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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

LXXII.

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THE hypothesiſ of a rotation of ſouls, out of which even the ſoul of CHRIST was not, I think, excepted, at leaſt by ORIGEN, ſeemed preferable to this. The makers of ſyſtems ſaw that the general tendency of virtue to promote the happineſs, and of vice to promote the unhappineſs of mankind, by which God made it the common intereſt of his human creatures to cultivate one, and to reſtrain the other, were the ſole means that his infinite wiſdom had ordained to this end in the ordinary courſe of his providence; and that, if the wicked were ſometimes puniſhed, either collectively or individually, by extraordinary interpoſitions real or apparent of the ſame providence, this happened rarely, after long forbearance, and not till the meaſure of iniquity was full. They ſaw that the mercy of God was in this manner of proceeding as conſpicuous as his juſtice, and that both were directed to maintain ſuch a moral ſtate as the imperfection of human nature admitted. No wonder then if they found it hard to believe that the ſame God, who dealt thus with his creatures here, dealt ſo differently with them hereafter; and that he, who puniſhed to a gracious end, the maintainance of a moral ſyſtem, with meaſure and proportion here, puniſhed to no end at all, when this ſyſtem was at an end, with inconceivable and eternal torments. They might think, according to the vulgar theological notion, that the wrath of God againſt finners for what they had done in this ſyſtem was not appeaſed when they went out of it. But they might think too, and it is plain they did think, that wrath itſelf could not exceed all proportion ſo far, as to appoint a ſtate of eternal torments to ſucceed a very ſhort ſtate of probation. They mingled therefore ſome notions of juſtice with this of wrath, and imagined
ſeveral

several states of probation; that souls, for instance, were sent to inform some bodies in recompence, or punishment of what they had done in others; that the wicked suffered for their impurity, but that in new states of probation they would have new occasions of purification.

By some such hypotheses they endeavored to soften a doctrine that shocked their reason, and could not be reconciled to any moral attribute, no, nor to the physical attributes of God, not to his wisdom at least. But the general tide of artificial theology ran the other way; and time, and dogmatical affirmation established absurdity in this case, as they have done in many. Father and councils decreed, and christians believed, that the Supreme Being dooms almost all his rational creatures, all whom these men do not think fit to save, to eternal torments for what they have done in this life. He created them, in effect, to be eternally miserable, according to this doctrine, since the term of this life can be reckoned for nothing in an infinite duration, and yet is to decide their state to all eternity. The doctrine we speak of assumes such a proceeding necessary to satisfy divine justice; whereas in truth it can be ascribed to no principle, but that of anger, and to the revenge of a being who punishes to the full extent of his power, and merely for the pleasure of punishing, and without any regard to justice, creatures who did not offend him merely for the pleasure of offending him, creatures who had free will, and made wrong elections; creatures who might plead, for that plea the worst of them might make, if not in excuse for their crimes, yet in mitigation of their punishment, their frailties, their passions, the imperfections of their nature, and the numerous temptations to which they stood exposed.