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ART. I.—*Three Sermons upon Human Nature, being the first, second, and third of fifteen Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel.* By Joseph Butler, LL.D., late Lord Bishop of Bristol; as published in two volumes at Glasgow, in 1769.

DURING a long period after the commencement of philosophical inquiries concerning morals, it seems to have been taken for granted, that all motives to action in men, as in mere animals, originate in regard for self, and the natural tendency of all sensitive beings to self-preservation. The appetites, the desires, and even in most instances the social affections were resolved into modifications of self-love. The instinctive pursuit of self-gratification was the principle to which all action must be reduced; and somewhere in that sort of transmuted essence the elements of morals were presumed to reside. No sentiment was entertained, by some of the most popular philosophers, of the reality of moral distinctions. Law and morality were considered as mere suggestions of interest, changing with circumstances. And by those who, with Grotius, recoiled from this revolting degradation of man's moral nature, the highest point of approximation towards a satisfactory theory of morals was the

proposition that all law, and all the precepts and sentiments of morality are the discoveries of reason, exercised in discerning what is suitable and convenient in promoting the peace and prosperity of society.

Thus far and no farther had the science of morals advanced, when, in the early part of the seventeenth century, Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and Grotius turned the current of European philosophy into a new channel. Hobbes laid his harsh and heavy hand on the existing theory of mental and moral philosophy; obliterated the broad distinction between thought and feeling; dashed the whole moral nature of man into a confused mixture with the understanding; and "thrust forward the selfish system in its harshest and coarsest shape." The prodigious impulse given by the powerful intellect and the daring and dogmatic temper of Hobbes, to the ethical speculations of Europe, resulted in the overthrow of his influence, at one time great and dangerous to truth and virtue; and in the establishment of several fundamental articles of a just theory of morals on a lasting base. Nearly an entire century, however, was occupied in vehement controversy, which, although conducted by the greatest minds of the age, such as Cumberland, Cudworth, Clarke, Shaftesbury, Leibnitz, and Malebranche, achieved little else for moral science than the satisfactory refutation of the theory of Hobbes. They established no new and valuable principle. Lord Shaftesbury, indeed, about the beginning of the eighteenth century, gave original and clear intimations of a more satisfactory account of certain moral phenomena in man; and his suggestions were valuable to succeeding philosophers. But, either from want of a just estimation of his discoveries, or from ignorance of their proper and comprehensive application to the system of ethical doctrine, he only threw out the gem from the rubbish, laid open its brilliancy to public view, and left it; not even employing it for his own subsequent purposes. He seems to have valued the principle, and stated it with cautious formality, while he appears not to have known its use.

It was reserved for Butler, afterwards Lord Bishop of Bristol, and still later, of Durham, the author of "the Analogy," to introduce the new era in the progress of ethical philosophy. His views are expressed at large in the three Dissertations which he has chosen to call Sermons, named at the head of this article. The theory of the conscience is more particularly treated in the second and third. The fol-

lowing condensed statement of his theory is given in a single paragraph in his preface, pp. 20, 21.

“One of the principles of action embraced in an adequate notion of man’s nature, is conscience or reflection; which, compared with the rest as they all stand together in the nature of man, plainly bears upon it marks of authority over all the rest, and claims the absolute direction over them all, to allow or forbid their gratification; a disapprobation of reflection being in itself a principle manifestly superior to a mere propension. And the conclusion is, that to allow no more to this superior principle or part of our nature, than to other parts; to let it govern and guide only occasionally in common with the rest; as its turn happens to come from the temper and circumstances one happens to be in; this is not to act conformably to the constitution of man; neither can any human creature be said to act conformably to his constitution of nature, unless he allows to that superior principle the absolute authority which is due to it. And this conclusion is abundantly confirmed from hence, that one may determine what course of action the economy of man’s nature requires, without so much as knowing in what degree of *strength* the several principles prevail, or which of them have actually the greatest influence.”

It came in Butler’s way, partly from his preference for defining all right action to be acting according to nature, and partly from the design of giving his disquisitions the sermonical air, to insist at large on the definition of *nature*; the principle by which the Gentiles are said, in his text, to do the things contained in the law, and thus to be a law unto themselves. He likewise labours, with an earnestness and a minuteness perhaps somewhat excessive, the distinction between what he calls the *strength* of a principle of action, and its *nature* or *kind*; or the difference between its power and its authority. Neither of these parts of his discussion appears to us essential, either to the completeness of his theory, or to the evidence of its truth. The simple statement of the office of conscience in man, as he has given it with abundant repetition in the course of his argument, carries with it such evidence of her natural superiority as seems neither to need nor to admit corroboration by an extended argument; and least of all by such an argument as he employs. His reasonings on these points were, probably, in his own judgment, demanded rather by the peculiarity of the times, than by the intrinsic necessity of the subject. But his doctrine of the

superior authority of the conscience, independent of the reasonings by which he illustrates and supports it, is one of those great discoveries, the practical application of which may worthily engage the industry and skill of all succeeding generations.

As to the history of Butler's opinions, from the time of their promulgation to the present, it can be written in few sentences. The paragraph of Sir James Mackintosh to this point is worthy of introduction here; and will be found to contain as copious a transfusion of truth as so much elegance and eloquence of language usually holds in solution. "There are few circumstances more remarkable than the small number of Butler's followers in ethics; and it is perhaps still more observable, that his opinions were not so much rejected as overlooked. It is an instance of the importance of style. No thinker so great was ever so bad a writer. Indeed, the ingenious apologies which have been lately attempted for this defect, amount to no more than that his power of thought was too much for his skill in language. How general must the reception have been of truths so certain and momentous as those contained in Butler's Discourses,—with how much more clearness must they have appeared to his own great understanding, if he had possessed the strength and distinctness with which Hobbes enforces odious falsehood, or the unspeakable charm of that transparent diction which clothed the unfruitful paradoxes of Berkeley!"

