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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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LXII.

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of predestinating, the future. If we persuade ourselves of this great truth, that the whole series of things is, at all times, actually present to the divine mind, we may say as properly that God knows things because they are actual to him, and not that they are actual to him because he knows them, or much less pre-ordains them, as we say, that things are seen by us because they are visible, and not that they are visible because they are seen by us. They, who talk so much of pre-science and predestination, would do well to consider, whether it be not more reasonable to think in this manner, than to adopt all the absurd, as well as impious, consequences that flow from their hypothesis, according to which there must be not one general system of nature, but as many natural and moral systems, as there are rational creatures, and the providence of God must be employed to carry on this aggregate of systems so distinctly and so steadily, that the innocence and happiness of some, and the guilt and misery of others, may be effectually secured, agreeable to their several predestinations.

LXII.

THE fact, that there are such particular providences as have been assumed, which would be so many miracles, in the strict sense of the word, if they were real, cannot be proved; unless we accept for proofs, in an age when miracles are scarce pretended out of your church, and scarce believed in it, all the ridiculous stories that passed in times of ignorance and superstition. I said that particular providences would be miracles, if they were real, and such they would be strictly, whether they were contrary to the established course of nature or not; for the miracle consists in the extraordinary interposition as much as in the nature of the thing brought to pass.

pass. In one case, there could be no doubt of such an extraordinary and miraculous interposition. In the other, doubts might arise, the opinions of men might be divided, and yet the miracle be as real in one as in the other. Nay, the reality might be made evident enough to remove these doubts by the occasions, by the circumstances, by the repetition of it on similar occasions, and with similar circumstances; and, above all, by this circumstance, that the assumed particular providence was a direct answer to particular prayers, and acts of devotion offered up to procure it. Should fire rain down from heaven to burn one city, and the walls of another fall at the found of the besiegers trumpets, should a destroying angel put one army to death in a night, and the sun stand still to give time for the entire defeat of another, neither the besiegers nor the besieged, the victorious nor the vanquished, could fail to see the omnipotent hand of God in these events. Should abundant showers descend from the clouds, after a long drought, or fair weather succeed a wet season, tho' nothing is more in the ordinary course of nature than these phaenomena, they would be esteemed particular providences, very reasonably, at Paris, if they happened as constantly as the shrine of saint Genevieve is carried in procession to procure one or the other.

INNUMERABLE cases of these kinds may be put hypothetically; but happily for mankind, experience furnishes no authentic examples of the first sort, nor any well enough ascertained to become proofs of the second. All the instances that can be brought of providences, which men assume to be particular, are so very like to the events which happen in the ordinary course of things, that they fall under the head of such as are problematical, and as are made particular by nothing but the voluntary applications of them. I say happily it is

so; for if it was otherwise, if providences were directed according to the different desires, and even wants of men equally well entitled to the divine favor, the whole order of nature, physical and moral, would be subverted, and the affairs of mankind would fall into the utmost confusion. The laws of gravitation, for instance, must be sometimes suspended, and sometimes their effect must be precipitated. The tottering edifice must be kept miraculously from falling, whilst innocent men lived in it, or passed under it; and the fall of it must be as miraculously determined to crush the guilty inhabitant or passenger. The free will of man which no one can deny that he has without lying or renouncing his intuitive knowledge, and which was so much regarded by God, that we are told he suffered ADAM to fall, and to involve all mankind in his guilt, rather than restrain it for a moment, for a moment would have saved us from original sin; this free will must be often not only restrained, but determined irresistibly by still whispers, secret suggestions, and sudden influences.

