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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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LXVI.

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trusted to the reason of particular men. It is a principal object of the universal reason of mankind. For this purpose governments have been instituted, laws have been made, customs have been established, children have been trained up to morality by education, and men have been deterred from immorality by various punishments, which human justice inflicts. When these means are employed effectually in any society of men, the moral state of that society is happy. When they are employed ineffectually, which must be always the fault of those to whom government is committed, the state of that society is miserable. Individuals are the objects of human justice: societies of men, of divine justice. When the former is not exercised effectually, the latter is; and no physical causes produce their effects more naturally, nor more surely, than general depravity produces general misery.

LXVI.

SUCH is the constitution of things, and such the divine oeconomy in the government of mankind. God has given us the desire of happiness and the means of attaining to it. He has given us faculties sufficient to discover, and to improve, these means. What could we ask more of a beneficent Creator? Let us adore his goodness, and his justice (if we will ascribe our ideas of moral attributes to him) as well as his wisdom, and his power. Let us give him thanks for bestowing existence upon us, in the system to which we belong; whilst prophane antitheistical writers refuse to own, that he himself exists, unless there be another. Our state, in this world, is a state not of pure, but of mixed, happiness. As we are material beings, we are subject to generation and corruption, and to many physical evils that arise necessarily from this constitution.

tution. As we are intellectual beings, but endowed with very imperfect intelligence, we are liable to much error, and to many moral evils, that arise from hence, and that we bring on one another. If this were our case, without any thing more, the human state would be very deplorable indeed: and that it is our case we should be induced to think, if we gave credit to the partial representations of divines and atheists; one of whom defame, and the other deny, the Supreme Being. But our own experience, our own reflections, and, above all, the excellent writings of those who apply natural philosophy to confirm and improve natural religion, will lead us to God, by sensible demonstrations, much more strongly, than the others can lead us from him by metaphysical jargon, and theological declamation. In short, however mixed, and however moderate the general happiness of mankind may be, it is real, animal happiness: and he who affirms absolute non-existence preferable to existence in such a state as ours, like the persons *PLINY* alledges*, “qui non nasci optimum censerent aut quam ocyssimé aboleri,” scarcely deserves an answer. Let philosophers carry on this dispute as long as they please, it must always terminate in a question not hard to resolve; “whether it was most agreeable to the wisdom of the Creator, “to make the world and man as they are made; or to make “the former a wheel unfit to roll in it’s place, in the great “machine of the universe, and the latter a creature so superior to his actual rank in the scale of intelligent beings, that “this rank must have been void, and the scale imperfect?”

THAT there are other material intelligent creatures, inhabitants of other planets, we have great reason to believe, and none to doubt. As they may be superior to us in their na-

* Nat. Hist. L. 7.

ture and objects, in their several degrees less unworthy of the divine munificence, so their happiness may be greater than ours. Yet these creatures, even the noblest of them, must be liable to some inconveniencies at least, both physical and moral. Angels and glorified saints, who are said to live with God, and, therefore, above the reach of those effects of matter and motion which are felt in other systems, can be alone exempt from the first: and whether these beings, who are finite still however glorified, can be exempt from the latter, theology must determine; it is not an object of common sense. Nay, theology has already determined it, in the case of those angels and archangels, who were driven from heaven for their ambition and rebellion against God. Some divines there are, who assume that the expulsion of these superior beings made room for men; that the earth is a nursery for heaven; to which the elect, a competent number of whom will be completed before the end of the world, are to be admitted: and that as creatures of a lower class are encouraged to better their condition by a right use of their faculties, according to this oeconomy, so those of an higher, the highest of created beings, are deterred from the abuse of theirs. They may abuse these faculties then: and there may be moral evil, even in heaven*. But however all this may be, since infinite wisdom designed that there should be various orders of intellectual beings in the plan of the universe, differently placed, differently constituted, and some superior to others; it will follow that nothing can be more absurd than the complaints of creatures who are in one of these orders, that they are not in another, if, in truth, there are any creatures, except men, unreasonable enough to make such complaints. They complain of their own constitution, and of the constitution of the system wherein they are placed,

* Vid. Notes to the Treat. de Orig. Mali. C. 5. Sec. 5.