Charmed as we are by this transparent and fluent explanation of Butler's unpopularity as a philosopher, we are still reminded of a lively and limpid fountain, viewed from a direction so oblique that the bottom and the surface of the beautiful water appear in the same plane. The reason why the right reverend philosopher's theory of the moral sentiments was unsatisfactory to his right honourable commentator serves, in our view, as an ample reason why so little respect has been paid to that theory in all the later speculations: the restless and importunate demand, not only of an undeniable statement of the facts of the existence and operations of the conscience, but also of the manner of its existence and operations; a disposition to remain unsatisfied until the moral phenomena of human nature are traced by clear philosophical demonstrations, to the positions, combinations, or circumstances of mental powers or properties, which, in different conditions, reveal themselves in different results. Sir James's criticism on Butler's statement rests on

the assumption that conscience is not to be taken as a simple and primary element of the moral constitution of man; and he pronounces it a defect that Butler, in asserting the fact that conscience commands right actions, does not answer the question, why or how? This is a part of his language: "The most palpable defect of Butler's scheme is that it affords no answer to the question, 'What is the distinguishing quality common to all right actions?' If it were answered, 'Their criterion is that they are approved and commanded by conscience,' the answerer would find that he was involved in a vicious circle; for conscience itself could be no otherwise defined than as the faculty which approves and commands right actions." Now we humbly submit, that the vicious circle by which the great philosopher is so gracefully circumvented, is not formed by the bishop, but by Sir James himself; and that Butler might have gone indefinitely into explanation of the distinguishing quality common to all "right actions," without describing, by his own principles, so much as a parabola. "Conscience itself can be no otherwise defined than as the faculty which approves and commands *right* actions." But this is not Butler's definition at all. Let him give us his own: "There is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart as well as his external actions; which passes judgment upon himself and them; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust: which, without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him, the doer of them, accordingly." Sermon 2, p. 86. This is some different principle from that which approves and commands *right* actions. It *distinguishes* between principles and between actions; and pronounces some *to be* in themselves good; others, bad. Had the bishop only said, in one place, that *because* an action is right, conscience, therefore, approves and commands it; and then, in another place, that an action is right *because* conscience approves and commands it, he would, indeed, have fallen into a circle sufficiently vicious. But both these he happened not to say. As to the question why it is right to do the thing approved and commanded by conscience, he does indeed say, page 101: "The question carries its own answer along with it. Your obligation to obey this law, is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience ap-

proves of and attests to such a course, is itself alone an obligation. Conscience does not only offer itself to show us the way we should walk in, but it likewise carries its own authority, that it is our natural guide; it, therefore, belongs to our condition of being; it is our duty to follow this guide." In other words, the act is right because conscience approves and commands it. The approbation of the actor's conscience *makes* the act right for him. He knows no other rule by which to determine its character, except the decision of his conscience upon it; and without that decision, he could predicate neither right nor wrong concerning it. So absolute is this supremacy of conscience, if it be supreme at all, that with whatever conceivable rule of judgment the act might disagree, when brought into a mere intellectual comparison, if such a comparison were not itself absurd, still if the man's conscience, with the best possible use of the best attainable light, approve and command the deed, it is for the man a deed of righteousness. Until man can be shown to have some other faculty than conscience, with which either to perceive or apply a rule of moral right: until it can be proved that, without the possession of this faculty of conscience, man could form a notion of right and wrong, the conceptions, judgments, dictates of this faculty, must be to him the only rule of duty. And if this be so, to demand of man any other account of his feeling of obligation than that which is given by reference to the dictates of his conscience, must be unphilosophical and absurd.

We are not called upon in this place to decide whether or how conscience herself may ascertain the action to be right before she pronounces her judgment upon it, or whether righteousness, as a philosophical attribute of action, be to her at all an object of abstract recognition;—a question this, which might lead farther into speculations about the physical and essential nature of conscience than any thoughtful philosopher would perhaps adventure. But we here humbly suggest an inquiry which we deem strictly philosophical and legitimate; which no writer has, within our knowledge, treated according to our views, and which, with permission, we propose in some future number, and at some length, to pursue. We mean an inquiry into the natural connexion between conscience as a moral principle of supreme authority *in* man; and a moral principle of supreme authority *extraneous* to man, with which conscience may be responsive and correlative. If it can be made to appear,

in some good degree, a reasonable assertion, that to look behind conscience for the origin of our conceptions of right and wrong were as unphilosophical as to look behind the solar ray for the origin of light and heat; that in the process of forming a moral action, the only point where the principle of morality is developed perceptibly to the moral agent is the point between the conscience and the will;—a solution of the engaging and sublime question concerning the origin of moral distinctions, satisfactory to our own minds, will have been reached.

Our present concern with Butler leads us in another direction. We have intimated that the labour bestowed by him on certain parts of his argument for the supremacy of conscience was incidental to some of his favourite, but, to us, unimportant ideas, of the application of his doctrine in explaining the nature of virtue; and consequently disproportionate to the advantage derived from it to his theory. We propose to make Butler's conclusions our goal in the few remarks of this article, but to arrive at them by another route. There lies in this subject the force of a more direct appeal to the common experience of mankind than our philosopher has distinctly urged; one, which we humbly conceive may be more effective both in supporting or recommending the theory, and in applying it, than those which he has employed.