How all this can be effected, and especially in compliances with the wants and petitions of men so different and so repugnant to one another, is not only hard to say, but the very supposition may seem to imply contradiction with what we know of the constitution of things, and with our clearest and most distinct ideas. The affairs of men are connected by so many various relations, that the particular providence which puts a force on the mechanical laws of nature, and on the freedom of the human will, must do this very often, not in one or two instances alone, but in a multitude, to have its effect in one. Again. The circumstances of individuals, the public conjunctures wherein numbers are involved, and the merits and demerits of particular men, as well as of collective bodies, are

so nearly alike, and they return so often to be equally objects of these supposed providences, that no one who does not think himself at liberty to affirm or deny any thing that his precarious hypothesis requires, will dare to pronounce where these providences have been, or should have been employed, and where not. The scheme, if it were true, would be universal in extent, and continual in time; from whence these great absurdities arise, that the world would be governed by miracles till miracles lost their name, that the established order of natural causes and effects would be subverted, that the general rule would be absorbed in the exceptions to it, or that God would govern his human creatures by two rules that do not consist very well together, since by one of them the wants and the petitions of these creatures would be submitted to one common providence which carried on the affairs of the world, according to the first constitution and original laws of it: and by the other, this common providence would break, if I may say so, into a multitude of particular providences, for the supply of these wants and the grant of these petitions, every one of which is an appeal to the second rule of government against the first.

AMONG other attempts which have been made to solve these difficulties, and to reconcile the assumed scheme to the actual and visible, it has been urged, that God may possibly have so ordered the whole series of things, from the commencement to the consummation of this system*, that all particular cases may have been provided for in the original design, that they may be parts of it, and, therefore, consistent with it. It has been urged further, that the particular natures and actions of all the sons of ADAM having been known to God, it is very possible that he may introduce them into the world

* Relig. of nat. delin.

at such times, and in such places and circumstances, that they may be, even according to the general course of nature, the instruments or the objects of particular providences. These are very arbitrary suppositions, and such surely as give little satisfaction to the mind. Without entering further than they deserve into the examination of them, it may be said, and it may be shewn, that they come up very nearly to that of an absolute predestination, and are at least as whimsically invented to this purpose, as that of a pre-established harmony is to another. The example of the planets, which is brought to illustrate one of these hypotheses, will not appear extremely apposite. They are disposed so as to perform their dance regularly, in various conjunctions and oppositions, without any new impressions, or any alterations in the laws of motion. But is this the case of moral and free agents? The planets make their revolutions, and maintain their order, by the invariable laws of their system, which nothing but the will of God can alter. They have, in themselves, no principle that can determine their motions in contradiction to these laws. But whether we suppose situations, and conjunctures prepared for men, or men for situations and conjunctures, they may act, by the freedom of their will, against all these preparations and destinations, in spite of time, place, and circumstance. But God foresaw that they would not, says the metaphysician, and you assert that God may foresee future events without pre-ordaining them. Yes, foresee, or rather see, as he knows all the most contingent events that happen in the course of his general providence, but not provide for particular cases, nor determine the existence of particular men, in the manner assumed, without pre-ordaining. Their voluntary actions may coincide with an unpredestinated state of things. But that certain ideal men should come into existence to perform these voluntary actions in such an unpredestinated

destinated conjuncture precisely, is a very evident predestination, and as much a particular providence as if these dispositions, and these conjunctures, had been the effects of many miraculous interpositions.

IT will be of little service to the scheme of particular providences to say, like WOLLASTON, that there may be incorporeal, at least invisible beings, of intellects and powers superior to men, and capable of mighty things; and that these beings may be the ministers of God, and the authors of many of these providences; for that there may be, is no proof that there are such beings. To affirm that we stand in the highest rank of intellectual creatures, would be extreme folly; and to deny that there may be a chain of intelligence, through several systems, up from man, would be to contradict without reason, what reason and analogy render very probable. That such creatures may be the inhabitants of other planets, and dispersed in these habitations, through the universe, is a notion so favored by appearances, and so agreeable to the majesty of God, and to the immensity of his works, that no reasonable man will reject, in the present improved state of astronomy, what some of the most antient astronomers suspected. But the difference is great between adopting an opinion thus founded, and the opinions of antient astrologers, and of the knaves or madmen who professed theurgic magic. Yet these were the first philosophers who invented such beings as are still assumed. They imposed them on the east, and the east has imposed them on the west. They were not a little embarrassed about their habitations. They placed some in heaven. These were the angels, or messengers, whom the Supreme Being employed on the most important occasions; and, not to enter into the more perplexed and obscure parts of this doctrine, the greatest number of them were daemons and genii, who rambled about in imaginary