as loudly as if the Supreme Being was obliged in justice to give them their choice, in some inconceivable manner, how and where they would exist, before he made them to exist. They complain of the uniform conduct of that general providence which is over all his works, as if his justice, repugnant, in this case, to his wisdom, required that he should govern creatures, whom he brought into existence that they might compose a distinct order, and complete the scale of intellectual being, in a manner that would confound the several orders, and interrupt the scale. Some have condemned the creation, some the government of the world, and some both. The discoveries made, and every day making, in natural philosophy, have shewn so many things which were thought useless, or hurtful, to be necessary, or beneficial, that a man who should talk like *LUCRETIUS*, and others, about the physical world, would be at this time ridiculous. But he who talks as extravagantly as *COTTA*, and many others, about the moral world, is still sure to be heard with attention.

THAT creatures should censure their Creator, in the government of the world he has made and preserves, would appear surprizing and shocking, if men had not been familiarized with this language. But how should they not be familiarized with it, when the preachers of natural and revealed religion have been the loudest in holding it, tho not the first indeed, for they have done nothing more than repeat what all the atheists, from *DEMOCRITUS* and *EPICURUS*, have said? Like them, they have insisted much on what they assume that God should have done, and has not done, to promote and secure the happiness of his human creatures; whilst they have passed over lightly what he has been pleased to do, for both these purposes. I might undertake to prove that *TITUS* and *TRAJAN* were tyrants of the Roman empire as well as *NERO*, by
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the same method whereby they attempt to prove that the Supreme Being is the tyrant of the world he governs. They have pushed such arguments on this subject, and they have pushed them so far, that the whole tribe of these writers, like WOLLASTON and CLARKE whom I have mentioned, do in effect renounce the God whom you and I adore, as much as the rankest of the atheistical tribe. Your priests, and our parsons, will exclaim most pathetically, and rail outrageously, at this assertion; but have a little patience, and I will prove it to their shame, to be true.

THAT there is room for much contingency in the physical and moral world, under the direction of a general providence, has been said already; and that, amidst these contingencies, happiness, outward happiness at least, may fall to the lot of wicked, and outward unhappiness to that of good men. But then, this general proposition is of very uncertain application, too uncertain, by far, to be made a rule by which to judge of the dispensations of providence. There is, generally speaking, less immorality, and less morality, worthy to draw down interpositions of divine vengeance or favor, and more innocence, perhaps, in the world, than is commonly apprehended. But however this be, divines, above all men, have the least reason to insist on the objection, taken from the assumed unhappiness of good men, since they cannot do so without manifest inconsistency. That innocent children should be punished to the third and fourth generation, for the sins of their guilty fathers, nay that the whole race of mankind should be punished for the sin of one man, they hold agreeable to the justice of God; because they believe on the faith of the scriptures, that he has proceeded, and proceeds, in this manner, with mankind. But that men, apparently innocent, should be exposed to any sort of evil, they hold repugnant to his justice; altho
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they affirm on their knowledge, not their belief, that his providence suffers this to happen in the course of human affairs.

DIVINES are not only thus inconsistent, they have on another account, and, as preachers of christianity, a worse grace than any men whatever to cry out so loudly against the evil that happens sometimes to good men. They assert, that the law of grace is much more perfect than the law of nature, and that revelation inspires much more sublime notions of the deity, and of piety towards him, than reason. But how has it come to pass, then, that heathen theists defended the divine providence against atheists who attacked it, and recommended a cheerful resignation to all the dispensations of it; whereas christian divines have made a common cause with atheists to attack this providence, and to murmur against the necessary submission that they pay? Admirable precepts, and illustrious examples, of the first kind, may be quoted from paganism. I will mention the first that occurs to me. SENECA, who pleaded the cause of God against atheists, as I plead it actually against divines, heard the philosopher DEMETRIUS break out in his sufferings into this rapturous expression: "Immortal gods, I have but one complaint to make: why was your will no sooner communicated to me? Had I known it sooner, I would have run to meet what I am now called to suffer." The passage is so very fine, that it deserves a place not in the margin, but in the text, and to be cited in the original. "Hoc unum dii immortales de vobis queri possum, quod non ante mihi voluntatem vestram notam fecistis; prior enim ad ista venissem, ad quae nunc vocatus adsum." Few can arrive at this pious fortitude of mind, but we should all endeavor it: and the christian, who goes murmuring and complaining through this
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life against the justice of God, deserves little to taste of his goodness in any other state.

