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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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XLVI.

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worthy nations of the earth. Yet, God chose them, according to the same system, by a wonderful predilection for his favorite people, preferred them to all the people of the earth, and assigned them a country flowing with milk and honey. May not christian philosophers have been led, by this example, to believe that God preferred mankind to all other intellectual creatures, and made a particular world for them, as he assigned a particular country to the Israelites? The facts, tho received in theology, are not, indeed, applicable to philosophy. But when the mind is once tinctured by them, and an habit contracted of reasoning from them, any thing, that appears analogous to them, will be the more easily admitted.

XLVI.

THE confederacy between atheists and divines appears to have been carried very far, by what has been said already. I have chose in the reflections that have been made to account for the physical and moral evil that is in the world, and to defend the attributes of God, to go up to the source of all the false reasoning about them, rather than to insist on the topics that are commonly employed: and I hope, that the method I have taken is not the worse for being shorter, plainer, and less metaphysical. I must confess that I do not see, how the cause of God can be effectually pleaded on this head any other way. But there is another head, on which it must be pleaded likewise; for the antitheistical confederacy does not end here. Left the bare existence of evil should not afford the atheist color enough to deny the being of God, nor the divine a sufficient foundation whereon to erect, by the seeming authority of reason, that system of another world, which is, and always has been, of great advantage to him in this, they
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proceed to consider these evils in the distribution of them. The supposed injustice of this distribution has been ever in their mouths a subject of accusation, not to say of invective, against the providence of God: and they have been heard with partiality of two kinds, that of love, and that of aversion, in their favor. The good that happens to themselves, and to those with whom they are intimately connected, by sentiment, by interest, and often by both, is an object of one partiality among men. The evil, that happens to these, is an object of the other. The order is reversed, when persons we disapprove, or who stand in opposition to our sentiments or interests, are concerned. We hate the good, and we love the evil that happens to them. Great advantage has been taken of these natural dispositions to attack successfully the divine providence in human opinion. But here, indeed, the alliance between the atheist and the divine breaks off. The former concludes directly, that there is no God. The latter, after all he has done to favor this opinion indirectly, maintains still that there is one. How well the premises common to both, and their opposite conclusions are founded, let us examine. I fear, that the atheist will appear, to that reason to which they both appeal, more consistent in his absurdity than the divine.

I think I have said, that artificial theology betrays the cause of God, how sincerely and how piously soever some of the professors of it may direct their intentions: and, if I have said so, I shall not recall my words. If these men had left the atheists to assert alone, both vainly and foolishly, that divine goodness required the world should be made for the sake of man, and that God could have no other motive to create him, except that of communicating happiness to him, they might have defended this goodness sufficiently, as I hope it has been shewn, and the divine justice too, as I hope, it will
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be shewn. They would have had no after-game to play, nor any contradictions to reconcile. The stoics would not have been obliged to deny that to be evil, which they and every one else felt to be evil; nor the christians to rest their defence on this proposition, that the first designs of God were disappointed by the fall of man, which cannot be conceived by reason, and which the atheist will not admit on the authority of revelation, or rather of a moral, philosophical, aegyptian allegory. But when they reasoned on the same principles, as the atheist reasoned, down to his conclusion exclusively, they left themselves no pretence for not concurring in the same conclusion but that of an hypothesis, and of an hypothesis which cannot, if it is admitted, effectually discharge the goodness, nor justice of God at the tribunal of reason. Thus it seems plain to me, that they betray the cause of God; for they undermine it: and if the hypothesis fails, that truth which was raised on demonstration fails with it, or totters on so precarious a support.

To such a risque at least does artificial theology, as it is employed in this case, expose the first principle of all religion: and we may apply to the schools that teach it, what ARISTO of Chios said of some schools of philosophy. As caution was to be used lest men should go debauched out of the school of ARISTIPPUS, or morose out of that of ZENO, so caution should be used lest men go infidels out of the schools of christianity. A few reflections will shew that the risque, I mention, is not imaginary but very real. No doctrines were ever inculcated more strongly on the minds of men, nor enforced by more authority, than those of a future state. The institutors of religions, and the priests of these religions, were careful to establish and to maintain them in belief. They excited devotion, multiplied observances, and encreased offerings. By them, the religious society

