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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

LXVII.

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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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you to suppose rather that BARNEVELT or SCRIBLERUS had proved your rape of the lock to be philosophical, than to suppose they had proved it to be a political poem. These philosophers are so afraid of ignorance, that they expose themselves to error, which is worse. What they imagine presumptuously may be, they pass dogmatically for that which is, in matters of the first philosophy above all. You carry on your poetical systems per ambages deorumque ministeria: and, for this purpose, no other being can be so like to man as a poetical god, nor any intricacies of your marvellous so great as those of imaginary abstractions, imaginary analogies, and delusive sounds, which these men employ to carry on theirs. It is hard very often to discover their meaning, or even whether they have any meaning or no: and when we examine closely what is intelligible in their writings, we find it sometimes hard, and sometimes impossible, to reconcile clearly and consistently many things that they advance in maintainance of the same system, and in a supposed conformity to it.

THIS world is called, by some, the porch or entrance into another. We go from the porch into the house by death; for death does not destroy that soul, that self which is the living agent. It destroys, indeed, the gross material body, or, to speak in the familiar sublime of SOCRATES, the soul wears out her suit of cloathes*. Nay, she was said to wear out so many, in different states, both before and after this, that there was some apprehension taken lest she should wear out herself at last. They who assert a future as well as the present life connect the two, in some of their discourses, so intimately together, that they assume the moral government of God, which begins in one, to be carried on more perfectly and to be complete in

* Vid. PHAED. in PLATO.

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the other. Thus virtue has a sufficient sphere of action, and all the consequences of it have time to follow. Good men may all unite with one another, and with other orders of virtuous creatures, and form one blessed society in a future state: nay, this happy effect of virtue, in distant scenes and periods, may have a tendency to amend those vicious creatures, throughout the universal kingdom of God, who are capable of amendment*. They who express themselves in this manner, who think that virtue is militant here, and may be and is often overborne, but that it may combat with greater advantage hereafter, and prevail completely, and enjoy its consequent rewards in some future state, tho they think the present a state of probation and trial, cannot think it to be such finally. But the language of divines, in general, is different. Tho they are not quite agreed about the eternity of torments in hell, yet they are agreed that our state of probation ends with this life; that however we are disposed of from the hour of death to the day of judgment, that judgment will be determined by what we have done in this state; and that the exact distribution of rewards and punishments then made, will, and alone can, set the present disorders and inequalities right, and justify on the whole that scheme of providence †, which appears in the small portion of it that we see so inexplicable, so confused, and so unworthy of infinite wisdom, justice and goodness.

THE first of these theological hypotheses, for such they are to reason, independently of revelation, one as much as the other, may be received. Far from accusing directly, and excusing indirectly the providence of God, it does not so much as imply any thing repugnant to the perfections of the divine

* Vid. Anal. of Relig. P. 1. C. 3. † Vid. CLARKE'S Evid. Prop. 4.

nature. I do not presume to say, that these perfections require it should be true, nor that my understanding is able fully to comprehend it. But since I may believe it true, tho I cannot believe the latter to be so without contradicting the fundamental principles of theism, I embrace with joy the pleasing expectations it raises in my mind. The antient and modern epicureans provoke my indignation, when they boast, as a mighty acquisition, their pretended certainty that the body and the soul die together*. If they had this certainty then, would the discovery be so very comfortable? When I consult my reason, I am ready to ask these men, as TULLY asked their predecessors, where that old doating woman is who trembles at the acherontia templa, the alta orci, and all the infernal hobgoblins, furies with their snakes and whips, devils with their cloven feet and lighted torches? Was there need of so much philosophy to keep these mighty genii from living under the same terrors? I would ask further, is the middle between atheism and superstition so hard to find? Or may not these men serve as examples to prove what PLUTARCH affirms, "that "superstition leads to atheism? For me, who am no philosopher, nor presume to walk out of the high road of plain common sense, † but content myself to be governed by the dictates of nature, and am, therefore, in no danger of becoming atheistical, superstitious, or sceptical, I should have no difficulty which to chuse, if the option was proposed to me, to exist after death, or to die whole, as it has been called. Be there two worlds, or be there twenty, the same God is the God of all, and wherever we are, we are equally in his power. Far from fearing my Creator, that all-perfect Being whom I adore, I should fear to be no longer his creature.

* Se, cum tempus mortis venisset, totos esse perituros.

† Introd. to Princ. of hum. knowl.