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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

LI.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777)

offered to cut his throat, in order only to deliver him from the miseries he complained of in such lamentable terms, would have been very ill received. But I hasten to wind up and to conclude the hints, for they are no more, which occur to me, and which I think proper to give you concerning the general and usual state of mankind.

LI.

I SAY then, that if men come helpless into the world like other animals; if they require even longer than other animals to be nursed and educated by the tender instinct of their parents, and if they are able much later to provide for themselves; it is because they have more to learn and more to do; it is because they are prepared for a more improved state and for greater happiness. Sense and instinct direct all animals to their several ends. Some of them profit more by experience, acquire more knowledge, and think and reason better than others both in different species and in the same. Man is at the head of these, he profits still more by experience, he acquires still more knowledge, he thinks and reasons better than all other animals; for he who is born too stupid to do so, is not a human creature: he sinks into an inferior species, tho he be made after the image of man. Man is able by his intellectual superiority to foresee, and to provide more effectually against the evils that threaten him, as well as to procure to himself the necessaries, the comforts, and the pleasures of life. All his natural wants are easily supplied, and God has proportioned them to the abilities of those who remain in the lowest form of rational creatures. The Tartar under his tent, and the Savage in his hut enjoys them. Such is the general state of mankind. Of what then do we complain? His happiness exceeds

exceeds that of his fellow creatures, at least as much as the dignity of his nature exceeds the dignity of theirs: and is not this enough?

WE ought to think that it is enough: and yet God has done more for us. He has made us happy, and he has put it into our power to make ourselves happier by a due use of our reason, which leads us to the practice of moral virtue and of all the duties of society. We are designed to be social, not solitary creatures. Mutual wants unite us: and natural benevolence and political order, on which our happiness depends, are founded in them. This is the law of our nature; and tho every man is not able for different reasons to discern it, or discerning it to apply it, yet so many are able to do this that they serve as guides to the rest. The rest submit, for the advantages they find in this submission. They learn by experience that servitude to law is real liberty, and that the regulation of pleasure is real happiness. Pleasures are the objects of self-love, happiness that of reason. Reason is so far from depriving us of the first, that happiness consists in a series of them: and as this can be neither attained nor enjoyed securely out of society, a due use of our reason makes social and self-love coincide, or even become in effect the same. The condition wherein we are born and bred, the very condition so much complained of prepares us for this coincidence, the foundation of all human happiness; and our whole nature, appetite, passion, and reason concur to promote it. As our parents loved themselves in us, so we love ourselves in our children, and in those to whom we are most nearly related by blood. Thus far instinct improves self-love. Reason improves it further. We love ourselves in our neighbours, and in our friends too, with TULLY'S leave; for if friendship is formed by a kind of sympathy, it is cultivated
by

by good offices. Reason proceeds. We love ourselves in loving the political body whose members we are, and we love ourselves when we extend our benevolence to all mankind.

THESE are the genuine effects of reason, these are the purposes for which it was given us, and nothing more trifling, nor more absurd, can be found in the writings of those who have presumed to censure the providence of God, than what TULLY puts into the mouth of COTTA, in the third book of the nature of the gods, on this occasion. "I know not," is this pontiff made to say, "whether it had not been better for mankind to have had no reasoning faculties at all, since they are hurtful to so many, and profitable to so few, than to have had them so bountifully and so profusely bestowed*." Foolish and prophane! Fire serves for several necessary uses, among the rest to warm us, and sensitive experience teaches us to distinguish between warming and burning, in the manner and degree wherein we employ it. Shall we renounce the use of it, and complain that there is such an element, because it burns us when we employ it ill, or when we neglect, in employing it well, the precautions and attentions that are necessary? Just so (for we may transfer this material image to an intellectual subject, much more properly than such images are usually transferred to such subjects by metaphysicians) just so, I say, human reason is given for several necessary uses, and principally to lead us to all the happiness we are made capable of attaining, by a proper application of it, which rational experience is sufficient to teach us. This comparison is more just than that which COTTA makes, and BAYLE has copied, of the

* Haud scio an melius fuerit humano generi motum istum celerem cogitationis, acumen, solertiam, quam rationem vocamus, quoniam pestifera sit multis, admodum paucis salutaris, non dari omnino, quam tam munificè, et tam largè dari.