nary spaces, the intermundia of EPICURUS, but principally in our atmosphere, that they might be at hand to take care of men and to direct the conduct of human affairs. But now, admitting that there are such beings, and that they are thus employed; I would ask, do they act by the immediate command of God, or do they not? If you, who defend the scheme of particular providences, say that they do; you leave the matter just where it was, and God governs the world no longer by his general providence alone, but mediately, if not immediately, by particular providences likewise, so little consistent with it that they would be useless, if they were not wrought in opposition to it, or to supply the defects of it. If you say that they do not; under how strange a government do you place mankind, when you give any share of it to these beings, and suppose that they exercise it in proper places, and according to their greater abilities!

I neither say, nor think, that divines mean to blaspheme. God forbid that I should be as uncharitable as they are. But this I say, that he who follows them cannot avoid presumption and prophaneness, and must be much on his guard to avoid blasphemy. Consider, under one view, their whole proceeding. God made the world, they say, for the sake of man, and he made man only to indulge his goodness in communicating happiness to so noble a creature. God preserves the world he has made. His providence presides over all his works, animate and inanimate, and principally over men, those rational beings whom he has created in his own image. But this providence is general, and, therefore, insufficient to answer all the purposes of his goodness and his justice, in an immense variety of contingent events, and with regard to the merits and demerits of every man. It is essential, therefore, to these, and especially to the last, that there should be particular providences

vidences to take care of rational beings in every particular case which there are not, and to make a due distribution of good and evil among them constantly, because any one instance to the contrary is inconsistent with God's moral attributes, and shakes the belief of his existence. He governs, therefore, by particular providences, and provides by them for particular cases that are not provided for in the administration of a general providence. Be it so. All you ask is granted. Are you reconciled to the justice of God's government? Are you satisfied? By no means, reply these divines, and such theists as WOLLASTON. These particular providences are exercised so rarely, so secretly, or some how or other so ineffectually, that his government continues liable to the same charge of injustice, and cannot be reconciled to his attributes, and to the eternal reason of things, without the help of an hypothesis, which it is but reasonable we should make to distinguish ourselves from the atheistical tribe, and to justify that God, whom we accused in concert with them, whilst our alliance lasted, and as far as the conditions of it extended.

AFTER this, will it not be permitted me to say, that if these men do not blaspheme directly, little less than blasphemy, nay blasphemy itself is deduced directly by their allies from, the principles they lay down? I will say this at least, that they talk prophanely, and argue presumptuously, in very devout and sometimes in very modest terms. Will it not be permitted me to say, that these men seem to be in the kingdom of God, what the ringleaders of faction are in a state? Men would be angels, and we see in MILTON that angels would be gods. The pretensions of men are exorbitant, yet all they demand is presumed to be of right, and whatever falls short of their demands to be a denial of a right founded in

original institution of his government by God; for of any original contract or covenant between him and man, except that which the jews boast he made with their ancestors, we never heard. Tho' divines talk sometimes of a covenant, which they are pleased to call of grace. To finish this allusion, let me add that when factions devise expedients to redress the grievances of which they complain, they are commonly such as seem to redress, rather than redress, and as make the sovereign little amends for all the violence they have offered to his prerogative, and for all they have said and done against him.

LXIII.

IT is high time that we should have recourse to a better authority than that of man, to the authority of God himself, that we should consider how he has made us, and in what circumstances he has placed us; that we should declare what he has done to be agreeable to his infinite wisdom, and to all his other perfections, because he has done it, and that we should prepare our minds to be grateful and resigned. To lead us then into this track of thought, let it be observed that the phaenomena of nature, the greatest and the most minute, establish the doctrine of final causes, and, therefore, the intelligence of the first cause, by innumerable proofs which are at all times obvious to our senses. Many of these proofs amount to geometrical certainty; since a multitude of things, which might be made in manners and placed in positions almost infinite, are so made, so placed, so contrived that they are visibly appropriated to the particular uses to which they serve, and to no other. If the scheme of particular providences was supported by proofs like these, no
reason-