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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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LVII.

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LVII.

TO suppose a constant series of particular interpositions from above, necessary to this purpose, seems to my apprehension little less absurd than to suppose the necessity of a perpetual and universal theocracy, and to complain that such a government of the world has not been established, is as silly as it would be to complain that the golden age of the poets is ended, or that the millenary year of the Apocalypse is not begun. If all men had been determined necessarily to virtue, there would have been certainly no moral evil, nor probably any more physical than there was in paradise, or than there will be in the new Jerusalem. But there would have been no merit neither, nor properly speaking any such thing as virtue. Our moral obligations arise from that nature, which God willed we should have. They must continue as long as this nature exists, that is, as long as there are men: and so long whatever promotes, the happiness of the kind will be virtue at least in one sense, and whatever tends to the destruction of it will be vice in every sense. Vice and virtue must take their denominations not only from their effects, but from their motives. Actions of the first sort must have always a bad motive as well as a bad effect, and must, therefore, be always attended with demerit. But actions of the second or mere innocence may have no moral motive at all, nor consequently any true merit, as in the case of an absolute and natural determination; or they may have motives, which render them rather appearances of virtue than really virtuous, and deprive them in a strict sense of all merit, as in the case of particular and occasional determinations of the will wrought by immediate interpositions of the divine power, whether acting silently within, or sensibly without. Our inconsistent academician
confesses

confesses thus much in the very breath, in which he affirms that mankind should have been determined, some way or other, by the gods to virtue. Nay, he asserts even more than is true; for tho we owe the practice of virtue to ourselves, to our own elections, and to our own free-will, in which all the merit we can have consists, yet we owe to God the means of knowing, and of practising it*.

IF all men had been originally and necessarily determined, by the constitution of their nature, to virtue, according to COTTA's first proposition, and had, therefore, been able to acquire no more merit in doing virtuous actions, than they acquire in drinking, when they are thirsty, or in gratifying any natural appetite, what a curious system might some philosopher of the school of POTAMO have made by joining the gods of EPICURUS to the men of COTTA? Slim, taper, transparent beings in heaven, indolent and unactive†: a succession of machines on earth, wound up to go a certain time, to continue certain motions, and to strike at certain moments, according to their predestination, or the pre-established harmony of their system. But, in good earnest, is a system of particular providences in which the Supreme Being, or the angels, like his ministers to reward, and his executioners to punish, are constantly employed in the affairs of mankind, much more reasonable? Would the justice of God be more manifest in such a state of things, than in the present? I see no room for merit on the part of man, nor for justice on the part of God, in such

* Virtutem nemo unquam acceptam deo retulit. Nimirum recté. Propter virtutem enim jure laudamur, et in virtute recté gloriamur. Quod non contingeret, si id donum a deo, non à nobis haberemus.

. . . . Debebant illi quidem omnes bonos efficere siquidem hominum generi consulebant. Sin id minus, bonis quidem certé consulere debebant.

† Exiles perlucidos monogrammos Deos, et nihil agentes.

a state: and a state of partial, not universal, determinations to goodness, instead of being liable to such cavils as we have now under consideration, would be liable to unanswerable objections. It would be productive of effects, quite opposite to those that are assumed, and would cause the wildest confusion in the judgments of mankind.

If some men were determined to goodness by the silent workings of the spirit, and others not, which they must be on the supposition of particular providences, and a partial not universal determination; if the former were protected from evils of every kind, on account of this goodness, and if the latter were exposed, for want of it, to all those physical evils which result from the constitution of the material world, as well as to all those moral evils which men would bring on one another, what could be said to excuse the justice of God? Plainly nothing. The proceeding would be that of injustice, and an arbitrary partiality which can never be imputed, even indirectly, to him without blasphemy. It is not possible for me to conceive, that any thing out of himself could be a motive to the first intelligent cause of all things to create any thing, neither can I subscribe to the opinion, that certain general independent natures tempted God, as it were, to cloath them with existence. I can conceive still less, that individual creatures, before they have done either good or evil, nay, before their actual existence, can be objects of predilection or aversion, of love or hatred to God: and yet this must have been, to have made such a system of particular providences effectual in the first instance of it. If we can conceive it made so in this, we may conceive it made so in all the rest: and if God had pre-determined some men to goodness, exclusively of others, without any motive on his side, we may easily conceive that particular providences would have been employed to secure

2

happiness

happinefs to them, without any merit on theirs. But “credat
 “Judaeus Apella non ego.” CLARKE fhall not force me in-
 to atheifm, tho I deny what he afferts, concerning the moral
 attributes of God, nor WOLLASTON, tho I fee, not only one,
 but many good men unhappy, and am not convinced by his
 reasonings of a future ftate.

