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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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LXXIII.

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## LXXIII.

IT is justly matter of scandal, and it would be matter of surprize, to hear men, who acknowledge an all-perfect Being, and who speak with so much reverence of him on some occasions, speak of him with so little on this, and others, if we did not observe in general that foolish presumption with which they are apt to erect themselves into the standard and measure of every thing; and in particular that prophane licence which the christian theology has derived from the jewish, and which divines have rendered so familiar and so habitual, that men blaspheme without knowing they blaspheme, and that their very devotion is impious. The licence, I mean, is that of reasoning and of speaking, even in common conversation, of the divine, as of the human, nature, operations, and proceedings; sometimes with, and sometimes without the salvo of those distinguishing epithets and forms of speech which can in very few instances distinguish enough. The jewish scriptures ascribe to God not only corporeal appearance, but corporeal action, and all the instruments of it; eyes to see, ears to hear, mouth and tongue to articulate, hands to handle, and feet to walk. Divines tell us, indeed, that we are not to understand all this according to the literal signification. The meaning is, they say, that God has a power to execute all those acts, to the effecting of which these parts in us are instrumental\*. The literal signification is indeed abominable, and the flimsy analogical veil thrown over it, is stolen from the wardrobe of EPICURUS; for he taught that the gods had not literally bodies, but something like to bodies, "quasi corpus:" not blood, but something like to

\* Vid. Serm. of the archbishop of Dublin, on Rom. viii. 29, 30.

blood, "quasi sanguinem.†" This analogy, if it could be allowed, would justify in good measure your HOMER as a philosopher, for as a poet he wanted no excuse; and something of this kind has been attempted. But who is there, philosopher, or poet, except jewish and christian rabbins, that can employ in good earnest images taken from corporeal substance, from corporeal action, and from the instruments of it, to give us notions in any degree proper of God's manner of being, and of that divine inconceivable energy in which the action of God consists, and by which the natural and moral worlds were produced, and are preserved and governed? The more human they are, the less adequate they must be; and whilst they do no good one way, they do much hurt another. They cannot exalt, they must debase our conceptions, and accustom the mind insensibly to confound divine with human ideas and notions, God with man. This happened in the case of the anthropomorphites, who imagined that God had an human body, because it was said by MOSES that he created man in his own image. So dangerous are these expressions, whose literal sense is obvious to all, whilst the analogical is understood by few, and attended to by fewer. So false is the reason given in excuse for them, that we must know God this way, or not at all. Far from making us know him better, they lead us into error. They make us unknow him, if I may say so, and impose an imaginary being upon us for the true God. Other passages of the scriptures confirmed the error of the anthropomorphites; and if it was heretical in the christian church, it could not be deemed, one would think, very heretical by the jews; since they held communion

† . . . . Quidni igitur similiter, says GASSENDI, fateatur esse in Deo non passiones, sed quasi passiones? atque adeo non irasci illum, sed quasi irasci; nec teneri gratia, sed quasi teneri?

with them so far, as I remember, that they eat the paschal lamb together.

THUS again, and to bring the observation quite home to the present purpose; the same scriptures, that are so apt in many places to make those who read them represent the Supreme Being to themselves, like an old man looking out of a cloud, as painters have represented him often, ascribe to him at the same time, by the whole tenor of them, all the affections and passions which characterised the nation of the jews, whilst they were a nation, very strongly, and which are not entirely worn out by their dispersion, and their commerce with others. God loves, according to their theology; but he loves with a strange predilection and partiality for them, who are not certainly the most lovely of his human creatures. He loves like DEIOTARUS, a king of Galatia, who for the sake of one son put the rest of his children to death. He is merciful too, but his mercy is arbitrary, and depends on mere will. "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," and when he will have mercy, "and whom he will, he hardens." Even they who esteem themselves his chosen people, who, we say, have been hardened, and they say have been chastised, have waited for it these two thousand years, and wait still. Towards mankind in general, his anger is often furious, his hatred inveterate, his vengeance unrelenting. But when the wicked repent of their sins, he repents sometimes of his severity. What a description now is this of an all-perfect Being? What a task have men, several of whom are great masters of reason, undertaken, when they have undertaken to reconcile such doctrines to his perfections, and to other doctrines directly contrary to these, that are interspersed in the same books? The task is hard, indeed but their profession made it necessary; and all the force of great learning, and of great parts

has been prostituted to conceal the ignorance, and to palliate the errors of the most illiterate, superstitious, and absurd race of men who ever pretended to a system of things divine or human.

## LXXIV.

**A**NALOGY is employed in this case as it is in the other, and indeed in every case where theological paradoxes, which are not a few, are to be defended. If analogy itself, such as some divines assume and represent it, could be defended, there would be no case, wherein it ought to be employed with all its force more than in this; for, surely, to impute human passions, even the worst of them, to the Supreme Being, is not further off from blasphemy, than it is to ascribe to him a corporeal form, and the sensations, and the limbs, and the actions of a man. It is not true, tho it has been asserted, that this analogy is obvious to every one, and that no one can think on reflection that any of these passions can affect literally the divine nature\*. It is on the contrary as true, that a multitude of good christians, far the greatest number, believe at this hour that the divine nature is affected by them, as it is true that a multitude of good heathens represented to themselves their gods and goddeses, even the father of gods and men, under an human form, or conceived at least, which is much the same, that these divinities took the human nature upon them whenever either business or pleasure called them to converse and act with the children of men. Let us not imagine that any thing is too absurd for men to believe even on reflection. Heathen, jews, christians, have believed

\* Vid. Serm. supr. citat.

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