The chief importance of man to himself and to the universe, accrues from his moral relations to his Maker. To these he is indebted for all the dignity which invests his character, and all the weight which attaches to his actions. In comparison with the lower creatures, he is indebted to his Creator for superior intellectual endowments; but measured only by the scale of mere intelligence, he would excel the inferior creatures only as the lion excels the snail. He receives his Maker's care; but this care he only shares in common with the sparrows. It is not his rational nature that gives him his great consequence in the creation. From the treatment of man's nature in the Scriptures, we cannot infer that mere intellectual endowments are of any great account. They do, indeed, distinguish man from the irrational animals, and mark him for a larger sphere of action and influence. They raise him above the horse, as the horse, by his higher instincts, is raised above the worm. He acts upon a larger scale, but, as an intellectual being only, he acts to no higher purpose, and with no more solemn results. The tie

which joins him to higher natures, and even with the Most High, is his moral constitution. It is by the possession of moral endowments, that he takes his place among immortals; that his actions are deemed worthy of being regulated by a regard to things beyond himself, of being minutely recorded and made the subject of a solemn review and judgment at the end; that he becomes an object of moral esteem among his fellows, and of cordial interest among the superior powers. This is the great distinction between man and the inferior creatures. Let us make man, said the great Creator, in his sublime self-consultation upon the last work of this lower creation, let us make man in our own image. But the part of man's mental constitution which bears the most, perhaps the only indisputable marks of the divine image, is his capacity of knowing good and evil, his power of discerning between right and wrong. On this principle a line can be drawn, clear and undeviating, between the two departments of animate existence, with the Creator and those who, like him, possess the moral sense on one side, and all the lower orders on the other. On no other principle can such a line be made so clear. The startling exhibitions of intelligence in some animals often bring us to a stand, and put us in doubt where the line of distinction between the human and the brute understanding would strictly fall. We almost raise at times the question whether man alone, of all this lower world, may claim the endowment of reason. The architectural instincts of the beaver and the ant; the principle of social organization amongst the bees; the sagacity of the elephant; the attainments of various animals in the knowledge of sounds, to a degree which seems only to require the power of speech to render them intelligent companions of mankind; these, and many like phenomena, foster doubts in many minds, whether the just philosophical distinction between reason in man and instinct in brutes has ever yet been drawn. Should then the understanding be taken, alone or chiefly, as the family feature of divinity in man, we might receive a plausible admonition to give our inferior fellow-beings a place in the household; for their knowledge, though inferior decidedly and immensely to the knowledge of man, may still far more nearly equal it, both in kind and degree, than the knowledge of man equals that of God.

But man may not thus be confounded with the lower orders of life. He has a constitution which marks and decides his high relations. It is the power of discernment between good

and evil; of guiding his actions by a rule of right. He has the capacity of enjoying the consciousness of virtue, and of suffering under the sense of moral degradation. This reveals the family likeness in him, teaches us where to look for his kindred, and stamps the countenance divine upon his nature. By this endowment he takes a rank to which no other creature in this world can aspire. His corporeal properties; his appetites and animal instincts, whatever capacities he possesses in common with the brutes, he holds to his higher connexion; he collects and retains them in the exalted rank of his moral endowments. He undergoes corporeal changes in common with all parts of the material world; but even these changes are appointed to serve in him the high purposes of a moral existence. The very appetites which in the horse serve only the animal life, assume in man the nobler office of ministering to the improvement and happiness of a moral and immortal life.

We define man, in broad philosophical distinction from the inferior creatures, when we say he has a *conscience*; and in explaining the superiority of human nature, our first consideration is due to this principle. It is not a mere appendage to man's nature; an associate of his other faculties; claiming to share with them the respect due to man. It is rather the substratum of his constitution, upon which the human structure is formed, and to which it is adapted. The rank of the other powers is not her level. It were hardly an extravagance to say that all the other powers of the man, bodily and mental, were made for the sake of conscience, and for her high and solemn ends. They are the instruments only with which the moral creature is to accomplish the ends of his existence. Shall we call them the system of material and mental machinery which the conscience is to move and control? Let her inherent superiority be but clearly conceived and remembered: the inestimably higher quality of the moral, compared with the material or the intellectual; and no such analogies as have been referred to will mislead.

When the powers of the understanding, noble and exalted as they are justly called, are considered in their subordination to that ruling principle whose authority they are formed to obey, the dignity of the subjects illustrates the majesty of the sovereign.

To give this doctrine of the supremacy of conscience the clearest aspect of truth, we propose to gather some of the

testimony yielded in its favour by the common sentiment of mankind.

The animal appetites are admitted by every reflecting person to exert great influence in prompting and directing the actions of men. No small portion of every man's life is ordinarily spent in obedience to these lowest principles of human action; the principles by which man and beast partake of a common experience. The claims of those appetites which demand the needful sustenance of life are to be yielded. Against such there is no law. If ever the prescriptions of a self-denying discipline require their rejection, it is not on account of any evil in the appetites themselves, but because evil, as a remote effect, or the loss of good, may result from their gratification. These appetites are not incidental to moral imperfection; their natural demands contravene no moral law; their gratification, to every needful degree, subverts no other principle of the human constitution, and defeats no high and pure end of human life. So far otherwise, the perfect health of the body, which preserves these appetites in their natural strength, and allows the satisfaction of their current demands, conduces in the largest measure to the successful operation of all the faculties of both the body and the mind. To deny their claims may be sin. Abuses of the body which destroy them; or mock their demands with the tender of unwholesome things; or transfer their longings from the proper nourishment of life, to articles forbidden by the antipathies of nature, are offences against the laws of nature and of God; and prove, beyond controversy, that those appetites which contemplate the life and health of the body are invested with an office which should command respect.