ciety has governed principally in all ages*: and if the priests of Aegypt undertook to conduct men in the way of the gods, in the difficult road, in the ineffable paths, and through the brazen gates that lead to the mansions of the blessed, we may quote priests in the pale of christianity, at this time, who undertake to save men from hell, to deliver them from purgatory, and to conduct them to heaven through the gates whereof St. PETER has the keys, as well as others who make some of the same pretensions, and who scruple not to declare, that if this doctrine be taken away, all difference between good and bad is taken away, and there is no such thing as religion left. To this authority we must add that of legislators and magistrates, who have for political purposes authorised the same doctrines, solemnised them by religious institutions, like those of the Eleusinian mysteries, confirmed them by laws, and set education, the great nurse of theological opinions, on their side. These are great advantages, and yet we do not find that this doctrine ever had an effect suitable to them, or to the importance of it. Remote considerations, tho they are believed, have not indeed the same influence that immediate objects have. But they have an influence proportionable to the belief of them: and they must have this influence, especially in a case like this, where the punishments held out, are unavoidable, and no man can hope, as every man does in all other cases, to escape them.

I do not say, that to believe a future state is to believe a vulgar error: but this I say, it cannot be demonstrated by reason; it is not in the nature of it capable of demonstration, and no one ever returned that irremovable way to give us an assurance of the fact. It was, therefore, originally an hypothesis,

* Euseb. Praep. Evan. L. 9. C. 10.

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and it may, therefore, be a vulgar error. It was taken upon trust by the people who first adopted it, and made prevalent by art and industry among the vulgar who never examine, till it came to be doubted, disputed and denied by such as did examine. It was made, like many other opinions that had no better foundations, subservient to philosophical systems, and political institutions. It was advanced in answer to the great atheistical argument, drawn from the prosperity of wicked men. It was applied to enforce human laws, by divine and temporary rewards and punishments, by the fear of others more grievous, and more lasting, to procure greater authority to governors and more submission from the governed. It was communicated from Aegypt, the mother of good policy as well as of superstition, to Greece. The luxuriant imaginations of that people improved it, and the Mythologia de inferis became a favorite theme of their poets, of ORPHEUS, of HOMER, and so downwards even to their dramatic writers. There seems likewise to have been a custom then, not very unlike to that which prevailed about two centuries ago in the christian church generally, and much later, I believe, in Spain, the custom I mean of acting mysteries. Such these representations were called by the heathens, and the same kind of religious fopperies retained the same name among christians.

BUT that which gave the greatest credit to this doctrine, and spread it most, was the authority of HOMER and PLATO. The former was gravely quoted by philosophers, as a philosopher, an historian and a divine, and all as properly, no doubt, as the latter. The Romans took this doctrine and these mysteries from the Greeks: and the Greeks carried them back, when they conquered Asia and Aegypt, to countries from whence they had received them. HOMER and PLATO were in the zenith of their glory at the time of ALEXANDER's expedition,

dition, and they continued to be so in the reigns of his successors. Whether the Jews, who began about or a little before this time to have schools, and to engraft from foreign stocks on their own law, might not have taken the first hints of a future state from some of their neighbours, I know not. But it is most probable that this doctrine was not known, or at least not taught amongst them, till the disputes in their schools gave a rise to the sects of saducees and pharisees in their church. The most considerable persons, the richest says JOSEPHUS, adhered to the saducees, who adhered so strictly to the law of MOSES that they could not admit a doctrine whereof there appeared no traces in it, and, therefore, denied the resurrection. The pharisees or the separatists, on the other hand, were ready to admit things marvellous in doctrine, and superstitious in practice; to reconcile them, if they could, to the written, or to justify them by an oral law; for no expedient serves the purpose of innovators better than that of a blind tradition. All this was proper to strike the multitude: and the multitude followed the pharisees. Thus the doctrine of a future state, and even of a transmigration of souls, slid into the system of judaism before the coming of CHRIST: and yet they who adopted this doctrine then had no better authority for it than that of aegyptian priests, greek poets, and pythagorean and platonic hypotheses.

