

ARTICLE IX.

DR. BURTON ON METAPHYSICS.¹

BY REV. ENOCH POND, D.D., BANGOR, ME.

Most of the authorities speak of Dr. Burton as having been born at Preston, Conn. He was born at Stonington, in 1752; but at the age of two years removed, with his parents, to Preston, where he lived for the next ten or twelve years. He graduated at Dartmouth College in 1777, — only eight years after the founding of that institution. As the war of the Revolution was then in progress, much alarm was felt in college in expectation of an attack from hostile Tories and Indians. Young Burton often spent his nights on guard; and when he graduated, the usual exercises were dispensed with, on account of the peculiar state of the country. It was during his college life that he became a subject of renewing grace, although he did not become satisfied on this point for several months. After he had graduated, he spent some considerable time at college reading and studying with a view to the ministry; when, with very little ceremony, he was licensed to preach by the Grafton Presbytery. In 1778 he received a call to settle with the church in Thetford, and was ordained the following year.

His field of labor was, at the time, very unpromising; but this was a recommendation of it, rather than otherwise, to Mr. Burton. He resolved to enter it, and to keep on laboring until he should see a brighter day. And here he continued to labor till the end of life. He witnessed several revivals of religion, one of them of years' continuance, and of great power, which entirely changed the aspect of things about him, and transformed the desert into a fruitful field.

For thirty years together Dr. Burton had theological students under his care, in which time he must have assisted not less than sixty in their preparation for the gospel ministry. In general these were able and faithful men, a few of whom still remain; but the most have followed their beloved teacher to a better world. He continued sole pastor of the church in Thetford, until he had passed his threescore years and ten, and died, in 1836, at the age of eighty-four.

Dr. Burton was an instructive, though not an eloquent, preacher. His

¹ Essays on some of the First Principles of Metaphysics, Ethics, and Theology. By Asa Burton, D.D., Pastor of the Church of Christ in Thetford, Vt. Portland. 1824.

sermons were so neatly written and so full of thought, that upon the intelligent and reflecting hearer they could hardly fail of producing an effect. The late Dr. Channing of Boston, after hearing him on some public occasion, remarked: "With all his metaphysics, he is anything but a dry preacher."

With regard to the character of his mind, we quote the following from one of his pupils: "Dr Burton was a man of uncommon intellectual powers. He had a clear, penetrating, comprehensive mind. By severe discipline he had so schooled his understanding that he was capable of taking the most profound and discriminating views of any subject that occupied his attention. Though his library was small, and his reading not extensive, he was familiar with the best writers on metaphysical science. He was not accustomed to stop in the investigation of a subject until he supposed he had reached the legitimate boundary of human knowledge. As an instance of this great perseverance he used to say: "I have spent more than three months of intense study upon the three words *free, moral, agency.*"

In the year 1824 Dr. Burton published the volume of *Essays* now before us. It was written some twenty years previous to this time, probably for the use of his theological students. The style is unadorned, but perspicuous and direct, and it displays throughout a Christian spirit. Its principal object was, without doubt, to vindicate what from him has been called "the Taste Scheme," in opposition to "the Exercise Scheme" of Dr. Emmons.

The work before us is, in the main, original. The author tells us that he first "read with attention the most distinguished authors he could find on the subject of pneumatology, expecting by studying them to digest a true system. But, instead of finding increased light, his mind was more darkened and perplexed than before. Failing of success in this way, he determined to lay aside authors, and make an attempt, by the exertion of his own powers, to arrange his thoughts systematically on the principles and operations of the human mind. In this way he has succeeded, in some good measure, to his own satisfaction."

In entering as a minister upon his theological inquiries, Dr. Burton soon discovered that he could make no satisfactory progress without first settling some of the great principles of mental science. And every student of theology finds the same. For some of the main points of Christian theology are so intimately connected with the human mind, that the former cannot be well understood without a knowledge of the latter. The subjects, for example, of moral agency, regeneration, the Christian virtues, are subjects pertaining to the mind, and cannot be understood without a right understanding of the mind itself. Indeed, both the salvation of the gospel and the destruction from which it delivers are subjects which require an accurate knowledge of the mind. This is the view which Dr.

Burton took, and accordingly the first half of his *Essay* is purely psychological, rather than distinctively theological.

Dr. Burton commences with insisting that the human mind has a substantial existence, and has different faculties, in opposition to those who regard it as but a succession of ideas and exercises. The reference here is, without doubt, to Dr. Emmons; although the author does not name him. On this point Dr. Emmons has been misunderstood. He nowhere affirms that the mind is a mere succession of ideas and exercises, but only that these are all of which we are conscious. Anything beyond these is a matter not of personal consciousness, but of inference, and Dr. Burton says the same: "We know not what the essence of mind or spirit is. We are acquainted with its operations, and the effects they produce; and this comprises all our knowledge, at present, of spiritual existence" (p. 20).

Dr. Burton differs from most of the older metaphysicians, in considering the human mind under three great departments or faculties, — the understanding, the sensibilities (which he calls taste), and the will. If we were to make any criticism on this division, it would be to prefix another department of mind, the sensational, making four in all. Our sensations are the impressions made upon our minds, through the external organs of sense. In these, we are entirely passive. When the external organ is in a healthy state, and is approached through its appropriate medium, sensation will be produced, whether we will or not.

Sensation has sometimes been confounded, though improperly, with external perception. It is through our sensations, or by means of them, that the intellect perceives external things. Sensation is directly connected with external perception, though distinct from it.

Our sensations have also been confounded with our emotions or feelings; but this cannot be true. Our sensations and consequent perceptions often excite emotion — strong emotion; but the sensation itself is not emotion. What can be more different than the sensation of sight, and the feelings awakened by what we see; or than the sensation of hearing, and the feelings excited within us by what we hear?

