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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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LV.

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the very time when COTTA lamented that of Corinth and Carthage, that of Rome was coming on; for the loss of her liberty was connected with that of her empire by a scarce interrupted succession of tyrants. Under these she lay, as it were on the rack, and died a lingering and painful death.

LV.

IN asserting the justice of providence, I chuse rather to insist on the constant, visible, and undeniable course of a general providence which is sufficient for the purpose, than to assume a dispensation of particular providences. The atheist, who assumes that there ought to be such, complains that they are wanting. The theist, who admits that there are such, complains that they are insufficient. The former draws from what he assumes a pretence to cavil. The latter only grows inconsistent; for I would ask him if there are any such providences, why not more? He admits enough to break through and overturn the natural order and constitution of the the physical and moral system. How comes it to pass that there are not enough to stop his mouth when he complains of the misery of man and the injustice of providence? The truth is that we have not in philosophical speculation, in any history except that of the Bible, nor in our own experience, sufficient grounds to establish the doctrine of particular providences, and to reconcile it to that of a general providence, which continues, and directs the course of things in the material and intellectual systems, as these systems were originally constituted by the author of nature. They who have attempted to do this by shewing with great, and, as I think, with too much subtilty of wit and licence of imagination, in what cases, how far, and in what manner, God may act by particular

lar and occasional interpositions, consistently with the preservation of that general order of causes and effects which he has constituted, seem to me quite unintelligible. It is impossible to conceive that the course of the sun, or the double revolution of the earth, should be suspended or altered by a temporary, nay, a momentary interposition of some particular providence, or that any thing worthy of such an interposition should happen in the material world, without violating the mechanical constitution of it, and the natural order of causes and effects in it. As little is it possible to conceive such occasional interpositions in the intellectual system as shall give new thoughts and new dispositions to the minds of men, and in consequence new determinations to their wills, without altering in every such instance the ordinary and natural progression of human understanding, nor without resuming that freedom of will, which every man is conscious that he has, tho' some are absurd enough to deny it, and to oppose metaphysical dreams to intuitive knowledge. I confess, that I comprehend as little the metaphysical, as the physical, impulse of spirits †, and that the words suggestion, silent communication, sudden influence, influx, or injection of ideas, give me no determinate, clear and distinct ideas, nor even, as I suspect, to the persons who talk of them the most, and build so much upon them.

To acknowledge the fatum of antient philosophers, to hold with the mahometans an absolute predestination of all events, with SPINOZA and CALVIN the necessity of all our actions, or with LEIBNITZ his whimsy of a pre-established harmony, would be somewhat almost as mad, as to take the true history of LUCIAN for such. On the other hand it would be absurd,

† Relig. of Nat. delineated, et alibi.

and

and impious both to assert with EPICURUS, that the world was made by a fortuitous concurrence of atoms, and that, as it was made so, it is governed by chance, without any knowledge, without any rule, without any providence. The truth lies between these extremes. The world is governed by laws, which the Creator imposed on the physical and moral systems, when he willed them into existence, which make a part of them, which must be in force as long as they last, and any change in which would be a change of the systems themselves. These laws are invariable, but they are general: and from this generality what we call contingency arises. The laws of matter and motion, those which we know and those which have not been yet discovered, are fixed, no doubt. But within the latitude which they allow, tho' nothing happens which is repugnant to them, many things happen which seem so to us. Plastic, or fashioning nature, produces sometimes monsters, and all material beings as they partake of the good, partake of the evil, which matter and motion cause; for it would be trifling to object the assumed existence of beings, material indeed like the saints in heaven, if those glorified bodies are material, according to our idea of matter, but existing in systems that are not liable to the same inconveniencies or evils that arise from matter and motion, such as pain, sickness, or death, for instance, which our system is. There is no need of any great sagacity to perceive that the case is much the same in the moral world; nay that it is more liable to contingency than the natural. The moral world is subject to the law of right reason, fixed, invariable, promulgated in the very nature of things, and enforced by the sanctions of rewards and punishments, which follow often the observation or the breach of it. But then, instead of two principles, whereof one is active, and the other passive only, as in the other case, there are in this two active principles tho' one be slower than the other, reason and
passion.

passion. Both necessary in the human state. Both useful when reason, both hurtful when passion governs. Between both stands the freedom of our will which can determine either way, and from this constitution arises all that mixture of moral good and evil that we see and feel.