I may be ftopped here, perhaps, and may be asked, with a
 tone of authority, nay, but, O man, who art thou, that re-
 plieft againft God? If I am fo ftopped, and fo questioned, my
 anfwer is both ready and fufficient. “Holy, or reverend fir,
 “I am a better theft than you, and on this occafion I reafon
 “better. It is not I that reply againft God. It is you. Had
 “fuch a fyftem, as this, been actually eftablifhed by God, he
 “would have fpoke by his works, and I fhould, for this very
 “reafon, have believed it agreeable to the divine attributes, tho
 “I could not have reconciled it to my notions of impartiali-
 “ty, and juftice, nor even of wifdom. But fince I cannot
 “reconcile it to them, and fince I have no affurance but your
 “word, againft all appearances, that God elects fome men,
 “and rejects or neglects others, that he fofteneth the hearts
 “of fome, and hardeneth the hearts of others, I fhould re-
 “ply againft God, indeed, if admitted what you affert to be
 “true. I reafon cautiously, from what he has done, to his at-
 “tributes. You affirm boldly, without any regard to what
 “he has done, or to the perfeftions of an all-perfeft Being.”

As to the other part of the hypothefis, which fupposes par-
 ticular providences, that might product the good and fecure
 their happinefs, wanting, and, therefore, God convicted of in-
 juftice in the prefent conftitution of things, it is maintained,
 I think, by the whole chorus of divines; and they who do not
 hold the doctrine I have mentioned, are as loud in their com-

plaints as they who do. They who agree in little else, agree in censuring the dispensations of providence, and if some are dissatisfied with the lot of their elect, others are so as much with that of good men, in general, however they came to be good. To satisfy them all, therefore, and to shew himself a just governor of the world, instead of governing by the established laws of nature and by a general providence, he should have corrected these laws and have governed by particular providences, whenever the service of good men required it. If he had not made all men good, he should have made all good men happy. Now suppose it done, suppose this human reformation of divine oeconomy, what would be the consequences? Would they not be such as these?

IF the good, besides the enjoyment of all that happiness which is inseparable from virtue, were exempted from all kinds of evil, and if the wicked, besides those evils which are inseparable from vice, and those which happen to all men in the ordinary course of events, were exposed to others that the hand of God inflicted on them in an extraordinary manner; in short if an ark was ready, at every inundation, to save the former, and if a destroying angel was ready on every occasion to wreak vengeance on the latter, it is certain, as we have observed already, that such good men would have very little merit, and it may be suspected, that the hearts of the wicked would be hardened as that of PHARAOH was by all the plagues that God brought on him and his people. such good men would have, whilst they continued to be good, no other merit than that of children who are cajoled into their duty; or than that of galley-slaves who ply at the oar, because they hear and see and fear the lash of the boatswain.

BUT

BUT would there not be, at the same time, some further defects in this scheme? I think there would. It seems to me that these good men, being thus distinguished, by particular providences in their favor, from the rest of mankind, might be apt either not to contract, or to lose, that general benevolence which is a fundamental principle of the law of nature, and that public spirit, which is the life and soul of society. God has made the practice of morality our interest, as well as our duty. But men, who found themselves constantly protected from the evils that fell on others, might grow insensibly to think themselves unconcerned in the common fate: and if they relaxed in their zeal for the public good, they would relax in their virtue; for public good is the object of virtue. They might do worse. Spiritual pride might infect them. They might become, in their own imaginations, the little flock, or the chosen sheep. Others have become so by the mere force of enthusiasm, without any such inducements as those which we assume in this case, and experience has shewn that there are no wolves like these sheep. Thus forced into virtue, and rewarded for being virtuous, they might cease to deserve the reward in any sense, or degree. On the whole; the scheme, opposed to God's scheme, is inconsistent with all our notions of wisdom, as well as of justice. It is the scheme of men: it must be tried, therefore, by human ideas and notions, and since the justice of providence is attacked on these, it may be defended, surely, on the same. To measure the wisdom and justice of God by a rule so inadequate as that of human intelligence, is vanity and presumption in the highest degree. But to expose this vanity and presumption, by shewing the men who are guilty of them that even their own rule is sufficient to condemn them, is very consistent with the modesty of true theism.