Supreme Being to a physician, who prescribes wine to a patient that he knows will drink it too strong, and perish by the use of it. Neither the strength of our reason, nor the too frequent use of it, but the contrary, are to be apprehended: and if the sick man's wine must be mingled with water to do him good, reason, the *medicina animi*, must be employed pure and unmixed. The other similes, which these academicians employ, are as impertinent as this, and might be shewn very easily to be so, if it were worth our while. But no man, who is not already devoid of reason, will be induced by them to renounce this noble gift, wherein the dignity of our nature consists, because it becomes hurtful when we apply it ill; or through negligence, or through affectation, or through design, even when we apply it well. It was applied rather impertinently than hurtfully, to maintain stoical apathy; for it was not given to destroy, but to direct and govern the passions; to make them as beneficial as they are necessary in the human system; to make a PISO of a CATALINE*, and a BRUTUS, I mean the first, of a CAESAR. But it was applied very hurtfully; indeed, and it is so still by those who employ all the reason they have to corrupt the morals of men, to bribe, to seduce, to argue, to deceive, or to force them out of their properties, or their liberties, and to make an whole community become the vassals of a faction of men, or of one man. This in politics. In religion it was applied very hurtfully, and it is so still by atheists and divines, whilst the former endeavor by sophism and declamation to censure the works of God, and the order of his providence, to destroy the belief of his existence, and to banish all sense of religion; and whilst the latter, who join very heartily in the same censure, would be thought to justify the divine attributes against the common

* Frugi.

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accufation, and to promote the interefts of religion by this juftification.

A moft unneceffary juftification furely! if they did not make it neceffary; fince God leads us by the natural ftate, in which we ftand at firft, into the road of happinefs, and leaves us to the conduct of a fufficient guide, that is, of our reafon, afterwards. It would be falfe to fay, as *SENECA* fays, fome-where in one of the rants of the portic, that we owe our virtue to ourfelves, not to God. It would be equally falfe to fay, that we owe our happinefs to ourfelves, not to God. But this may be faid with truth, that God, when he gave us reafon, left us to our free-will to make a proper, or improper, ufe of it: fo that we are obliged to our Creator for a certain rule and fufficient means of arriving at happinefs, and have none to blame but ourfelves, when we fail of it. It is not reafon, but perverfe will, that makes us fall fhort of attainable happinefs. The rule is fo certain, and the means fo fufficient, that they who deviate from them are felf-condemned at the time they do fo; for he, who breaks the laws of nature, or of his country, will concur to preferve them inviolate from others. As a member of fociety, he acknowledges the general rule. As an individual, he endeavors to be a particular exception to it. He is determined in both cafes by felf-love. That active principle, inflaming and inflamed by his paffions, preffes on to the apparent good which is the object of them: and if reafon, a lefs active principle, which, inftead of impelling, requires to be impelled, and to whom it belongs to be confulted in the choice, as well as in the purfuit, of an object, is called in, it is called in too late, and is made the drudge of the will, predetermined by paffion. Thus it happens, that felf-love and fo- cial are divided, and fet in oppofition to one another in the conduct of particular men, whilft, in the making laws, and in

the regulation of government, they continue to be the same. As long as they do so, the happiness of mankind is abundantly provided for and secured, in their several societies; and, notwithstanding the physical evils to which the members of these societies may stand sometimes exposed, every reasonable man, every man who is not a disciple of such a whining philosopher as WOLLASTON, nor such a presumptuous divine as CLARKE, will confess that such a state is as happy not only as human eye ever saw, or human ear ever heard, but as the heart of man can conceive to belong to humanity; and much more happy than creatures, but one degree above those whom they despise, could expect to be.

It is true, indeed, that governments shift and change not only their administrations, but their forms. Good princes and magistrates carry on the work of God, and by making men better make them happier. When these are corrupt, the infection spreads. They corrupt the people, the people them, social love is extinguished, and passion divides those whom reason united. When the abuse is confined within certain bounds, the condition of many men may be happy, and that of all may be still tolerable: and when the abuse exceeds such degrees, and when confusion or oppression becomes intolerable, we are to consider that they who suffer deserve to suffer. Good government cannot grow excessively bad, nor liberty be turned into slavery, unless the body of a people co-operate to their own ruin. The laws, by which societies are governed regard particulars, and individuals are rewarded, or punished, by men. But the laws by which the moral as well as the physical world is governed, regard generals: and communities are rewarded or punished by God according to the nature of things in the ordinary course of his providence, and even without any extraordinary interposition.

Look

Look round the world antient and modern, you will observe the general state of mankind to increase in happiness, or decline to misery, as virtue or vice prevails in their several societies. Thus the author of nature has been pleased to constitute the human system, and he must be mad who thinks that any of the atheistical, theological, or philosophical makers, and menders of worlds, could have constituted it better. The saying of ALPHONSUS, king of Castile, who found so many faults in the construction of the material world that he pronounced himself able to have given the supreme architect a better plan, has been heard with horror by every theist. Shall we hear without horror the men spoken of here, when they find fault with the moral, as well as physical plan, when they found accusations against the goodness, justice, and wisdom of God, merely on their pride, when they assume, on no other foundation, that man is or ought to have been the final cause of the creation, and rail as heartily at providence as PLUTARCH represents EPICURUS to have done; in short, when they go so far as to impute to God the introduction or permission of those very evils which neither God is answerable for, if I may use such an expression, nor nature, nor reason, but our own perverse wills, and the wrong elections we make?

