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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

LXIII.

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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
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reasonable man could doubt of the truth of it. But it is not so supported. The facts are often wholly uncertain, or mingled up with fabulous circumstances, or distinguished, without reason, from those which happen under the direction of a general providence, by superstition and artifice, so that proofs of the falsity of particular providences are in proportion as frequent as those of the reality of final causes. We are justified, therefore, in affirming one, and in not affirming the other, whilst they who affirm both are justified by their proceeding in affirming neither. They affirm the doctrine of final causes often on proofs which the phaenomena contradict, and which the doctrine established independently of them does not want. They affirm that of particular providences without any proofs which the phaenomena furnish.

THE two assumed propositions I have mentioned so often, that man is the final cause of the world and that the communication of happiness to him is the final cause of his creation, are most certainly false, as the scheme of particular providences that force the laws of nature is no doubt, and as that may be which supposes these providences exercised in a manner agreeable to these laws. That the world is fitted in many respects to be the habitation of men, or that men are fitted for this habitation, is true. But will it follow, even from the first, that the world, therefore, was made for the sake of man any more, than it will follow that it was made for any other species of animals, for of all whom, according to their several natures, it is equally well fitted, and for of all whom we may believe on this account very reasonably, that it was made as well as for us? It is as well fitted for BOWNCE as for you, with respect to physical nature, and with respect to moral nature, BOWNCE has little to do beyond hearkening to the still whispers, the secret suggestions, and the sudden influences of instinct.

stinct. In the works of men, the most complicated schemes produce, very hardly and very uncertainly, one single effect. In the works of God, one single scheme produces a multitude of different effects, and answers an immense variety of purposes. Whatever was the final cause of the world, whatever motive (for we must speak after the manner of men) the first cause had to create it, which motive could not arise from any thing without himself, and must be, therefore, resolved into his mere will; we conceive easily that infinite wisdom which determined, and infinite power which executed the plan of the universe had some secondary, some inferior regard in making this and every other planet, to all the creatures that were to inhabit them, tho neither any of these creatures nor all of them were, in a proper sense, the final causes for which these planets were created. When we look down on other animals, we discern a distance, but a very measurable distance between us and them. When we look up to our common Creator, the distance is immeasurable, for it is infinite. In the first view, as we have some superiority, we are ready to claim a preference due to us over them. But in the second, and relatively to God, we can boast of no such claim. As the distance is infinite from them, so it is from us, to him; for there are no degrees of more or less in infinite.

THIS reflection alone should have kept philosophers within the bounds of modesty. But neither this reflection, nor a great many others, which inward consciousness and outward observation suggest, have been able to do it. No men have reasoned so dogmatically about the divine nature and perfections, nor have supposed them so much on a level with human conceptions, as the philosophers and divines who have talked the most, and the most inconsistently by consequence, of their incomprehensibility. Some of the heathens asserted the soul of
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man to be a participation of the divinity, or an emanation from it. Christians have been very little more modest. St. AUSTIN taught, that the soul of man is the highest of created beings, and that there is nothing superior, except the Creator himself: and the philosophers, we speak of here, teach that God's manner of knowing, a secret as impenetrable as his manner of being, is the same as ours, that he knows by ideas, and that without them he could not have made, nor could govern what he has made*. The vanity of being rational, a title they ascribe to God as well as to man, turns their heads. But what is their rationality? The first principles of all their knowledge are not common to God and them, but to them and to the beasts of the field. The improvements they make, on the same principles, beyond their fellow creatures, are owing to this, that they have better, and, perhaps, more intellectual faculties than the others, as the others have better, and, perhaps, more corporeal senses than they have. The reason of this difference seems to be, that such improvements in knowledge are necessary to the well-being of men, to their station, and to their destination, as are not necessary to those of other animals. This reason will appear, I think, true, if we consider that as far as these improvements are necessary to the purposes I have mentioned, they are easy; the knowledge we acquire by them is real, and rationality is a perfection in our nature: whereas in proportion to the attempts we make to carry them beyond this point, they grow harder and harder, our knowledge grows less and less real, till it terminates in mere conjecture, or in manifest error, and this very rationality becomes an imperfection in our nature, or gives, as it gave to COTTA, a pretence to call it so.

* Vid. MALER.

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THIS might be illustrated by many examples, by that of religion particularly. Man is a religious as well as a social creature, made to know and to adore his Creator, to discover and to obey his will, to conform himself, not to an imaginary abstract reason of things, but to that reason which results from his own constitution, and from the constitution of the system to which he belongs, whereby many things indifferent in themselves and no way obligatory on other animals, cease to be indifferent, and are obligatory on him. Thus far the principles of religion, and the duties of it are easy to be known; and if the one were known, and the other known and practiced only thus far, it would have, in great measure at least, it's genuine effect. But men have not been content with this knowledge. Artificial theology and superstition have perplexed the principles, and overloaded the duties of it, till it is grown unintelligible, and in many instances impracticable, or unfit to be practiced.

GREATER powers of reason, and means of knowledge have been measured out to us than to other animals, that we might be able to fulfill the superior purposes of our destination, whereof religion is, no doubt, the chief. But they have been measured out to us thus far, and no further, whilst in those inferior purposes (for such we ought to esteem them) that regard animal life, other creatures have by nature the advantage over men. The elevation and pre-eminence of our species consist in the former alone. But tho they are great, they do not take us out of the class of animality; and the metaphysician who fancies himself wrapped up in pure intellect, and even abstracted from his material part, will feel hunger and thirst and roar out in a fit of the stone. I am far from thinking the condition of mankind as unhappy as the same writers,
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who maintain that the world was made for the sake of man, and man merely to have happiness communicated to him, represent it to be. But yet I am persuaded, and so must every man be who is capable of reflection, that his condition would have been very different from what it is, if the hypothesis of these men had been true. In short, without regard to the exaggerations of the elder PLINY, who makes the human state as despicable as he can, we shall find sufficient reason to say on our own observation of the progress of human life, and not of the beginnings of it only, how mad are men when they entertain such high opinions of their own elevation, and think themselves born to be proud! "Heu dementiam ab his
" initiis existimantium ad superbiam se genitos*!

LXIV.

TH O God does not govern the world by particular providences, and tho it seems to be contrary to what infinite wisdom has established that he should, yet are we not, nor has mankind ever been without God, and the evident marks of his providence in the world. Look back, as far as history and tradition give you any light. Consider the present course of things in the physical and moral systems. Which way soever you turn yourself, you will meet with God, "Deum
" videbis occurrentem tibi †," and may say to the divine what the good man, whom SOCRATES mentions in his ecclesiastical history, said to the philosopher ‡, my book is the nature of things, which is always at hand when I am desirous to read the words of God: "meus liber, o philosophe, est
" natura rerum, quae quidem praesto est quoties Dei verba le-

* PLIN. L. 7.

† SEN. de Benef.

‡ L. 4.

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