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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**

XXXVII.

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lapsed into almost the same iniquity, that the end of all things should be at hand. He would have proceeded, no doubt, in much the same style, if MANDANIS, the head of the order, had not imposed silence on him, and, calling ONESICRITUS to himself from CALANUS, had not talked with great decency and good sense, in a manner, and on subjects proper for the greek to report to his prince. Thus the history of the fall, and all the circumstances of it are proved reasonable and probable.

## XXXVII.

OUR author takes a little more pains to shew, that the doctrine of the redemption of mankind is agreeable to reason. Having assumed, which he calls proving, that the moral attributes of God, and the notions and expectations of some wise men among the heathens, make it reasonable to believe God did make, seventeen hundred years ago, a revelation of his will to mankind, as if mankind stood in more need of a revelation four thousand years after their race began, than at any other period; as if the moral attributes of God were not the same, four thousand years before, when he made the first revelation of his will, in the constitution of nature, and finally, as if the notions and expectations of SOCRATES and PLATO, supposing these philosophers to have had them really, proved any thing more than their desire of more knowledge than God thought proper to give them the means of acquiring; having assumed all this, I say, he proceeds to argue in this manner\*. Some sacrifice or expiation for sin was necessary to be appointed, “ to shew God’s irreconcilable

\* Evid. p. 263 et sequ.

“ hatred



“ hatred to it. Repentance might not be sufficient. God  
“ would not be appeased without some punishment and sa-  
“ tisfaction; and yet he would accept some other than the  
“ destruction of offenders. This appears, in the custom of  
“ sacrificing, to have been the universal apprehension of  
“ mankind:” and, from this universal apprehension, he con-  
cludes, that “ the doctrine of the redemption is plainly  
“ agreeable to right reason.” Thus are these great masters  
of reason reduced to propose the most gross abuses for the  
true dictates of it. Thus are the most absurd notions which  
superstition ever spread, in contradiction to the law of nature  
and reason, applied to the proceedings of God with man;  
made the measure of divine justice by philosophers who de-  
termine and define the moral attributes of the deity; and  
established as foundations of the christian system, by divines  
who pretend, and who are hired to defend it. Notions  
which directed a principal part of idolatrous worship are  
sanctified, and the most inhuman rites are rendered the most  
meritorious; for if it was agreeable to sound reason, to think  
that God would not be appeased unless some blood was spil-  
led, he who shed that of beasts to expiate sins did well, but  
he who shed that of his children did better. He brought the  
punishment nearer to himself: and the Phenician had the ad-  
vantage, in this respect, of the Israelite. He erred, what-  
ever he sacrificed, by the misapplication of a true principle,  
when he sacrificed to MOLOCH. But the Israelite, who did  
not misapply the principle, would have pursued it more  
agreeably to sound reason, and the unprejudiced light of na-  
ture, if he had sacrificed his son, as ABRAHAM was ready to  
do, or his daughter like JEPHTHAH. God was pleased to ac-  
cept of an expiation that cost offenders less to make, under  
the mosaical dispensation, as the scriptures tell us. But the  
same scriptures prove evidently, that the reason of the thing  
goes



goes as far as I carry it ; since, under the christian dispensation, God caused the expiation for sin to be made by the sufferings and death of his own Son ; than which nothing can be imagined, as CLARKE \* assures us, more honorable and worthy of the Supreme Lord and Governor of all things.

WE weigh these matters in the ballance of human reason, to which the appeal is made, if men who decide can be said to appeal, even tho they affirm that God condescends to do so. They are refuted, therefore, if they have not reason, as well as revelation, on their side : and the charge of weakening the cause of the latter, whilst they presume to defend it by the former, is made out against them. Let us proceed, with a due respect for revelation, and with no more than it deserves for their reasoning.

I say then, tho we should allow men were in the right to think univerversally that God exacted some bloody expiation for sin, and that repentance, which the law of nature points out, was not sufficient, yet even this concession would not justify the doctrine of the redemption of mankind at the bar of reason. The heathens thought, that the sacrifice of an ox, or a son, or a daughter, would atone for sins. Therefore, it is plainly agreeable to the universal reason of mankind, signified by this universal apprehension, to believe that God sent his only begotten Son, who had not offended him, to be sacrificed by men, who had offended him, that he might expiate their sins, and satisfy his own anger. Surely our ideas of moral attributes will lead us to think, that God would have been satisfied, more agreeably to his mercy and goodness, without any expiation, upon the repentance of the offenders, and

\* Ib. p. 268.

more



more agreeably to his justice with any other expiation rather than with this. The heathen divines were accustomed to think and speak of their gods much after the manner of men. If one of them, therefore, had arisen from the dead, he would have concurred readily with CLARKE in the maxim, that the moral attributes are the same in the divine nature, as they are in our ideas. But then, he would have challenged the doctor to produce an example, in the pagan system, of a god sacrificing his son to appease himself, any more than of a god who was himself his own father and his own son. SATURN, he might say, did indeed offer up his son in sacrifice: but he did it to appease COELUS, not himself.