The authority of these appetites is fully expressed whenever the organs become sensible of their demands. The feeling of hunger is the voice of nature commanding attention to the bodily necessities; and the obligation to obey the appetite commences at the moment the appetite is felt. This is a principle of action; and were it supreme in its authority, the duty of satisfying hunger, if possible at the instant the hunger is felt, would be imperative. Every impulse of resistance against the appetite would be sin. Every instant of unnecessary delay in meeting its claims would be a transgression of law. The entire force of the authority of appetite is uttered whenever the feeling exists.

Yet how many are the principles of action to which the

authority of appetite may lawfully defer. The suggestions of a more rational self-love may postpone the claims of appetite to favour the attainment of corporeal or mental excellence; to the subserviency of which no one of the bodily appetites is ever esteemed too good to submit. We never hesitate to approve of their subjection to the dictates of benevolence. If a man suffer hunger or thirst, to any endurable extent, in saving his fellow from the perils of death, we never feel inclined to vindicate the claims of his appetite against the dictates of his benevolence. If a hungry man give his only morsel to his more hungry neighbour, no beholder disapproves the act. The dictates of benevolence thus have manifestly higher authority than those of appetite. The instances are innumerable, and of daily occurrence, in which other motives, themselves subordinate, and some of them by no means of high authority, are justified in resisting the calls of the animal appetites; but never are these appetites justified in lording it over them. The bodily appetites, therefore, as guides in matters of duty, possess only an authority common to the very lowest principles of our nature. They are servants of servants. How much more are they servants of that superior principle which these higher servants, their masters, are bound to obey. The appetites owe subjection to the benevolent affections; the benevolent affections owe subjection to conscience. The man who, to save his dinner, should refuse to save the life of a drowning neighbour, would be shielded, by no stress of hunger, from general execration. Yet, if that man saw his neighbour, though his own son, on the scaffold, about to suffer justly for crime, his conscience would forbid his benevolence to interpose; and would be entitled to command even the fatherly affections into silent, though sorrowful acquiescence. This order of graduated subordination amongst the inward guides of moral action is universally recognised by reflecting men. It fixes the comparative rank of appetite, as to its authority, in morals. All approve the denial of appetite for conscience's sake; all condemn obedience to appetite against conscience. All freely admit, that a serious regard for the true rule of duty will never indulge the gratification of an appetite, the lawfulness of which has not received the sanction of conscience as the result of a distinct reference of the question to her court.

We would here remark, if at this point we may be pardoned for a brief digression, that the immense elevation of

conscience, as a rule of action above the sphere of appetite, precludes many of her faithful admonitions in that large department of human conduct which the influence of the bodily appetites pervades. A philosophical truth, pregnant with keener reproof to the slaves of appetite cannot be found. Few things provoke more ridicule from persons of a certain class, than a scrupulous conscience in eating and drinking. Is it assumed that conscience is degraded by having the regulation of a bodily appetite assigned to her prerogative? But this assumption the true philosophy denies. If conscience claims dominion over the whole moral being, what act of that being can be too small or too low for her inspection? But to regulate the appetites by a moral rule is no insignificant or unworthy office. They have in themselves a power, the control of which confers no contemptible dignity on the sovereign principle. But besides this, let it be considered how many of the actions, the thoughts, and the feelings of men, which are ranked with the most serious matters of conscientious concern, take their form and character from the influence of sensual indulgence, and the moral importance of the regulation of the appetites, becomes abundantly manifest. The states of the body have largely to do with all our mental exercises. The direction, purity, activity, and force of the thoughts are affected for hours, if not often permanently, by a single instance of excessive indulgence. If then, conscience have the right of authority over the thoughts, and administer her government agreeably with the laws of human nature, her watchfulness over these appetites will be diligent and strict. In the light of such truth, we cannot observe, without surprise, the little restraint imposed on the bodily appetites by many persons apparently conscientious in other things. The natural wants of the body, exceeded in the quantity, or perverted by the quality of the supplies, become physical occasions of sins, in things done and things not done, in thought, word, and deed; sins, which the sinner strives in vain to avoid, after having generated in himself the influence which prompts them. In the case of ministers of the gospel, this fact assumes great solemnity. The pleasures and the success of their official labours depend as largely on their mental frames, as these in their turn depend on their bodily states. Except by those who watch their mental changes, as they range with the varying states of the body, it cannot be fully seen how directly and powerfully the bodily sensations affect the interests of those for whose

benefit the gospel ministry is appointed; how often a preacher's spiritual views may be darkened, and his spiritual ardor quenched, at the moment when they might have served to awaken, enlighten, and comfort some waiting soul; and all this by the momentary indulgence of an appetite, which perhaps is deemed too trivial a matter for conscientious watchfulness and restraint. We meet also, in this train of our thoughts, an admonition against the formation and indulgence of artificial appetites, in the use of articles which are offensive to the natural taste; which, in the majority of cases, are not upheld by the least pretence that they are useful, and which, on the score of health, and of personal and social convenience cannot be held as altogether harmless; while the suggestions of conscience, whenever a hint from her voice is heard on the subject, are against them. There is doubtless more of the solemnity of moral responsibility connected with these trivial indulgences than is generally supposed. They present, in their degree, that perversion of our moral nature, in which the whole man, without, or even against the acknowledged and supreme authority of conscience, surrenders himself to the dominion of the lowest impulses of his nature.

