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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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XXXVIII.

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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.

posed

posed it before out of the oracles of reason, and his answer in both places is the same. It had been urged that no revelations, no instituted religions, had been universally received at any time, and by all nations; and that christianity is in the same case with the rest; that the son of God did not appear, till the latter ages of the world; and that since he did appear, his gospel has not been received universally, and even his appearance has not been known to a great number of nations. The doctor does not undertake to shew how men may receive the benefits of a revelation of which they never heard, tho that seems to be his opinion. But he insists triumphantly, that the same objection will lye against natural religion, and boasts again that he can force the objector into absolute atheism. He boasts, like a bully who looks fierce, speaks big, and is little to be feared; for there is no sufficient parity between the two cases, and his reason is, on this occasion, as harmless as the other's sword. To affirm that natural and revealed religion are alike unknown in any parts of the world, is to affirm an untruth. That all men have not the same capacities and opportunities of understanding the obligations of natural religion, is true, but proves nothing.

Go to any of those people whom we call barbarous, and who seem of all human creatures to have improved their reason the least, you will find the light of nature, tho not the light of the gospel shining, faintly indeed, but shining among them; some rules of moral life, some laws for the maintainance of society, some awe and reverence of a Being superior to man, some reward for virtue, some punishment for vice. The religion of nature is known and improved more or less according to the different opportunities which men have, in proportion to their different capacities, and perhaps to the different degrees in which they participate of
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one common nature. But it is known and observed more or less every where. Nay, there has been often occasion to wish that the same moderation and innocence, which prevailed in ignorant nations, had been found in those, who are more improved in learning and civility; and that the knowledge of virtue had been of greater advantage to natural religion than the ignorance of vice*.

Is this now the case of the christian religion? How many nations, civilized as well as barbarous, have there been, how many are there still, by whom these tidings of good news, have been never heard, nor even the least rumor of them? How many others to whom they have been carried, and who have refused to hear them, or hearing to believe them? All the truths of natural religion are discoverable, it is allowed on all hands, by the due use of reason alone; and God has left them to be so discovered: for tho he has not given the same capacity to all men in any case, he has given the same means to all men in this case. If natural religion is discoverable by all men, revealed religion is so by none: and the divine must have very little regard to consistency, when he objects that God has not given to some the same capacity of making and improving this discovery, as he has given to others; since it is his own doctrine that in those countries where christianity has been preached, some have believed and some have not believed, according to the different measures of grace, which is the free gift of God, bestowed upon them.

BUT to carry this matter beyond the power of sophism, and every polemical artifice; let us suppose whole nations as

* Utinam reliquis mortalibus similis moderatio et abstinentia alieni foret. Tantum plus in illis proficit vitiorum ignorantio, quam in his (nempe Graecis) cognitio virtutis. JUSTIN Lib. 2. C. 2. speaking of the Scythians.

ignorant of natural religion as their bears and their wolves. Natural religion would be still the same and of the same authority. It would be the religion of reasonable nature, and obligatory on all who had such a nature. One part of CLARKE'S reasonings, which he supposes falsely to be alike applicable both to that and to the christian religion, would be well applied in favor of it. They who were endowed with rationality might say with sound reason and the unprejudiced light of nature on their side, "God is not obliged to
" make all his creatures, even all those that are in ap-
" pearance of the same species, equal: and to assert, that
" he is, would be a prophane diminution of his sovereignty.
" Let us be thankful for the means he has given us, of im-
" proving our knowledge and our happiness. That he has
" not given them to other creatures, would be a strange
" reason for not improving them ourselves." They, who were not endowed with so much rationality, would have no more moral obligations incumbent on them than their bears and their wolves. Is this plea now applicable to the want of universality, objected to the christian revelation? It cannot be said without equal absurdity and effronterie. But they, to whom the terms of the christian religion were communicated, might say, with sound reason and the unprejudiced light of nature on their side, that these terms would have been communicated to all mankind alike, if the revelation had been from God; since all mankind were alike obliged to them, and since they, to whom these terms had not been communicated, would die, and might be damned in their involuntary ignorance of them. Thus their faith would be shocked, or if it was not, if they worked out their salvation with fear and trembling, the fate of the others would continue to be, what they pronounced it, most undeservedly miserable.

