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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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LXXI.

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be absolutely impenetrable. We are able to account, in great measure, for the general distribution of good and evil here, tho not perhaps for every particular instance. But we are wholly unable to say what will happen hereafter. This only we know, that neither here, nor hereafter, God will deal with his creatures in direct violation of those natures and essences of things which he himself has constituted, and has given them the means of knowing. He will not deal with them according to one rule here, and according to another hereafter.

As we must believe, if we think worthily of the Supreme Being, that he will not proceed with his human creatures, in any state, in violation of that justice which he has constituted in the nature of things, and whereof he has made them able to acquire ideas and notions; so we must be on our guard lest we should be induced to believe that he will proceed, at any time, agreeably to those affections and passions which have so great a share in directing our conduct, and so much influence over our thoughts. Sovereign reason is exempt from affection and passion; and the great cause of error in theism is this, we judge of it with all our affections and passions about us. What the effects of this cause were in the heathen world we all know. But few of us consider that the same cause has worked ever since, works still, and if it does not produce a crop of errors as foul and as abominable as those, it produces a crop not less abundant.

## LXXI.

**W**HATEVER the vulgar religion of the heathen taught, their philosophers, even those of them who assumed providence to be the most active in directing the affairs

affairs of this world, were unanimous in their opinion, that the Supreme Being was never angry, nor ever did harm\*. The first part needs no commentary, the second very little. They believed that God punished in this life, but they believed that his punishments were inflicted for the general advantage of mankind; that the evil which happened to the virtuous was designed by his goodness to try their virtue, to preserve, and to improve it by exercise; that the evil which came on the wicked was directed by his justice to chastise their crimes, to terrify, and reform; and that a being, who acted always on motives of goodness and justice, could be never said with truth and propriety to do harm. Such was the language of heathen divines, and thus they represented the proceedings of God to man. But our artificial theology holds another, which is very different. Let us mention some of those doctrines which are of this kind, and begin and terminate in that which is here opposed particularly. According to them, God loves, and he hates, he is partial, angry, and revengeful. He creates some rational beings with a determination to save them, and others only to damn them. It is not sure that repentance and amendment can appease the wrath of God, nor any thing less than a sacrifice. He has given a law, the law of nature and of reason, to all his human creatures; the sanctions of it are a natural tendency of virtue to the happiness, and of vice to the misery of mankind: but these sanctions are so imperfect, that they cannot procure obedience to the law, even with the supplemental help of occasional interpositions on the part of God, and of a constant discipline of civil laws on the part of man. To supply this imperfection, therefore, there must be necessarily some fur-

\* Num iratum timemus Jovem? At hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum . . . . . nunquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere. TULL. de Off. L. 3.

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ther sanctions of this law, and these are the rewards and punishments reserved to a future state.

HERE is ample room for reflections. I shall make but three. The term "imperfection" is, in this case, employed equivocally; for we may conceive an absolute and a relative perfection, and that which appears imperfect in one of these considerations, may be perfect in the other, according to the design of the lawgiver. We may presume to say, that if it had been in the order of God's designs to make the state of mankind as happy as the universal and steady observation of this law would make it, he would have made the sanctions of the law as perfect as the law. But we see by what he has done, which is the only sure way of knowing what he designed, that we were made to live in a state of moderate and mixed happiness. His law shews us the perfection of our nature, in which that of our happiness consists. Reason draws us to it, affections and passions from it; and our free-will, inclining sometimes to one, and sometimes to the other, maintains that state which mankind is appointed to hold in the order of rational beings. Had the sanctions of the law of nature been stronger, we should have risen above this state. Had they been weaker, we should have sunk below it. Thus they are relatively perfect, relatively to the design of the lawgiver; and neither the goodness, nor the justice of God, required that we should be made better, nor happier, than we are.

BUT, further, if we will suppose any other sanctions necessary to enforce the original and universal law of God, the law of our nature, they cannot be those of a future state. Future rewards and punishments are sanctions of the evangelical, as temporal were of the mosaical law. Sanctions must be contained in the law, they must be a part of it. In their promul-  
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gation they must precede, as the law does, necessarily all acts of obedience, or disobedience to it; tho in their execution they are retrospective to these acts, and are the consequences of them. So likewise new sanctions may be added to an old law by the same authority that made it. But justice requires that the new be as public as the old, and that the authority of them be as well ascertained to every one who is bound by the law. These conditions are essential, there can be no sanction without them; and therefore the rewards and punishments of a future state, which have not these conditions, are no sanctions of the natural law. Reason and experience, that taught men this law, shewed them the sanctions of it. But neither of them pointed out these. Have we any grounds to believe, that they were known to the antediluvian world? Do they stand at the head or tail of the seven precepts given to the sons of NOAH? Were they so much as mentioned by MOSES, who had need of every sanction, that his knowledge, or his imagination, could suggest, to govern the unruly people to whom he gave a law in the name of God? Were they believed, was that of future punishments, at least, believed by any of the philosophers of Greece? PYTHAGORAS told strange stories, indeed, of the infernal regions, where he had been in his several transmigrations from body to body; and PLATO had his informations from ERUS the Pamphylian, who came back like a messenger sent on purpose to give an account of this new discovered world. But were they in earnest? It would be ridiculous to think that they were. Both of them affected to be lawgivers, and it is no wonder that in this character they employed an hypothesis, which other lawgivers had employed with success in those eastern nations with which they were acquainted.