To return: We were taking evidence of the fact that the supreme authority of conscience is universally admitted in the practical judgment of mankind. We have selected a class of cases which show that men habitually demand of each other the promotion of conscience above other principles of action; and most of all, above the bodily appetites. We proceed to other cases which illustrate the same truth, and which, to our minds, possess great philosophical interest.

The story of Nisus, in ancient mythology, found in one of the first books of the Latin scholar, is morally just to human nature, and was probably invented as an impressive means of inculcating the moral sentiment it involves. Nisus, a king of the Megarensians, was told that he would continue to reign as long as he should retain his head of purple hair. He engaged in war with Minos, king of Crete. His daughter Scylla had fallen in love with Minos; and, through the violence of her passion for him, became so lost to filial affection and duty, that, to secure his success, she cut off with her own hand, the hair of her father's head, while he slept. Minos was victorious. Nisus lost his throne and his life. And when the unnatural Scylla presented herself before her fa-

ther's conqueror, and offered to accompany him into his own country, he repelled her with abhorrence, declaring that Crete would not suffer such a pest to tread her soil. We honour his decision; we applaud his rejection of the parricide; and so much the more, as his casting her off may have been against the force of her devotion to him; of his gratitude for her important service to his interest, and perhaps of his personal affection for her. Though he may have previously loved the woman, he abhorred her shameful deed. The generous gratitude he may be supposed to have felt for her favourable design towards him, could not reconcile him to her detestable treachery against her father. The ascendancy of conscience in this ease is complete. In Scylla, a passion for the Cretan king absorbed the soul, and overcame the dictates of filial love, and of the moral sense. In him, conscience rose superior to self-interest and blind affection. We submit to any person, capable of understanding the case, the question, whether this triumph of conscience does not meet his hearty approbation? Let one indulge, if he must, a momentary sympathy for the disappointed woman; and another suggest that he who had received so important a favour owed for it a suitable reward; and another insist on his inconsistency in denouncing the crime, while he seized the advantage it offered to his cause; all will agree in approving his decided testimony against the unnatural deed. The two persons appear, perhaps by the intent of the mythologist, in opposite extremes; and while she is remembered as a disgusting example of perverted human nature, he, in that particular act, will be remembered as a fair model of a man.

When the infamous Arnold had betrayed the trust reposed in him by his confiding and bleeding country, he found a cordial reception and immediate promotion in the army of his country's enemies. His treachery called for the reprobation even of every generous foe of the cause he sought to betray. The traitor forsook his country in her extremity. He set an example of defection which nothing but an unparalleled devotion to the cause of liberty prevented from being extensively followed. He had decoyed into fatal snares an accomplished and adventurous young officer, who was destined to suffer on the scaffold. All this notwithstanding, the arms of British generosity are open to receive him. A wreath of honour is prepared for his brow. When it is proposed to the magnanimity of Britain, that Arnold be given up as a victim to the righteous indignation of his country, the pro-

position is rejected. When it is proposed to exchange Andre for Arnold, the offer is declined. And that image of treachery is protected and honoured by the people whose cause he had endeavoured not less unsuccessfully than wickedly to serve.

Now the history of these transactions is doubtless read by the majority with little displeasure against this friendly and persevering protection of a man who, by his crime, had awakened the just indignation of his country. Or the act may be condemned as a mere violation of an imaginary law supposed to forbid one nation to harbour the fugitives of another. Or it may be disapproved in a spirit similar to that in which it was performed; the spirit of national selfishness which disapproves whatever opposes its own dictates. But the case serves a valuable purpose to our present reasoning, by showing that any approbation of such an act, whenever it is yielded, is of the lowest and most equivocal kind. Had the authorities of Britain refused the traitor a shelter, cast him off with abhorrence, and testified their detestation of his deed; had they said to him, as Minos to Scylla, that Britain would not suffer such a pest to tread her soil, every unbiassed reader of the history would have cordially commended the course. Whatever advantage they may have gained from his treachery, or whatever vindication from the usages of war; still, had they surrendered Arnold, as a testimony of their abhorrence of such deeds as his, they would have received the unqualified approval of every disinterested observer. The ascendancy of conscience over antagonist motives of such plausibility and power would have engaged the admiration of the world. Conscience in such a case may have been honoured under the name of magnanimity, or generosity, or a sense of national dignity; but it would be conscience still; the principle which perceives and disapproves the inherent wrong of treachery, and refuses and discountenances the crime under all circumstances. That they should cherish the traitor was natural. It was agreeable to many powerful principles of human action. It was only seeking their own. It was taking an advantage thrown fully in their way. Their motives for patronizing treason amongst their enemies were powerful and popular. But it requires a decided sympathy in their interests to prepossess reflecting minds with approbation, or even with toleration of the course. Nothing but elaborate vindication saves it from the condemnation of every virtuous and unbiassed judge. Grant that it may be vindicated, and kept in tolerable

odour with mankind; its vindication is attempted by principles of acknowledged inferiority in man, and is but the struggle of the lower principles of action against the sentence of the higher. It is self-interest and policy against conscience; and the result, although specious, is deceptive. The plea is only an apology. But had the commander of the Vulture sternly refused to receive the fugitive on board, and afterwards received from his government conspicuous honours for his act, the whole transaction had scorned apology. It had been viewed with involuntary and unmingled complacency by all the world. Its very face had presented—a vindication, shall we say? No. It had shone by its own light; an effulgence of moral glory, sublime and captivating to every pure mind.