I will

I will conclude this head by observing, that we have example, as well as reason, for us, when we reject the hypothesis of particular providences. If the government of a general providence was liable to the objections that are made to it, a government by particular providences would be liable to none. But the contrary appears true from the example of the jewish theocracy. God was the king of that people. He did not decline the title, nor the exercise of kingly power, as his son, who came to suffer for all mankind and not to govern a most inconsiderable portion of them, did afterwards. His presence resided among this people, and his justice was manifested daily in rewarding and punishing by unequivocal, signal, miraculous interpositions of his power. The effect of all was this, the people rebelled at one time, and repented at another. Particular providences, directed by God himself immediately, and on the spot, if I may say so, had particular temporary effects only, none general nor lasting: and the people were so little satisfied with this system of government, that they deposed the Supreme Being, and insisted to have another king, and to be governed like their neighbours. How long this theocracy may be said to have continued, I am quite unconcerned to know, and should be sorry to mispend any time in enquiring. It is enough for my purpose, to have observed that the justice of God was not so acknowledged as to produce any suitable effects, at a point of time when the Israelites had no other king but God; and to conclude from thence, that if he governed the whole world at present by particular providences, they would not have a better effect in manifesting his justice, nor stop the clamor against it, of the very men, perhaps, who accuse now the injustice of his general providence. Nay the case would be much worse, and every particular exertion of his power would render his
justice

justice more disputable. So pregnant is this scheme with absurdities.

It has been said already, that where religions, which claim to have been revealed, prevail, a new character of goodness arises, besides that which consists in obedience to the laws of nature, and compliance with our moral obligations. Faith in certain men, and, on their authority, in certain facts, and certain speculative propositions, how incredible soever the former, how little intelligible soever the latter may be, together with the practice of certain duties which the arbitrary will of man imposes, and the observation of certain forms of outward devotion--constitute this artificial goodness, which stands often in the place of natural, and is always attended to much more.

This is that kind of goodness which christian divines intend principally or solely, when they complain that good men are often unhappy, and bad men happy, by the present constitution of things. They establish a rule, and are not agreed about the application of it; for who are to be reputed good christians. Go to Rome, they are papists. Go to Geneva, they are calvinists. Go to the north of Germany, they are lutherans. Come to London, they are none of these. Orthodoxy is a mode. It is one thing at one time and in one place. It is something else at another time and in another place, or even in the same place; for in this religious country of ours, without seeking proofs in any other, men have been burned under one reign, for the very same doctrines they were obliged to profess in another. You damn all those who differ from you. We doubt much about your salvation. In what manner, now, can the justice of God be manifested by particular providences? Must the order of them change as the notions of ortho-

orthodoxy change, and must they be governed by events, instead of governing them? If they are favorable to those of your communion, they will be deemed unjust by every good protestant, and God will be taxed with encouraging idolatry and superstition. If they are favorable to those of any of our communions, they will be deemed unjust by every good papist, and God will be taxed with nursing up heresy and schism. God can do nothing more than to furnish arms against himself, by the dispensations of particular providences in the christian world, and every one of these will pass, in the minds of some men, for a proof of injustice, if it passes in the minds of others for a proof of justice. Nay, more. If, in these dispensations, God, who knows the hearts of men, should judge differently from our divines, if he should shew more regard to moral goodness, than to the reputed orthodoxy of any side, it would fare with him -- I say it with reverence -- as it fares with every honest man in civil contests; He would be calumniated by all sides, in the exercise of particular providences, as he is in that of a general providence.

LVIII.

HAVING said thus much to shew the absurdity of assuming that a system of particular providences is necessary to render the government of God, in the present constitution of the physical and moral world, a just government, as it must, indeed, be necessary, if the government of a general providence, according to the established order of things, is unjust; it seems to me, that they who object to this are driven to the greatest of all absurdities. They must either give up their objections, or they must insist that the whole established order of things ought to be changed, and that God cannot govern mankind