aggravates the presumption of mankind, which sets the danger of these methods of reasoning in a stronger light, and which proves invincibly against him, that they are far from being what he asserts they are, the best, clearest and certainest that philosophy affords. When we deduce the will of God, and the duty of man, from the constitution of the world, and of the human nature, we deduce them from real knowledge; and we may have the certainty of this knowledge; through all the parts of natural religion, if we never lose sight of the first principles of it. That men lose this certainty, both philosophers and others, both they who reason "à priori," and sometimes they who reason "à posteriori," is true. The vast variety of opinions concerning the morality and immorality of actions, and the number of contradictory laws that have been all made with the same design, to promote the practice of natural religion, shew it to be so. But the difference lies here. Tho neither of these
methods

methods can secure men absolutely from error in forming general maxims, and much less in the particular applications even of such of these as are true, yet they have in one case a sure criterion, and in the other none at all. The reasoner "à posteriori" may at all times go back to those principles of knowledge from which he set out, and which he will find always the same, retrace his own reasonings, and rectify his mistakes. But whither shall the reasoner "à priori" go? Shall he go back to the abstract reason of things, and to the moral attributes of the deity, from which he set out? But in them, as often as he has recourse to them, he will find no such criterion. The notions of other men will differ from his, and the first principles of his boasted knowledge, for want of such a criterion, will be founded in probability at best. It required no such metaphysical apparatus, as CLARKE employs somewhat tediously, to prove that all perfections natural, and moral must be attributes of the self-existent, all-perfect author of all being; but he does not prove what he asserts, and on the proof of which his whole argument turns, that these attributes are the same in God, as they are in our ideas*. He says indeed, that he has proved it: and if we do not accept his proofs he leaves us to recur to down right atheism; nay, he threatens to force us into it. Happily he has not been able to do the mischief he meditated. Many a man believes in God, who does not believe in him. Many a man discerns, in their fullest light, the evidences of natural religion, and gives their due weight to those of revealed religion, without taking assumptions for demonstrations, and a chain of the former, which have an imaginary connection only, for a chain of the latter rising out of one another, and closely connected together.

* Evid. P. 33, 34. et alibi.

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I have enlarged the rather on this head, because the example of this modern divine is extremely proper to give us an image of the antient divines who raised the theological system. Few of them reasoned so well even as he, but they set the manner which he and the rest of their successors have followed: a manner which may serve, as it did formerly, and as it does still, in some degree, to realise, in appearance, the whimsies of every over-heated brain, and to maintain indeterminate disputes: a manner which proving almost every thing, proves almost nothing; and which, if it can be of any use, can be so only under the controul of the other method. It can be only of subordinate use. It may illustrate. It never can, it never did decide: and the disputes it raised, in the early ages of christianity, may be well called indeterminate, since they are not yet determined. I have good reason to say, tho I cannot say it on my own knowledge, that some of them were not determined in CLARKE'S own mind, tho he has pronounced dogmatically about them in his writings.

WHEN I say that the method of reasoning à priori, from the eternal reason of things, and from the divine attributes, may be of some subordinate use, under the controul of the other; I mean thatal tho our moral obligations arise from our moral system, that is, from the works of God, and the additional motives to observe them from the word of God alone, yet arguments deduced in this method, and expressly authorised by neither, may serve to warm the imagination, to move the affections, and by a sort of pious fraud to enforce natural religion. A lively declamation, unsupported by reason, and even by gospel revelation, concerning the whole scheme, order, and state of things, from the original design

of God in the creation of man to his fall, and from thence to his redemption, a patheticall exhortation to imitate God, in the exercise of his glorious attributes, in these perfections which are the foundation of his own unchangeable happiness, in which we are able to imitate him, and in which he desires that we should imitate him, because he has an infinitely tenderer and heartier concern for us, than any earthly father has for his posterity, to speak the language of Dr. CLARKE; such declamations and such exhortations, I say, may have a great and a good effect, especially when they flow from an eloquent mouth, and from the pulpit. The man, who is convinced by his reflections on human nature, and the nature of society, for instance that benevolence, and justice, and truth are the duties of natural religion, on the practice of which his happiness, and that of his whole kind depend, will not be further convinced, but he may be more moved, and his passions may be wrought up to second his judgment.

If the fathers of the church, and modern divines, had made no other use of this method of reasoning than to strengthen a sense of our moral obligations, and to raise in the minds of men a greater veneration for the scriptures, after they had proved the authenticity of them by external proofs, it had been well both for natural and revealed religion. But they have made a very different use of it. They have shook the former down to its very foundation, and, under pretence of explaining and defending the other, they have laid it more open to the attacks of unbelievers. Reason is sober and modest. She never affects to lead men beyond her bounds, but delivers them over to revelation. There is, and there needs must be, something marvellous in revelation. This marvellous dazzles and often blinds; so that they who pursue it too far slide easily into the whimsies of their own imaginations.

imaginations. Truth warms their brains; error that passes for it turns them. Thus christianity became fanaticism, even in the first professors of it. Thus artificial theology grew up as fast as men began to teach the doctrine of CHRIST, like a revelation made so obscurely and imperfectly, that they who were to publish it were to explain it, and not only to explain it, but to supply the deficiencies of it; and some will be apt to think that the first of these men was PAUL. Divines would be furious to hear such language held as I hold to you. But they would be under great difficulties to evade the charge, and, therefore, the more furious; since I could easily produce passages out of the most renowned of the fathers, and out of their own writings, as extravagant as any in the Talmud, as absurd as any in the Koran, and quite fit to hold their places in one of BORRI's letters: and since the whole ecclesiastical history is an history of the intolerance and violence of christians to one another, on such points as these, from the time they had it in their power to be intolerant and to persecute. You will not expect a bead-roll of these doctrines and disputes. It will be sufficient to shew how they had the effects, that have been mentioned, both in natural and revealed religion.

XXXV.

CLARKE observes that there is now no such thing as a consistent scheme of theism. A complete one, such an one as presumes to account for the whole order and state of things relatively to God and man, I believe there is not. But how does the learned writer make out his proposition? That of the best heathen philosophers, which alone was such, ceases now to be so, he says, after the appearance of

N n 2 revelation;