I cannot hear any part of this without horror; and therefore if I had walked with WOLLASTON * in some retired field, my meditations would have been very different from his, more just, and more reverential towards the Supreme Being. I should have been very sure that neither lifeless matter nor the vegetative tribe have any reflex thoughts, nor any thoughts at all. I should have been convinced that the faculty of thinking is given to sensitive animals, as we call them, in a lower degree than to man. But I should not have been convinced

* Ibid. p. 209.

that

that they have the power of exercising it in respect of present objects only. The contrary would appear to me, on some occasions, as manifest in them, or in some of them, as it appears on others, and on more, in the man who is born dumb. I should feel the superiority of my species, but I should acknowledge the community of our kind. I should rouse in my mind a grateful sense of these advantages above all others, that I am a creature capable of knowing, of adoring, and worshipping my creator, capable of discovering his will in the law of my nature, and capable of promoting my happiness by obeying it. I should acknowledge thankfully that I am able, by the superiority of my intellectual faculties, much better than my fellow creatures, to avoid some evils and to soften others, which are common to us and to them. I should confess that as I proved myself more rational than they by employing my reason to this purpose, so I should prove myself less rational by repining at my state here, and by complaining that there are any unavoidable evils. I should confess that neither perfect virtue, nor perfect happiness are to be found among the sons of men: and that we ought to judge of the continuance of one, as we may judge of our perseverance in the other, according to a maxim in the ethics of CONFUCIUS; not by this, that we never fall from either, since in that sense there would be no one good nor no one happy man in the world; but by this, that when we do fall we rise again, and pursue the journey of life, in the same road. Let us pursue it contentedly, and learn that, as the softest pillow on which we can lay our heads has been said by MONTAGNE to be ignorance, we may say more properly that it is resignation. He alone is happy, and he is truly so, who can say, welcome life whatever it brings! Welcome death whatever it is! "Aut transfert, aut finit." If the former, we change our state, but we are still the creatures of the same God.

God. He made us to be happy here. He may make us happier in another system of Being. At least, this we are sure of, we shall be dealt with according to the perfections of his nature, not according to the imperfections of our own. Resignation in this instance cannot be hard to one who thinks worthily of God, nor in the other, except to one who thinks too highly of man. That you, or I, or even WOLLASTON himself should return to the earth from whence we came, to the dirt under our feet, or be mingled with the ashes of those herbs and plants, from which we drew nutrition whilst we lived, does not seem any indignity, offered to our nature, since it is common to all the animal kind: and he, who complains of it as such, does not seem to have been set, by his reasoning faculties, so far above them in life, as to deserve not to be levelled with them at death. We were like them before our birth, that is nothing. So we shall be on this hypothesis like them too after our death, that is nothing. What hardship is done us? None, unless it be an hardship, that we are not immortal, because we wish to be so, and flatter ourselves with that expectation. As well might that emperor of China have complained of his disappointment, when he imagined, he had bought immortality of a certain impostor, who pretended to give it, and then died. If this hypothesis were true, which I am far from assuming, I should have no reason to complain, tho having tasted existence, I might abhor non-entity. Since then the first cannot be demonstrated by reason, nor the second be reconciled to my inward sentiment, let me take refuge in resignation at the last, as in every other act of my life. Let others be solicitous about their future state, and frighten, or flatter themselves as prejudice, imagination, bad health, or good health, nay a lowering day, or a clear sunshine shall inspire them to do. Let the tranquillity of my mind rest on this immoveable rock, that my future, as well as my present,
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state are ordered by an Almighty and Allwise Creator; and that they are equally foolish, and presumptuous, who make imaginary excursions into futurity, and who complain of the present.

THESE reflections, on the general and usual state of mankind, may be carried much further, and more may be added. But these are sufficient, and I proceed to plead the cause of God, on another head, against the same confederates.

LII.

IF you improve in your own thoughts the hints dispersed in the precedent reflections, you, whose good understanding is undebauched by metaphysics, will see very evidently the truth of these two propositions. First, that, supposing the world we inhabit to be a scene of as many evils as it is represented to be, the arguments, drawn from thence against the wisdom, or power, or goodness of God, are inconclusive. God is the Creator and Governor of the universe, not of this world alone, a small and, probably, a very inconsiderable part of it: so that, if there was really more evil than good in this part, it would conclude nothing against the whole, wherein there might be still much more good than evil, nor, consequently, against the divine attributes. Secondly, that there is even in this world so much more good than evil, and the general state of mankind is so happy in it, that the exaggerated descriptions of a supposed contrary state would make no impression against these attributes, if men had not been induced to think most absurdly, that God could have no good reason for creating them, but that of communicating happiness to them, and happiness such as they would have, happiness without alloy.

The