

THE
PRINCETON REVIEW.

JULY 1840.

No. III.

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

and shall be anxious to hear what conclusion may be formed on this important affair.

“May the God of heaven bless you and your brethren of the trustees. This is as sincere a wish as ever rose in the heart of

“Reverend and dear Sir; your affectionate brother and humble servant.
SAMUEL DAVIES.”

“*Mr. Cowell,*

As Mr. Halsey was sent to Virginia to endeavour to persuade Mr. Davies to accept of the offer made him by the trustees of the college, those who were particularly anxious for that acceptance, were surprised and displeased at the effect of his communications on Mr. Davies' mind. This feeling is clearly evinced in the following letter from Mr. Cowell to Mr. Davies, dated Trenton, Dec. 25th, 1758:

“*Reverend and Dear Sir,*

“From the representation of Mr. Smith, our first messenger, the trustees entertained the most sanguine hopes of your coming to take charge of the college this winter, and that this would finally issue in your being the fixed president. Your letter to me, put it out of all doubt; so that the clerk, in all the notices he sent to warn the trustees to the then next meeting, informed them that they might expect the pleasure of seeing Mr. Davies at it. We could think of no reason for Mr. Halsey staying so long after the vacancy was expired, but waiting to accompany yourself to Princeton. When he first made an offer of going to Virginia, that he would do it cheap, because he wanted to see the country, &c., I suspected him, because I knew he earnestly desired Mr. Finley at the head of the college. I mentioned these suspicions to him; and upon that he assured the committee that he was now heartily engaged for Mr. Davies, that he would use his best endeavours, and, if possible, bring you with him. To confirm this, Mr. Halsey told in Virginia, ‘That when he went from the college he was fully resolved to use all the arguments he could to persuade Mr. Davies to come with him; but on the road was either checked by his conscience, or in some other way was convinced that he could not do it; and he farther told that there had been false representations given to Mr. Davies by Mr. Smith and Caldwell, to persuade him to come, which representations he rectified.’ The honest man had not travelled far from college before he told a friend

that he did not expect Mr. Davies would come, but his journey would have this good effect, that he should bring a final refusal from Mr. Davies, and so clear the way for choosing Mr. Finley. This grand point the honest man had his heart so much set upon, that when he returned to Mr. Finley's, he rode three or or four score miles out of his way to get Mr. Shippen to attend the next meeting of the trustees; and this, though the vacancy had been up for some time, many of the scholars met, and no body to begin college orders till his return. I trust you will think my preface long enough, and that by this time you have a desire to be informed what we did at our next meeting. I shall therefore proceed to give you as circumstantial account as I can, and with that impartiality that becomes an honest man. I would just premise that one who was no friend to your election, declared just before this meeting that he had got the better of his former prejudices and expected your arrival, and acquiesced in it, and I take this to have been the sentiment of others. To proceed, the meeting of the trustees was so soon, after Mr. Halsey's return, that some of the eastern members did not hear of your refusal till our meeting. The distance was so great, and the roads so bad, that we had a bare quorum, thirteen out of three and twenty. After some time spent in discoursing and reading letters, it was put to the vote, whether your answer was final. Here the vote was divided into three parts, viz: final, not final, and non liquet, which two last had a majority. The vote was tried a second time, with like success, but in order to remove the embarrassment, and that we might go to business, it was at last voted final. It was then proposed whether we should proceed to choose a fixed president, or one pro tempore. Some urged strongly for a fixed president; others urged that it would not be using our brethren well to choose in their absence, they not being previously acquainted with it. Our governor, who heard of your refusal just before our meeting, and was detained from it by indisposition, sent us a letter expressing his dislike of so hasty a choice. Upon the whole, we voted a president pro tempore, and the Rev. Jacob Green, of Morris county, is the man who presides till our next meeting, which is to be, God willing, the second Wednesday of May next.

“If I may be allowed to guess, I think, 1. That you will be re-elected next May. 2. That if you are not, Mr. Finley will not. I think with you, dear sir, that the college of New Jersey ought to be esteemed of as much importance to the

interests of religion and liberty, as any other institution of the kind in America. God at first, in a most remarkable manner, owned it and blessed it. It was the Lord's doing. He erected it, for our beginning was nothing. He carried it on till it was marvellous in our eyes. But it hath been under terrible frowns of divine providence; first in the loss of Mr. Burr, the life and soul of it; then of Mr. Edwards from whom we had such raised expectations, and in being so often disappointed in choosing others, and all this while the college suffers for want of a fixed head. May the Father of mercies look with pity and compassion on the work of his own hands. I am sensible that your leaving Virginia is attended with very great difficulties, but I cannot think your affairs are of equal importance with the college of New Jersey. May the Father of lights direct both you and us in this important affair and order all for the best; thus prays, Reverend and dear Sir, your sincere friend and affectionate

“Humble servant,

“D. COWELL.”

It appears from the extracts from the minutes of the trustees, given by Dr. Green in his history of the college, that the meeting of the board referred to in the above letter of Mr. Cowell, was held on the 22d November, 1758. The next meeting was on the ninth of May 1759, when Mr. Davies was re-elected president. There must have been in the interval an informal meeting of the majority of the board, since, in the following letter, dated March 12th, 1759, Mr. Davies speaks of a renewed application to him to accept the presidency, which he answers as coming from the board, though in the postscript to his letter, he seems to doubt whether it was a private unofficial document, or one made by authority. The letter is addressed to Mr. Cowell and is as follows:

“My Dear Sir,—Your dateless letter I received yesterday; and I wish it had come a few days sooner, when it would have been in my power to have returned an immediate answer by a messenger from W. B. Smith, Esq. and some other eastern trustees, and when it might have assisted me in forming my answer to them, which I sent off last week.

“I am heartily sorry and surprised that the trustees did not drop all thoughts of me at the last convention, and set up some new candidate. But since the matter has taken such an unexpected, unaccountable turn, I could think of no other expedient on this new application, to extricate myself, to discover my duty and to satisfy the trustees and all parties con-