Such admiration of actions done from pure regard for the fundamental law of righteousness, is an instance of the homage rendered by human nature to conscience, the legitimate sovereign of its powers. This homage is yielded as by the instinct of the moral man. It is prompt and immediate; requiring no process of reasoning, no explanations, no apologies, to prepare its way; to preclude suspicions of evil, or to justify seeming improprieties. It is conscience in the beholder, recognising and honouring conscience in the actor. That all considerations of self-interest, public and private, should thus yield, in scrupulous subjection, to the simple dictate of the moral sense, it is not in the unperverted nature of man to disallow. The standard of righteousness, recognised by conscience, is every where and always intelligible, as a simple and independent test of virtue. For this the voice of nature speaks the reverence of the soul. In determining the character of actions, no other rule of judgment can supply its place. The argument of utility, or of necessity, of the power of natural affection, or of the urgency of temporal and local interests, as pleas in the court of conscience, have no force to affect her decisions, and are only the efforts in which the proneness of the wayward mind employs its energies of resistance against her sentence.

The natural reverence of mankind for the conscience is evinced in matters pertaining to the familiar scenes of business. We observe a variety of petty artifices, which are generated by the commerce of society, sanctioned tacitly by the community, and received as a part of the rules of trade. It is not from a regard for their moral rectitude that they are adopted, but from a belief of their convenience. All become familiar with them; the current of the business thoughts con-

forms to them; and while none insists that they are absolutely right, none condemns them as absolutely wrong. The operation of buying and selling has grown into an art, which men serve an apprenticeship to acquire. It is not alone the art of judging the qualities of things, of discerning their intrinsic properties and their market value. It is the art of making bargains; of inducing trade; of securing points of self-interest against the interest of others. It need not, for our argument's sake, be denied that these artifices have apologies of the highest plausibility. A necessity for them may be supposed to arise from the universal selfishness of mankind. But let it be observed from what source they do arise: covetousness suggests them as a measure for gain; to be justified by the exigency; to which exigency appeal is always taken for their vindication.

Now let it be admitted that, by explanations and excuses, these practices may be rendered consistent with a quiet conscience in those who use them; still, a firm and independent adherence to the strict rule of moral duty in all our dealings, receives as is due, wherever it appears, the lively attention and the cordial approbation of the world. Every man so admires to see others act rather from conscience than from self-interest, passion, habit, appetite, or any low affection, that although he stop not to stamp condemnation on every little device of selfishness, he does stop and turn aside to place the bright seal of approbation on every act put forth in obedience to the sense of right. Say all that can be said to justify disingenuousness in any degree or for any purpose whatever; it is, after all, but a justification; the making that seem just, and receiving and treating that as just, which is in itself not so. Its propriety is never prepossessing. The first impressions of the world are against it; and recommendations are demanded to shield it from the indignation of conscience. In such cases conscience exacts respect for her decisions. She arraigns men at her bar for disobedience of her mandates, and extorts explanations and apologies for their conduct; and in this form demands a substitute for the honour which is denied her in the form of strict obedience.

In this world of imperfection an ample and ready store of these apologies is found to be an important convenience. So few of the actions of men rise into the high and pure rank of self-evident virtue, that, like convicted criminals, we depend largely for our comfort on the clemency of conscience in habitual prostration at the footstool of her throne. The ma-

jority of human actions in this world are born under suspicion; and however justifiable, must be brought to trial to make their innocence appear. And then, though the innocence do appear, and be announced in the decision of the court, the arraignment, the charge, the state's evidence, are not forgotten by the world. The defendant brings out of court only a judicial innocence, which often compares, in hue and fragrance, with unsullied virtue, as the paper flower compares with nature's sweet and blushing rose. Excuses, however valid, are but tottering props of character. They breed in the emergencies of virtue. It is imperfection only that needs them. The patch may be sound itself and even elegant; but it covers a hole. Apologies, like life-preservers, are useless except in disaster; the unintended concessions of conscious infirmity; and in the rare cases of their usefulness, they leave behind them lasting and oppressive embarrassment.

The facts and statements heretofore presented contribute, in our view, an important support to the doctrine of the supremacy of conscience. We have stated a few of the unfeigned concessions of mankind to her authority. For all conduct over which conscience is not known to exercise her right of control, men naturally seek from each other excuses and explanations. It is not enough that each has acted from a tender and deliberate regard for his own welfare; he is expected to show that he seeks his own by the rule of right. It does not suffice that he indulges the strongest social affection; men ask, is the affection pure and right in its origin and influence? The suggestions of reason are judged by the canon of righteousness; and even the dictates of benevolence are watched and examined for their due agreement with the higher standard. Men of mere impulse are not trusted by men of calm reflection, and for the valid reason that the transient vehemence of the most plausible feelings is liable to overbear and disregard the sense of right. To secure the credit of speaking truth and working righteousness, a man must disclaim the influence of passion, affection, and of mere intellectual theory, and declare his deliberate regard for the calm and clear dictates of his conscience. Actions, done from other motives, find, if unpleasant in their effects, no favour whatever with mankind; if merely harmless they are viewed with apathy; if useful they are only allowed. But the course of action which wears the features of a conscientious parentage, be its local and temporary effects what they may, is sure of universal commendation from reflecting men. We ask

no other proof of the virtue of the deed, than the image and superscription of conscience upon it. The act put forth by the conscience of the actor is approved by the conscience, of the judge; she recognises her own progeny, when and wheresoever born; and bestows upon it her complacent smile. As wisdom is justified of her children, so her children are justified of her.