FROM such religions, from such philosophy, and from such political institutions, the jews, who picked up many scraps of all these among the Aegyptians and their neighbours in the east, introduced the doctrine of future rewards and punishments into their own soon after the captivity of Babylon at least. But whenever they introduced it, this doctrine was not of their own growth most certainly. It was not derived from their original, revelation: and accordingly it was not received by that sect who adhered strictly to the law. Thus we see that this assumed double sanction, far from being coeval with the law of nature, or any positive law of God, was unknown long to the nations who lived under the former, and even to his chosen people who lived under the latter; and that when it was known, and wherever it was known, it was plainly of human, not of divine authority.

My third reflection is this. As the double sanction of rewards and punishments in a future state was in fact invented by men, it appears to have been so by the evident marks of humanity that characterise it. The notions whereon it is founded are taken rather from the defects, than the excellencies of the human nature, and favour more of the human passions, than of justice or prudence; for *SENECA* said very consistently, tho' *PLATO*, whom he quotes, very inconsistently, "nemo prudens punit quia peccatum est, sed ne peccetur." How worthily soever some philosophers might think of the Supreme Being in this, and in other respects, who did not believe that God spared the wicked in this world in opposition to his justice, that they might have an apparent reason to give for his punishment of them in another world in opposition to his mercy and justice both; the vulgar heathen believed their *JUPITER*, as well as their inferior divinities, liable to  
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so many human passions, that they might be easily induced to believe him liable, in his government of mankind, to those of love and hatred, of anger and vengeance. They might attribute these to him in his public, as well as the others in his private capacity; for, according to them, he acted in both: and it is hard to say which of these passions could be attributed to him with greater irreverence. The jews indeed, as often as they made God descend from heaven, and as much as they made him reside on earth, were far from cloathing him with corporeity, and imputing corporeal vices to him. But the very first, and almost every other point of their theology, history, and tradition shewed him in two other capacities, one not so shocking as what the heathens imputed to JUPITER in one capacity, but little less irreverent; for the Creator of all things, the one Supreme Being, was at the same time, according to all these, the tutelary local deity of a family, and a nation, with whom he entered into covenants that bound him and them mutually. I need to descend into no further particulars. They are enough known, and extremely suitable to the first principle of this system, which contains such instances of partiality in love, and hatred, of furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance in a long series of arbitrary judgments, and bloody executions, as no people on earth, but this, would have ascribed, I do not say to God, but to the worst of those monsters who are suffered, or sent by God, for a short time, to punish the iniquity of men. Is it any matter of wonder now, that the greatest part of a people trained up in such notions of the Supreme Being, and of his arbitrary government here, should be disposed to receive a heathenish doctrine, which taught nothing more arbitrary, tho a little more cruel, of his proceedings hereafter? Is it any matter of wonder that they, who believed God inflicted punishments to the third and fourth generation on innocent persons, should believe that he punished

offenders themselves eternally; if even they did not soften this severity by a metempsychosis, or some other way which I do not well remember, nor think it worth my while to examine?

THIS doctrine was in vogue in the church of MOSES, when that of JESUS began. The sadducees declined, the pharisees flourished, and the great systematizer of christianity was himself a pharisee. He, who insists so signally on an arbitrary exercise of the power of God, might have established very consistently this doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments, by his gospel, if it had been established by no other. But it was part of the original revelation; and how absurd soever it might be in the jews to take it from the gentiles, who had taught it without either reason or revelation to authorize them, it might seem reasonable to the christians to adopt it. When the jews assumed it on the faith of idolatrous and superstitious people, they added a new sanction to an old law. When the christians adopted it, they received the new law, and the new sanction together, on the faith of the same revelation. Thus one objection to the doctrine was prevented, and every man, who entered into the new covenant, knew this condition of it before hand. But the other objections remained still in force; and on the whole it was found so impossible to reconcile this sanction of eternal punishments to the divine attributes, and these future invisible judgments of God to the actual proceedings of his providence, that in the early days of christianity it was rejected by some not inferior to any in knowledge or in zeal.