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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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LXVIII.

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LXVIII.

HAVING said thus much to shew why the first of these hypotheses, which I am willing to admit, may be true, tho it has no foundation in scripture or reason, and is purely imaginary, it remains that I shew more at large why the last, which I reject on principles of reason, must be on those principles necessarily false. When divines abandon the strong holds of revelation, wherein they are, or should be, made secure, they have no right to expect submission out of their province; and they must be content, when they reason prophanely or absurdly, to be sent back to revelation. It is prophane even to insinuate, and much more to affirm peremptorily, that the proceedings of God towards man in the present life are unjust: and if that could be admitted, it would be absurd to admit that this may be set right; which means, if the words have any meaning, that this injustice must cease to be injustice, on the received hypothesis of his proceedings towards man in another life. One is prophane, notwithstanding all the questions they beg to support the charge. The other is absurd, on the very principles on which they argue, and according to our clearest and most distinct ideas or notions of human justice.

THAT a due proportion of reward and punishment, that reparation and terror are objects essential to the constitution of human justice, will not be denied. That which falls short of these is partial. That which goes beyond them is cruel. Men are liable to err on both sides. God on neither. Men may have, therefore, amends to make; God never can: and when we say amends have been made, we imply, that injustice
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has been committed. Now, as absurd as it appears to say this, when we speak of the proceedings of God towards good men in the other life, we must say it, for we have nothing else to say, if we assume that he has dealt unjustly by them in this life; since it is beyond omnipotence to cause that which has been done not to have been done. The happy state of good men in heaven, according to this bold hypothesis, is not so much the reward of the virtue they practised on earth, as an act of God's justice against himself, as it were, an act, in short, by which he makes them reparation, and an ample one it is, for the injustice he did them here. The miserable state of wicked men in hell is an exercise of justice delayed, but exercised so severely at last, that it would exceed vastly all the necessary degrees of terror, if any of these creatures remained after it in an undetermined condition wherein terror might have its effect.

Tho reparation and terror are the essential objects of justice in the punishment of crimes, yet it is not sufficient that they be made so in general only. Justice requires that punishments, and we must say the same of rewards, the two sanctions of all laws, be measured out in various degrees and manners, according to the various circumstances of particular cases, and in a due proportion to them. Such is the procedure of providence in the moral government of the world; for tho particular interpositions to reward or punish particular men, if there are any, are too rare and too conjectural to pass for rules and measures of his government, and tho it be apparent that the immediate regard of providence is directed to men collectively, not individually, yet the divine wisdom has provided means to punish individuals, by directing men to form societies, and to establish laws, in the execution of which civil magistrates are in some sort the vicegerents of
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providence. To them distributive justice is committed, and when this fails to have its effect, when the immorality of individuals becomes that of an whole society, then the judgments of God follow: and as men are regarded collectively, they are punished collectively in the order of a general providence. This is evidently the oeconomy of God's government of mankind in this life. That which it is assumed will take place hereafter, and according to which he will proceed eternally in another life, is the very reverse of this. Every individual human creature is to be tried by the son of God, that is by God himself, at the great day, in the valley of JEHOSEPHAT. The criminal, who has been justified here, will be condemned there. The innocent man, who has been condemned here, will be justified there. The most secret actions, nay the thoughts of every heart, will be laid open, and sentence will be pronounced accordingly. What now does that justice require, if it may be called justice, when it tends neither to reparation nor terror, on the principles of which we argue? It requires most certainly that rewards and punishments should be measured out in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual. But instead of this, it is assumed, conformably to the christian revelation and to the doctrine of PLATO, that the righteous are set on the right hand of the judge, and the wicked on the left, from whence they are transported to heaven, or plunged into hell. They are tried individually, they seem to be rewarded or punished collectively, without any distinction of the particular cases which have been so solemnly determined, and without any proportion observed between the various degrees of merit and demerit, of innocence and of guilt, in the application of these rewards and punishments.

I ask the men who maintain that justice is the same in God as it is in our ideas of it, and who presume on these ideas to censure the divine providence, when they see such as they esteem good involved sometimes in public calamities with such as they esteem wicked, whether this be a jot more repugnant to their ideas of justice, and of the moral fitness of things, whereon they insist so much, than it is to reward the greatest and the least degree of virtue, and to punish the greatest and the least degree of vice, alike? The particular rules of justice consist in the distinction and proportion that have been mentioned; and unless they are preserved, the general rules must be of course perverted. I ask what these persons would say, if they beheld a man, who had done some trifling good to society, recompenced like one who had saved his country, or if they; who were convicted of petty larceny, should be delivered over to the hangman, at one of our sessions, with those who had been found guilty of assassination and robbery? It may be said of eternal torments in hell, that they have been made known to us by revelation, that there are, no doubt, sufficient reasons for them, which we are as unable to discover as we were to discover that there would be any such torments; but that these reasons not having been revealed, it is in vain to enquire about them, or about the various degrees of beatitude and of misery, wherewith good men may be rewarded, and ill men punished in another life. Now this answer is certainly conclusive on the hypothesis of a revelation, and being so, it should have hindered those divines, who maintain this eternity, from attempting it on arbitrary suppositions, and on such frivolous reasonings as are not only unworthy of infinite wisdom, but even of common sense in a very low degree, what reputation soever the authors of them have had in theology. How comes it to pass now, that the
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first of these divines account for an eternity of torments, and would, and might as well account for the apparently unjust equality of rewards to all the good and of punishments to all the wicked in another world, on the reasonable supposition, that the proceedings of providence are righteous and just, tho' determined by reasons incomprehensible to us; and will not suffer themselves to be silenced by the same answer, when they clamor against the justice of the same providence, because good men are sometimes unhappy, and ill men happy in the present world? With what front can the last of these divines insist on all the trifling reasons they bring to reconcile an eternity of torments to the goodness and justice of an all-perfect Being, or may bring to shew that the foolish paradox of the stoics and the bloody laws of DRACO are agreeable to these attributes, whilst they reject the arguments, that are drawn from what God has done in the constitution of the human nature, against what they assume that he designed to do?