As little as the atheist and the divine approve the natural and moral constitution of the world, they are unable to shew how it might be altered in any particular instance, except for the worse upon the whole; and, therefore, they must be reduced at last to assert, that goodness and justice require the whole should be altered, as they required originally that there should have been no such system made. In the first light they deserve to be treated like forward children, who complain, and wish, and know neither what they want, nor what they desire. In the second, they deserve to be treated like patients, proper for doctor MONROE, and to be put under his care. Nothing less than metaphysics could have turned so many good heads. Common sense and common observation would have hindered them from assuming, on the faith of this fantastical science, that God made the world for the sake of man; and man for this reason alone, that he might communicate happiness to his creature: which two suppositions are affirmed or implied in all their arguments, and thus a large field of complaint is opened to them. Without these they would have had no pretence to criticise the works of God, nor the dispensations of his providence, to upbraid his goodness, nor to censure his justice. On the contrary they would have found reason to admire, thankfully and submissively, that supreme wisdom, which has provided so amply, by a few general laws, for the well-being of all his creatures. But it is with this very instance of supreme wisdom, that they find fault. General laws, under the direction of a general providence, do not

provide sufficiently for human happiness, according to them; and their notions of human importance are wound up so high that they think there ought to be as many providences as men, on which notion guardian-angels, and genii, and daemons were introduced, and are hardly yet exploded: or else that the immediate providence of God should be attentive to all the wants and prayers of men, tho the wants are often imaginary, and the prayers impertinent, and should be ready on every occasion to protect and reward the good, to punish and reclaim the wicked.

EVERY religion boasts of many instances, wherein the divine providence has been thus exercised. We need go no further than our own ecclesiastical historians, and other christian writers to find them. The most common events are represented by exaggeration and declamation to have been extraordinary interpositions of the hand of God. Nay, at this time, there is many an old woman who thinks herself as important as your and GAY's parish clerk, and is ready to relate with much spiritual pride the particular providences that have attended her and her's. Thus then the matter stands. The same persons, who have contributed to establish this belief, have propagated, and continue to propagate an opinion, that the Supreme Being deals unjustly with mankind in this life, because the interpositions of his providence are not as frequent as they judge that they ought to be. I say as frequent, for where they assume that he does interpose, they dare not say he interposes unjustly. CLARKE complains*, that there are not in many ages plain evidences enough of the interposition of divine providence to convince men of the wisdom any more than of the justice and goodness of God. They reason like

* Evid. p. 142.

COTTA†, they are displeas'd at the few particular instances of this care; few as they conceive with respect to all the proper objects of it: and since he takes it in so few instances, his justice is no more acquitted at their tribunal than if he took it in none. This belief and this opinion do not hang very well together in reason, but they may do so in religious policy. To keep up a belief of particular providences serves to keep up a belief not only of the efficacy of prayer, and of the intercession of saints in heaven, as well as of the church on earth, but of the several rites of external devotion; and to keep up a belief that they are few, and that the providence of God, as it is exercised in this world, is therefore on the whole unjust, serves to keep up a belief of another world, wherein all that is amiss here, shall be set right. The ministry of a clergy is thought necessary on both these accounts by all: and there are few, who see how difficult it is to make the two doctrines; which these reverend persons maintain, appear in any tolerable manner consistent. On the whole, tho' there is little credit to be given to all that lying legends, suspicious traditions, and idle rumors have reported, concerning particular acts of providence, wrought on particular occasions, and directed manifestly by an immediate exercise of the divine power to the advantage of some, and to the detriment of others, yet will I not presume to deny, that there have been any such. This I will say only, that if any such have been, they must have been such as might happen sometimes in the ordinary course of a general providence. They could not be such as must have violated the laws of nature in their production. Nothing can be less reconcileable to the notion of an all-perfect Being than the imagination that he undoes by his power in parti-

† - - - Non placet autem paucis a diis immortalibus esse consultum; sequitur ergo ut nemini consultum sit.

cular cases what his wisdom, to whom nothing is future, once thought sufficient to be established for all cases. The effects, therefore, that are assumed of particular providences are either false, or they are undistinguishable from those of a general providence, and become particular by nothing more than the application which vain superstition or pious fraud makes of them. It is as easy to attack, and it is as easy to defend the justice of God on one hypothesis as on the other. But since one is supported by equivocal and doubtful, and the other by unquestionable facts, I shall borrow no help from the former, I shall suppose them not to have been, and shall rest the cause of God on the latter which are likewise the most proper to be urged against the atheists.

LVI.

LET us consider how it appears by the objections these difficult persons make that we, and the system we inhabit, should have been framed to satisfy them, and to anticipate their cavils; after which it will be proper to consider, further how it is framed, and to compare God's plan with theirs. Physical nature then should have been so constituted that the whole world might have been one paradise, neither scorched by the sun, nor pinched by the cold, nor ruffled by tempests. Men should have enjoyed in it every natural good, have been subject to no natural evil, no not to death which they deem to be the greatest of evils. Moral nature should have been so constituted that every man might be necessarily determined to all the obligations of morality, that he might be good as PATERCULUS says of CATO*, because he could not

* Quia aliter esse non potuit.