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THIS needs little explanation; but to prevent all cavil, and to shew with greater evidence how inconsequently CLARKE argues, and would argue, even if natural religion wanted universality, as much, and in as absolute a manner as he supposes, and as in fact the christian religion wants it, let us descend into a more particular comparison. In one case then, God would have placed his human creatures in very different circumstances, indeed; but the religion of reason obliges us to think that his proceedings towards them would have been proportioned to these circumstances. In the other case, and according to the christian revelation, he has, for the sake of one man's offence, reduced all mankind to the same deplorable circumstances. It is true, that he sent his son, forty centuries afterwards, to redeem them from the consequences of this situation; but the condition was that they believed in his son; "for there is no name under heaven by which we can be saved but the name of the man CHRIST JESUS". They are condemned without any fault of theirs: one sole and uniform condition of saving themselves is imposed on all of them, and the greatest part are deprived even of the knowledge of this condition. It will be said, perhaps, which has been hinted already, that as the death of CHRIST had a retroactive effect on those that lived and died before they were redeemed, so it may be beneficial to those who never heard of it since. But these are the hypotheses of theology and surmises of divines, not the express and clear doctrines of christianity. Nay, the divines, who held so charitable an opinion, would be opposed by other divines. St. THOMAS is pleased, notwithstanding this text, to save some of the heathens by a distinction between implicate and explicate faith, and by assuming that the first might be a saving faith to those who lived before the promulgation of the gospel.

gospel. But he is not so gracious to those who have lived since that time. Since the gospel was promulgated, nothing less than explicit faith will do: and he damns all those who have it not, whether they ever heard of CHRIST or no, most arbitrarily and most inconsistently. To conclude; there is no parity between the two cases. The first is agreeable to all our ideas of justice and goodness, as well as of sovereignty and order. But no subtilty whatever can reconcile the last to any ideas, except those of caprice, injustice, cruelty and tyranny.

WHAT shall we say now? Is the cause of christianity too bad to be defended? Or is it defended booty? I think neither. I have too much respect for revelation to think one, and too much charity for the least charitable men alive to think the other. A presumptuous habit of reasoning, and the phrenzy of metaphysics are to be charged alone. It would pass for down right madness, if we were not accustomed to it, and if the practice of great and good men did not authorise it in common opinion, to hear a creature, placed in the lowest form of intelligent beings, undertake to penetrate the designs, to fathom the depths, and to unveil the mysteries of infinite wisdom, which the most exalted of created intelligences would adore in silence. When the tradition was recent, and the proofs irrefragable of all the facts on which the authority of christian revelation is, and can be alone properly founded; the fathers of the church might have stopped the mouths of all pretenders to reason by refusing to reason about a revelation already proved to be divine; by insisting that every thing necessary to be known, was clearly and fully revealed, and that mysteries were recorded to exercise our faith, not our speculations, nor our logic. If they had not gone off this rock, in compliance with the philosophical mode of the age, and

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with the vanity of their own hearts, they could not have been forced from it. But when they had once engaged in platonic and aristotelical reasonings about christian mysteries, it was too late to go back. They might cry as loudly as they pleased, which they always did when they were pinched, that the judgments and ways of God were acatalepta, incomprehensible; but this cry came with an ill grace from them. It could have no effect on their adversaries. They might have made it a cry of triumph. They made it little better than a confession of defeat: and such it has continued ever since.

XXXIX.

IF I intended to proceed any further than CLARKE leads me on this occasion, I might consider in many more instances, taken from the writings of other divines, and of the fathers of the church, the manner in which they employ reason to account for revelation, sometimes literally, sometimes allegorically, always presumptuously, often ridiculously. To collect all the prophane nonsense that has been broached about Eve and the serpent, about the trees of life and knowledge, and about other circumstances of the creation and fall of man, which the curiosity of the woman, the wiles of the serpent, and the uxorious complaisance of Adam effected, would be to collect an immense volume of all that has been writ on these subjects by Jews and christians; for all that has been writ upon them is alike absurd. To run through all those passages of the Old Testament, which are lessons of public and private immorality, of immodesty to women, and of sanguinary ferocity to men, which leave us no room to be surpris'd when we hear that there were certain heretics, who thought the God of the Old Testament was not the God of the New, and which shew
that