IF acts of goodness and mercy, carried to excess, may become instances of weakness, or of something worse; if acts of severity may become, in the same manner, instances of cruelty; if the bounds of the former are limited by the proportion necessary to encourage the virtuous, and to excite the vicious, who are capable of it, to amendment; if those of the latter are limited by the proportion necessary to make reparation, and imprint terror on the minds of men; if it be arbitrary and tyrannical to make no distinction of persons in dissimilar, as it is partial to make this distinction in similar cases; if all this be agreeable to the clearest and most distinct ideas and notions we are able to frame of justice and equity; and if we are to judge of the conduct of God's providence in another world by these, as we must be, if we are to judge by these of the conduct of his providence in this world: if all this be so, I have a

right to conclude that they, who impute imaginary injustice to God here, impute very real injustice to him hereafter; and that it is impossible to believe that such a man as CLARKE, to instance no other, could be in earnest, when he affirmed that an exact distribution of rewards and punishments would be made, by this hypothesis, in a future state, and that such a scheme of providence would appear worthy of infinite goodness and justice, as well as wisdom. He forgot, when he asserted this, or he hoped his readers would forget, what he had asserted in another place, by which he deprived himself of the usual evasion, that he and all his tribe employ whenever they assume that God says, or does, any thing that it is impossible to reconcile to the divine perfections. He could have no recourse to the incomprehensibility of God's judgments on this occasion. He had asserted, that the moral attributes are the same in God, as they are in our ideas. On this theological, for it is nothing less than a theistical principle, he had joined in the common cry against the irregularities, inequalities, and disorders of this world, on which the charge of injustice against the providence of God is founded. To make this good, he appeals to human understanding. He appeals then to the same understanding, to the same ideas and notions, for the truth and sufficiency of the hypothesis, by which all that is amiss here is to be set right, and the divine providence is to be justified on the whole. If the truth and sufficiency of it to this purpose cannot be so made out, the cause of God is evidently betrayed by these men. They plead most strenuously against his justice, and they seem to plead booty for it.

To assume that the conduct of divine providence towards mankind in this world has one criterion, and in the next world another, would be too extravagant. God is the same, his attributes are the same, he can act against them in neither; and
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if we are competent to judge what they require of him in one, we are competent to judge what they require of him in both. Concerning his dispensations in both, therefore, we may argue on our general or abstract notions of human justice, when we defend his providence against the accusations, and even the pretended justifications of it by such a writer as CLARKE, who, like another EUNOMIUS, presumes to know God, his moral nature at least, and to teach others to know him, as well as he knows himself. In arguing with other divines, who are less presumptuous, for some such there are, who do not pretend to reduce the whole oeconomy of God's dispensations within the comprehension of human reason, we have another rule, sufficient to combat this hypothesis, and to secure us from error, one part of which they follow readily, and the other part of which they are obliged, like the rest of their brethren, to evade in particular instances, tho' none of them dare to reject it avowedly and in general. The rule, I mean, is this: first, that we adore the Supreme Being in all his works, and in all the known proceedings of his providence, without assuming any postulata on the strength of our own reason, which are neither confirmed, nor evidently suggested by them, and which may be set in opposition to the wisdom, goodness, or justice of this Being, by dogmatical reasoners à priori. Secondly, that we admit no proposition to be true, nor any argument valid, which expresses or implies, on what authority soever, the least conceivable imperfection in God. As to the first, the divines we speak of here practise it very laudably when they refuse to raise the importance of man, and the benevolence of God towards him so high, as to affirm, like the others, that he is the final cause of the world, and that the happiness, God was desirous to communicate to him was the final cause of his creation; when they take away these principal foundations of the accusations brought against providence, and shew the ac-

cusations themselves to be made up of exaggeration, and false representation. As to the second, neither their case, nor their conduct, is the same. In the character of philosophers they are under no necessity of maintaining this hypothesis, nor obliged to excuse that providence they never accused. But in the character of divines they are under this necessity, and their profession obliges them to defend every part of the system it was instituted to defend. They defend it, therefore, and they find the task of doing so in concert with their brethren much harder, than that of defending the cause of God against their brethren and the atheists in alliance, by shewing that there is more good than evil in this world, and that the happiness of mankind is provided for sufficiently in it.

LXIX.

IF the immortality of the soul could be proved by physical arguments, the eternity of rewards and punishments would be no necessary corollary deducible from it. But this immortality is a consequence necessarily deducible from this eternity. This immortality, therefore, seems to rest on a moral proof, and an inverted order of reasoning, since if the justice of God requires that there should be a state of eternal rewards and punishments, the soul of man is immortal, certainly, and the same persons, who were virtuous or vicious here, must receive their retribution there. To conceive this personal identity, which is ascertained by our consciousness, and which is known as intuitively as our existence in the present, and must be so in the future state, unless we drink of the water of Lethe by the way, is not difficult surely; and it may be matter of surprise to observe how many scruples have been raised concerning it by men who seem to embrace the rest of this doctrine without