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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

LXXIX.

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belonged to them, to his church, and to the poor; all of whom he threw on the laity to be maintained by them.

LXXIX.

THAT I may not render the deduction too long for this place, I content myself to observe further, that, as this order of men increased in outward dignity and riches, to neither of which they had any other claim than that which their own usurpations, and the bigot generosity of superstitious ages gave them, they increased in ambition and avarice. The doctrine of a future state was prostituted to serve the purposes of both; and as soon as they had persuaded the laity, that the power of tying and untying, which was given by CHRIST to his disciples, invested the clergy with a power of determining in this world the condition of men in another, heaven and hell became inexhaustible sources of ecclesiastical dominion and wealth, and were applied to little else. The man, for instance, who left his estate to the church, and to pious uses, as they are called, completed all the immoralities of his life by defrauding his family at his death. But the priest, or monk, conveyed him to heaven directly, and passports for that purpose, even of modern date, are said to have been found in the hands of the dead. The layman, who had a dispute with the church, stood exposed to the thunderbolt of excommunication, which he was prepared to believe did not only separate him from her communion here, but would deprive him of happiness hereafter; so that he might be damned eternally for withholding a tithe pig.

It was left to the industry of the clergy to improve these advantages in their several stations all over the christian world; and it must be owned that they improved them to the utmost of their delegated power: for being delegated, as extensive as it was, it was circumscribed. But that from which it was delegated, and which resided in the seat of this empire, the papal power in short, knew no bounds. Casuists have taught that the pope may by the fullness of it determine rightfully against right*; as if he made things good and just by willing them; which is, I think, the prerogative of God, but which no man, except a casuist, will affirm to be that of his pretended vicar. The proposition will sound harshly to your ears, how catholic soever they may be. But if you consider the practice of your church, and the pretensions of your sovereign pontiff, you will be forced to confess that they can be founded on nothing less than the supposition of such an exorbitant power as I have mentioned. There is no duty of natural, nor of revealed religion, nor of ecclesiastical institution commonly much more respected than either, from the observation of which you may not be free by dispensations, in the breach of which you may not be indulged, or for the breach of which you may not be still more easily pardoned, at a market price; and this market price was formerly settled and published in a book of rates, that every good christian might know how much his favorite vice would cost him. A passage in the gospel should have been altered on this occasion, and men should have been taught that it is more easy for a camel to pass

* Ex plenitudine potestatis jure potest etiam contra jus decernere.

through

through the eye of a needle, than for a poor man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

A casuist more modest, and who thinks himself more subtil than the former, may alledge perhaps, for it has been alledged, that the pope has virtually the keys of heaven since he has those of the treasure of the church, that treasure of merits which cannot be exhausted, the merits of JESUS CHRIST that are infinite, and that render therefore the rest of the heap unnecessary being contained in it; that the pope does not pretend to remit the debt which the sinner owes to God on a balance of the account of good and evil actions, but that he pays it by assigning out of this treasure as much merit as every sinner, who applies to him, wants to entitle him to salvation. So father PAUL represents the doctrine "ri-
"compensa il debito del peccatore con assegnare altrettanto
"valor del tesoro*." Thus, it may be said, the pope decrees in all these cases according to a right which God has established, and not against right by virtue of an assumed arbitrary, unlimited power. But this whimsical hypothesis, if it could be received, would answer the purpose, for which it is invented, by halves at most, for there is something behind much worse than the accusation already brought.

LXXX.

YOUR divines, as well as ours, affirm very truly of the preceptive parts, that tho natural and revealed religion are distinct, yet the difference between them is not a difference

* Con. di Tren. L. i.