This sort of appeal to the common judgment of mankind in proof of the legitimate supremacy of conscience, while it establishes the doctrine, exposes men's practical departure from the path they are formed to follow. While men honour her in theory, in practice they despise her. With the mind they serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. While each judges others, and sometimes himself by the moral sense, he acts, to an extent which, if he fully saw it, would surprise himself, from the lower dictates of his nature. The moral theory of man and his moral practice disagree with each other; and the disagreement results in the alternate coronation and dethronement of conscience as the sovereign principle in the soul. In theory her authority is owned as supreme by natural right. She is born to govern. Her natural mien is that of majesty. She is not a power amongst the powers, but a power over them all. Suppose now, what in practice we extensively see, that other principles are exalted over her. Suppose it to be right to act from other principles in contempt of conscience. Let it be lawful to follow the suggestions of interest, passion or appetite, and to substitute for conscience some other test of rectitude, and the mind of reflection instantly perceives that the foundations of morals are out of course. Man, with all his noble faculties, descends from his high rank in the creation. The consciousness of responsibility is merged and dissipated in the perceptions of the understanding, the deductions of reason, the ideas of interest and utility, or the dictates of passion, inclination, and taste. No account can be given, in our analysis of man, of the pleasure or the pain of moral perceptions; of the pleasures of virtue, and the miseries of vice; none can be taken of the feeling by which man is held in conscious responsibility to a supreme tribunal; and from proper moral beings pervaded, characterized and controlled by moral sensibility, we harden into cold intellectual judges of an abstract morality.

Such a derangement of human nature dissolves the moral union between man and his Maker. It destroys the

medium of spiritual communication. The mutilated workmanship of God has no longer any organ of intercourse with the moral influence of its author;—no eye to see, no ear to hear, no heart to feel. The stream is cut off from the fountain. The member is severed from the head. It is by the office of conscience, that the soul is fitted for communication with the moral nature and the moral influence of God; and this communication being interrupted, the moral constitution of our nature declines. Like the plant deprived of the pistil of its flower, it may display an exuberant growth, even the more so for its destined fruitlessness; but it is the growth of only the coarser and least valuable substance, which neither from its intrinsic excellence nor its uses, can seem worthy of an immortal destiny. The fair blossom is an empty form of beauty, the strong and bulky standard is a mass of useless and cumbrous matter; the value, the life of the production is gone.

A strong part of this cumulative argument, derived from the common sentiment of mankind for the supremacy of conscience, is furnished by the universal habit of appealing to the popular respect for conscience. It argues, indeed, a mournful moral degeneracy, where the assertion of a good conscience passes for nothing but the expression of a determined and obstinate will; a will determined by some blind impulse of the mind. The practical evil of such a depreciation of conscience is immense. Nothing else so undermines the belief of moral responsibility, or so debases the morality of public acts and public men. It brings the solemn declarations of faith and protestations of sincerity into disrepute; and makes the very authority of conscience an instrument of corruption. The moral dignity of man cannot be more degraded than when the pretended voice of conscience sinks into the utterance of an obstinate selfishness or of ungoverned passion. An ample sphere is thus opened for the arrogance and overbearance of a stalking hypocrisy; and the pretender soon learns to esteem himself the more for his greater inflexibility. He wraps his obstinacy in the cloak of a religious solemnity; and virtually warns his antagonist that his position is too sacred for assault; that to fight against him is to fight against God. The moral porcupine contracts his reason and his sensibilities under the bristly covering of a fictitious conscience; and there, alike inaccessible by argument, and insusceptible to urgent appeal, he defies the most legitimate and powerful reasonings and persuasions, by which truth and duty are enforced.

Thus impregnable is the fortress of conscience. No man feels any law of his moral being infringed, or his nature essentially dishonoured, by arguments however strenuous against his reason, or appeals however fervid against his ambition, his present interest, or even, in some matters, against his purest natural affections, or the strongest impulses of his benevolence. But to listen to an appeal against conscience; to be plied with argument and persuasion to do what he conscientiously believes to be wrong, is felt by every reflecting person, to be an assault upon the moral dignity of his nature. All this is a practical acknowledgment of the supremacy of conscience in the high sense in which it has been here asserted. There can be no clearer demonstration in moral philosophy than is here given of the existence of a supreme authority within the man, in obedience to which he is formed to live. To own this government in theory, and rebel against it in practice, is a crime of peculiar aggravation. It is a treason against one's self; the violation of a law admitted and felt to be of binding force; the reception of a statute with becoming deference for its authority, and the immediate and heedless trampling of that statute under foot.

In the view of this subject here presented, the rights of conscience assume a solemnity, with which they can in no other light be invested. They are emphatically the highest, and the dearest rights of man. Viewed in either their moral or their civil aspect, they demand the serious study and the cordial support of every friend of human improvement and happiness. By these rights conscience holds a title to freedom, from the constraint of every human principle whatever; whether it be that of the powers within the man or that of the powers without. We have spoken of the right of conscience to rule the powers of the individual; and from the same remarks we infer her right to rule the state. Never therefore are her rights duly respected until her dominion is equally acknowledged by individuals and by the state.