WHEN our divine is about to establish, “that there is a fitness and unfitness of certain circumstances to certain persons founded in the nature of things, and in the qualifications of persons; he says, that this must be acknowledged by every one who will not affirm that it is equally fit . . . that an innocent being should be extremely and eternally miserable, as that it should be free from such misery”. The proposition is true without dispute, tho it is not true that we can always discern this fitness and unfitness. Let us join issue with the learned person here, and add, to strengthen the maxim, that there is the same unfitness, in the case supposed, whether the misery be assumed eternal, or not. Let us ask now, whether the truth of this maxim, the innocence of the Lamb of God, and the sufferings and ignominious death of CHRIST, can be reconciled together and how? The nicest casuist would, I think, be puzzled; but our casuist goes on most dogmatically, and shews no more regard to the dignity than to the innocence of the divine person who died on the cross. He does, indeed, allow that no one can certainly say, that God might not have pardoned sin upon repentance without any sacrifice. But he  
pro-



pronounces this method of doing it, by the death of CHRIST, to be more wise and fit for several prudential reasons. Read them, they would appear futile and impertinent if applied to human councils; but in their application to the divine councils they become prophane and impious. Nay, it would not be hard to shew, that this method was more proper to produce a contrary effect, than that which is assigned as a reason for taking it. For instance, the death of CHRIST, it is said, was proper to discountenance presumption, and to discourage men from repeating their transgressions. Surely, it would not be hard to shew by reason, that the death of CHRIST might, and by fact, that it has countenanced presumption without discouraging men from repeating their transgressions. But I shall not descend into particulars that are trifling and tedious, and that would render a full answer to them little better. A general reflection, or two, may serve, and are as much as they all deserve.

THO I am far from approving the practice of those who compare so frequently the divine with the human oeconomy and policy, and who build on the last their hypothetical schemes of the first; yet on this occasion, and to frame an argument ad hominem, it may be properly done. Let us suppose then, a great prince governing a wicked and rebellious people. He has it in his power to punish, he thinks fit to pardon them. But he orders his only and beloved son to be put to death to expiate their sins, and to satisfy his royal vengeance. Would this proceeding appear to the eye of reason, and in the unprejudiced light of nature, wise, or just, or good? No man dares to say that it would, except he be a divine; for CLARKE does in effect say that it would; since he imputes this very proceeding to God, and justifies it not implicitly on the authority of revelation, but explicitly on the

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authority



authority of reason, which may be applied to man as well as to God, and as a particular instance of the general rule that is, according to him, common to both. Allow me one reflection more.

CLARKE acknowledges readily, that human reason could never have discovered such a method as this for the reconciliation of sinners to an offended God. But if reason could not have discovered it, how comes it to pass that reason finds no such difficulty nor inconceivableness in it, as to make a wise man call the truth of it in question? the truth of a well-attested revelation, he says. But here he plays the sophist. He is to prove the method agreeable to sound unprejudiced reason, independently of revelation. No matter how it came to be known, is it reasonable, is it agreeable to a fitness, founded in the nature of things, and in the qualifications of persons? That is the point to be considered. To consider it as reasonable relatively to the revelation of it, is not to appeal to unprejudiced, but to prejudiced reason. It is in plain terms to beg the question shamefully. Heathen theology was licentious enough in all conscience. The professors of it gave an extravagant loose to their imaginations, passed all the bounds of probability, and scarce kept within those of conceivable possibility. Thus they came very near to such a system as this: so near, that there was little more to be added, but this little, they did not think so highly of the human, and so lowly of the divine nature, as was necessary to make them add it. AEscULAPIUS came down from heaven, conversed in a visible form with men, and taught them the art of healing diseases\*. The passage is cited from JULIAN by CLARKE, in order to shew, according to his laudable custom, that there is nothing

\* Ib. p. 268.



in the christian system which we may not believe on grounds of reason; because there is nothing in it more incredible than what the least reasonable men that ever were, wild metaphysicians, heathens, heretics, apostates, have believed. It may be cited more properly to shew, what I mean to shew by it, how easy and short a transition might have been made by heathen divines, in the rage that possessed them all of framing complete schemes of the whole order and state of things, from a god teaching physic to a god teaching theology. The most ignorant and savage of them, like the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, who have been already mentioned, for they were all superstitious alike, came a little nearer to the doctrine of redemption. But even they did not come up to it entirely. They meant to encourage the pious practice of sacrificing their children; for pious it was on the principle of expiation by shedding of blood: but there was a great difference between the conceptions they had of their gods, and those which christians have of the Father and the Son. Their gods had been men, and SATURN was a man when he sacrificed his son. Their ideas of human government led them to notions of divine mediations, and of expiations by shedding of blood, which were so many particular redemptions. But nothing in the reason of the thing, nor in the most superstitious of their prejudices, could lead them to imagine so much rigor in one god, as to exact that another should be sacrificed even by men who meant no expiation, and in whom it was a murder, not a sacrifice; nor so much humility and condescension in another as to make him submit to be this divine victim. They could not imagine any thing so repugnant as this to all their ideas of order, of justice, of goodness, and in short, of theism; tho' they imagined many other things that were really inconsistent with all these ideas. Those of them, therefore, who embraced this doctrine, after it had been revealed, em-



braced it, not because they found no difficulty nor inconceivableness in it, which CLARKE was to prove by proving it agreeable to found reason, but merely because it was part of a relation they believed true, for reasons of another kind; which is nothing to his purpose under this head of argument.

## XXXVIII.

ALL that he says more than I have observed upon it; all that follows about the importance of this world of ours, which it is assumed was made for the sake of man, and which, we are told, is as considerable and worthy of the divine care as most other parts of our system, which is likewise as considerable as any other single system in the universe, in order to take off the objection arising from the meanness of the creature; and finally all that follows about the manifestations of God, and the discoveries of his will, supposed to have been made by the same divine Logos to other beings in other systems, in order to take off the imputation of partiality from the Creator; all this, I say, is a rhapsody of presumptuous reasoning, of prophane absurdities disguised by epithets, of evasions that seem to answer whilst they only perplex, and in one word of the most arbitrary and least reasonable suppositions. I will bring but one instance more of the excellent manner in which the author of the Evidences proves, that all things necessary to be believed, in order to salvation, or closely connected with these, are most agreeable to found unprejudiced reason. He proposes\* the objection drawn from the want of universality to the christian revelation. He had pro-

\* Ib. p. 215. 216, 217, et 273.

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