HEATHEN, as well as christian, philosophers, who believed that all things were made for the sake of man, found it hard to reconcile the phaenomena to this hypothesis: and, unless they could do so, they found themselves embarrassed with this hypothesis, in maintaining the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful Being, against the cavils of atheists. The former, however, did their utmost, both on the supposition of a general providence, and of particular providences, to answer all these cavils. They did it too, not only plausibly, but strongly, in many instances, and would suffer, in no case, the hypothesis of a future state, if they did at all admit any such, to unravel the demonstration they had made. The hypothesis might be true: they knew that the demonstration was so. The hypothesis might be true in part only, and relatively to some of the phaenomena: they knew that the demonstration was true in the whole, and that the infinite wisdom and power of God were manifest alike in all the phaenomena. They might have had an entire recourse to this hypothesis, if they had pleased; for it had been invented early in Aegypt, and elsewhere; and have attempted to untye, by one, the knot they had tied by another, as christian divines have done since. But this doctrine was never firmly enough established in the philosophical, whatever it was in the vulgar, creed; and besides, they might think it insufficient for their purpose in any of the various manners wherein it was taught.

THE conduct of christian philosophers has been very different from this. Far from defending the providence of God, they have joined in the clamor against it. They have brought him to the bar of humanity; and the self-existent Being, the
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first Cause of all things that are, the Creator, the Preserver, the Governor of the universe, in whom we live, and move, and have our beings, has been tried, convicted, and condemned, for his government of the world, on the general principles of human justice; like the governor of a province, or any other inferior magistrate. Nothing has hindered, even those who pretend to be his messengers, his ambassadors, his plenipotentiaries, from renouncing their allegiance to him, as they themselves have the front to avow, but the hypothesis of another state; wherein it is supposed that he will vindicate his justice, and make amends for whatever is irregular, and unjust, in this, by punishments and rewards in that. On this hypothesis alone they insist: and therefore, if this will not serve their turn, God is disowned by them, as effectually as if he was so in terms.

HEATHEN legislators might have reason to add the terrors of another life to those of the judgments of God, and of the laws of man, in this. Heathen priests might have reason to support these opinions by the authority of their pretended revelations, and by the mysterious rites of religion. But what reason could theists have, at any time, to pass condemnation on the whole scheme of God's providence as it is exercised in this world, in order to confirm an opinion, by reason, that must stand on the bottom of revelation, or on none? On this bottom it would spread, and prevail as far, and as much, as the revelation itself. We see that it does so both in christianism and in mahometanism. On this bottom it would do some good most certainly, and it could do no hurt. The mischief lyes in the way of proof. Reason establishes the belief of an all-perfect Being. Revelation supposes it. If we impute any imperfection to this Being, we shake the belief of him. The imputation implies contradiction, and reason is set in opposition to reason. But, on the other hand, some things may be admitted piously, on the faith
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of a revelation, concerning which we can scarce attempt to reason without impiety. Thus we may believe that men are to live again in another state, and that they will be dealt with there, even with some regard to the use they have made of their free-will here. But to enforce this hypothesis by any attempts to prove that the dispensations of providence here are unjust, or to advance any thing concerning the assumed future state, which cannot be reconciled to the divine perfections, is impious and absurd. It is impious and absurd, therefore, to rest the demonstrated existence of an all-perfect Being on an hypothesis that imputes real injustice to him hereafter, as an expedient to screen him from the imputation of imaginary injustice here: and the divines, who do this, if they are not atheists, which it is reasonable as well as charitable to believe that none of them are, must be esteemed abettors at least of atheism, by every man who examines impartially their whole proceeding.

LXVII.

METAPHYSICAL writers counsel us sometimes very gravely to silence imagination, that we may attend to experience, and hearken to the voice of reason. The advice is good, and they would neither puzzle themselves, nor perplex knowledge, if they took it as they give it. But who can forbear smiling, when these very men abandon themselves, at the same instant, to all the seductions and to all the transports of their own imaginations? No men do so more than these, not even the persons of your own tribe: and, as many of their writings, from those of PLATO down to some that are very modern, might pass more justly for poems than for philosophical treatises, so was I not in the wrong when I advised

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