In the form of government which this nation has adopted, the people are the fountain of power. Our republicanism, a system of self-government, detains the sceptre of dominion in the hands of the governed. If conscience then control the acts of individuals, it will equally control society; and the supposition that from such a power a law oppressive to conscience can proceed, is not only contrary to true liberty but absurd. Accordingly, the governments of the world which have been hostile to this liberty of conscience, have

been those in which the popular voice has been not at all or faintly heard. The legislation of a conscientious people, so far from bringing the rights of conscience into peril, will be one of the true methods of securing her highest liberty. Men's natural theory of the supremacy of conscience requires that, in a popular government, conscience control law.

This sovereign of human conduct is no respecter of persons, in judging the actions of men. It governs man no less in his public relations and duties than in his private. The truly conscientious man will be a conscientious voter, legislator, ruler; and in all these capacities can contribute no aid to oppression. In such due course of action, law can never exalt itself above the conscience; but conscience on the contrary will control the enactment of law. The laws of a conscientious people will protect their moral rights; help the obedience which conscience claims; and assist her in those conflicts into which she is so often drawn with principles of inferior authority.

This relation of conscience to proper legislation shows why the civil law, in suitable circumstances, may usefully concern itself with the moral duties of the citizen. When the same persons are the sovereigns and the subjects; when the man who makes the laws is the man to obey them; when conscience equally governs the man in his public and private relations, the law which would violate the rights of conscience in its execution, must equally violate them in its enactment. The same man is the oppressor and the oppressed. Such wrong, in a popular government, is hardly conceivable. No point of moral duty on which the conscientious judgment of a majority, deliberately expressed, would be found to agree, could leave a reasonable question of conscience peculiar to an individual of the state:

Hence, in a popular government, controversies on the liberty of conscience turn on the question of obedience or resistance to conscience herself. 'Shall a people bind themselves by their own laws to do what all admit to be right?' 'Shall moral duty be enforced by civil penalties?' It is the answer to these questions which appears to many to involve the sublime and vital doctrine of the liberty of conscience. But what is liberty of conscience, defined by either philosophy or the common sense of mankind? It is the liberty of man to obey his conscience; the liberty of doing what the man believes to be right. To claim the liberty of doing wrong is itself an assault upon the rights of conscience.

These rights may be protected, and in some points are so by legal constraints on the lower principles of our nature; and to assert the right of throwing off all this constraint, is to proclaim a jubilee for the obtrusive and arrogant competitors of conscience in the degenerate mind; encouraging the depraved passions, and instigating insurrection against the only supreme authority of acknowledged legitimacy in the soul. Can a man who declares his purpose of keeping a good conscience challenge civil protection in despising her dictates? Will he claim impunity in sinning against his acknowledged sovereign? Will he demand protection against his own conscience, and insist on the indulgence and countenance of all his kind, while he abuses and perverts their common nature? Will he demand that human nature in all his fellows shall consent to its own degradation in him; and that a civil bill of rights shall expressly declare full license for his individual propensity to trample on the conscience of the moral world?

The general principles of morality, everywhere and always admitted by civilized man, are proper subjects of that civil legislation, which most jealously watches over the rights of conscience; and such legislation will be useful in all communities where the relation between civil law and morals is rightly understood. Civil laws may be an index of the conscience of the people; and such they must be, to answer a valuable moral purpose. Laws may express either what the people are willing to do, or what they believe to be right. As mere exponents of the public inclination, they yield no aid to virtue; for the spirit which made the laws, would as promptly have done the things enjoined, as made the laws enjoining. No law was needed to secure such ends. The laws and the prevailing morality are on the same level; and neither can elevate the other. The disciple is not above his master. On the principle that civil law, in relation to morals, may indicate only the popular propensity, no good statutes can come, till the majority of the people are inclined and resolved to do what the laws are to enjoin: and then what is their use? Why make laws to enforce what the people do by nature without them? But if the laws may express the dictates of the people's conscience, and enforce by penalty what the people believe to be right, then until conscience receives a perfect obedience, the laws will continue in advance of the public morality, guiding the people by their teachings, and urging them by their authority and sanctions, in the course of moral improvement.

That, in the progress of society, the social principle will yet more effectually aid the due ascendancy of conscience as the guide of human action, admits of no reasonable doubt. We look in the future for a better understanding, and a better use of the connexion between conscience and the civil law. The day indeed will never come in the life time of true freedom, when the state will undertake to rule the individual sense of moral duty. But we expect the existence of such knowledge, and of such sincerity, that men, conscious as well of moral as of physical infirmity, will deem it a legitimate end of society, to secure moral as well as physical strength; and that civil law, the vital organ of social strength, will join its influence with that of other institutions of society, in vindicating and confirming the practical supremacy of conscience in the human soul. This will be a welcome harbinger of the moral renovation of the world. With the light which now shines on the path of moral duty, conscience points man towards the true perfection. It is the candle of God in the soul, lighted at the blaze of the Sun of Righteousness; and from the pure radiance of that heavenly orb, its bright flame is perpetually fed. Unlike the tapers of the evening fireside, and the twinklings of the evening sky, which grow dim as the king of day approaches; it brightens as the sun ascends, and is preparing its fulness of light to be dispensed in the noontide of the millennial day.

*Charles Hodge.*

ART. II.—*A History of the Rise, Progress, Genius, and Character of American Presbyterianism. Together with a Review of the "Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, By Charles Hodge, Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N. J."* By William Hill, D. D., of Winchester, Virginia. Washington City. 1839. pp. 224.

DR. HILL informs his readers that about eight years ago he was appointed by the presbytery of Winchester to write the history of that judicatory. He was thus led to make investigations into the early history of Presbyterianism in Virginia; which were so successful as to induce him to determine to write the history of our church in that state. The