TRUE it is that the immortality of the soul, and future rewards and punishments, some parts of what philosophers and poets had imagined, were sanctified by revelation soon afterwards. Thus sanctified, they deserve our respect, and challenge the implicate belief of every christian. Thus, and thus alone they are maintained in opinion, and not by the futile reasonings of divines with which we have to do here. These are called demonstrations by the men who make them,

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and who triumph in them as if they were sufficient of themselves and must convince by their own evidence. But the truth is, they would have little effect on the minds of men, if they did not pass for superabundant proofs of what is made certain by revelation, and if the respect that men pay to revelation did not screen these reasoners from being attacked so directly, and in so many ways as they would be otherwise, and as they deserve to be, for presuming to rest all religion both natural and revealed on their metaphysical refinements, and their abstract reasonings à priori.

THE most zealous asserters of a Supreme Being, the warmest defenders of his providence, and they who were the most persuaded of the necessity of a religion to preserve morality, and the good order of civil government, were far from this presumption. Some of them rather hoped than believed the immortality of the soul; and if they admitted a future state, they laughed at the old women's tales, the aniles fabulae of an hell and the furies. They either rejected the doctrine, or they admitted it by halves. It was not only problematical in the opinions of theistical philosophers, but it seems, in several instances, to have had little hold on vulgar opinion; notwithstanding the means that had been used to inculcate it. One instance, and a remarkable one it is, shall be given. TULLY* in a public pleading, wherein we may assure ourselves that he was careful to let nothing fall, that might be an occasion of scandal by contradicting and ridiculing the religious established opinions, speaking of OPPIANICUS, who had been condemned only to banishment, and, after saying that he should have killed himself, adds--"nam nunc quidem" (OPPIANICUS was then dead in his exile) "quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? Nisi fortè ineptiis ac fabulis ducimur ut

* Orat. pro A. Cluen.

"existi-

“ existimemus illum apud inferos impiorum supplicia per-
 “ ferre actum esse praecipitem in sceleratorum sedem
 “ atque regionem. Quae si falsa sint, id quod omnes intel-
 “ ligunt, quid ei tandem mors eripuit praeter sensum do-
 “ loris?”

THE use I make of this deduction is to shew that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, having been precariously established, and neither generally nor entirely believed, by those who believed the existence of God on better foundations, there is a real danger to this first principle of all religion arising from the hypothesis against which I contend. Reason, experience and self-consciousness, prove to me that a man may be thoroughly convinced, that there is a Supreme and self-existent Being, of infinite power and wisdom; without subscribing to such notions of his moral attributes as divines would impose, or believing them any more capable than himself, of determining what these attributes required that God should do. But I can easily conceive, at the same time, that by eloquent discourses on the dignity of human nature, and the misery of human kind, by the cajolement of appeals to his passions and to his senses, this man may be induced to think that the misery of mankind overballances their happiness in general*; and that in particular the criminal have many times the lot of the innocent, and the innocent that of the criminal: from whence he may conclude, that God is an unjust and cruel Being, and deals unreasonably with his creatures unless he has given them immortal souls, and there be another world wherein he makes proper amends to the good, at least for what they have suffered in this. The man is brought to the very brink of the precipice.

* Relig. of Nat. delineated pag. 205. et seq.

He cannot believe a God unjust, cruel, unreasonable; but he may find it as difficult to believe a God who acts against his attributes, and the perfections of his nature, in one system, only to have a reason the more for acting agreeably to them in another. In a word, he may be led by theology, if he does not start back and revert to his former ways of thinking, from theism into atheism. DES CARTES and his followers have been justly censured for resting the truth of God's existence on their favorite proof, drawn from the idea which they assume that the mind can frame of an all-perfect Being, and neglecting or even rejecting every other. Divines are justly liable to the same censure; for tho they admit all the proofs that establish this great truth, yet they rest the validity of them ultimately on the hypothesis here mentioned, and expose such as cannot take this hypothesis for a demonstration, to the danger of mistaking the demonstrations for hypotheses.

XLVII.

THIS danger, great as it is, appears to such a divine as CLARKE, or is represented by him to be none at all. He who does not believe the moral attributes of the Supreme Being, to be just such as the doctor conceives them, and as essential to the divine nature as the natural attributes, has the doctor's consent to believe no God at all. This is the angular stone of artificial theology. Grant to the divine that these attributes and the eternal reason of things are such as he conceives them to be, and he will raise whatever schemes he pleases of divine oeconomy. He will shew you what God was, and is obliged to do as creator and governor of the world*, and

* DEM. 131.

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