But we need not dwell on this particular. That the old division of the human faculties into understanding and will is defective, and has been a source of mistake and error to all who have adopted it, is indubitable. That there is a wide region of feeling between the understanding and will, which cannot be classed with either, is certain; and Dr. Burton is to be commended for making it prominent.

The statements of Dr. Burton with regard to the intellectual department of mind are generally sound. He rejects the idealism of Berkeley and the transcendentalists: "A material world does exist, distinct from the mind; and all objects of which we obtain a knowledge through our bodily senses are real existences. It is objects, as they exist, which we see; and not images or representations of them" (p. 22).

Dr. Burton regards memory and imagination and judgment and reason, as not distinct faculties of mind, but as belonging to the understanding. He regards conscience, too, as belonging to the understanding; it being no more than a judgment as to the moral quality of actions. This may be accepted, in part, as a just view of conscience; but it does not comprehend it all. Conscience, in the full sense of the term, denotes a complex mental operation, involving not the understanding only, but the sensibilities. It is not only a judgment as to the moral quality of actions, but a *feeling* in view of them — a feeling of approbation or disapprobation, according as they are perceived to be right or wrong.

In speaking of conscience we sometimes refer to one part of it and sometimes to the other. The phrases "*enlightened* conscience," and "*misguided* conscience," have reference to it as intellectual; while the expressions, "*a seared* conscience" and "*a tender* conscience" refer to the sensibilities.

We sometimes see the different parts of conscience existing in different degrees of perfection. We see a conscience that is enlightened, but not tender; or a conscience that is tender and quick to feel, but not greatly enlightened.

These different parts of conscience require, also, very different kinds of cultivation. The intellectual conscience, like everything else pertaining to the intellect, requires to be instructed and informed. The sentient conscience requires to be cherished, yielded to, and habitually obeyed.

Dr. Burton strangely errs in the matter of conscience, by saying that it "*respects our own character and conduct, and not that of others*" (p. 39). This surely cannot be true. We judge of the right and the wrong of others' actions as well as of our own, and often feel as keenly in view of them. We do not, indeed, feel the sting of remorse in view of the guilty acts of others, but we may feel strong disapprobation and sorrow. Every parent knows this when compelled to witness the guilty conduct of a child, or of others whom he loves.

The department of feeling, or the sensibilities, Dr. Burton properly places between the understanding and will, and insists that there is no approach of influence from the former to the latter, but through this region. He would say, with Professor Upham: "*Strike out the sensibilities, and you excavate a gulf of separation between the intellect and will, which is forever impassable.*"

This faculty of feeling Dr. Burton unfortunately calls *taste*; and its operations — even those of a highly spiritual nature — are denominated *appetites*. They are placed in the same category with our bodily appetites, such as hunger and thirst. This faculty he also calls *the heart*, and makes it the seat of all moral good and evil in the man. It is not only an active principle, but "*the most active principle in existence, and the primary cause, in moral agents, of all the effects ever produced in the*

universe." He further says that "the faculty of taste is the most important property of the mind. It is the seat of all our pleasures and pains; contains all the principles of action that govern men; it is the foundation of vice and virtue; and, according to its nature, such is the moral character of men, and of all intelligent beings. According to its nature, when we bid farewell to life, such will be our endless state beyond the grave."— pp. 284, 253.

In order to make good these representations, Dr. Burton is under the necessity of ascribing to this faculty of taste two distinct classes of mental operations — classes belonging to different departments of the mind, viz. the *sensibilities* and *will*. It is the seat not only of feeling, but of our *desires* and *wishes*. He is the more excusable in this mistake, because our English word "desire" is really an ambiguous one, sometimes denoting mere feelings, but more frequently a large class of internal, voluntary exercises. Thus the appetites and natural affections, which belong exclusively to the sensibilities, are not unfrequently called desires. So, also, are our universal, instinctive desires, as the desire of knowledge and the desire of happiness. But that in the larger part of those exercises which are commonly called *desires* or *wishes* we are voluntary, there can be no doubt. The thief deems it possible to obtain a sum of money by *stealth*; he earnestly desires to obtain it; he resolves that, if possible, he will obtain it; and he enters on a course of measures accordingly. Now, it would be difficult to show that the thief was not as voluntary and as criminal in his desires as in his subsequent resolutions and endeavors. Indeed, may not the foundation of all his guilt be traced to the indulgence of these guilty desires? David Brainerd deemed it possible, by much sacrifice and toil, to bring the American Indians, or a portion of them, to a knowledge of the truth. He earnestly desired the accomplishment of this object; he resolved that he would attempt its accomplishment; he formed his plans, and entered on a course of measures accordingly. Now, was there nothing morally excellent and holy in these benevolent desires of Brainerd? And was he not as voluntary in them as in those resolves and efforts by means of which his desires were accomplished?

Our desires, in the sense in which we here use the term, are, in reality, *choices*, *preferences*, and differ from our simple choices chiefly in respect to their objects. Their objects are not immediately attainable. If they were so, the desires would become simple volitions, fastening upon the chosen objects, and securing them at once. But, as these objects are not immediately attainable, what would otherwise be volitions assume the form of abiding wishes or desires to secure the objects in question as soon as practicable.

The error here detected in Dr. Burton's classification is a very important one, and goes far towards upsetting all that is peculiar in his theory of moral action. Mere feelings are not action, but are powerful motives to

action, constituting the entire class of internal, sentient motives, through which alone external, objective motives can reach and influence the will.

Dr. Burton seems to have suspected that he had included more under his faculty of taste or feeling than properly belonged to it; since he calls it a "compound faculty," and says that "an affection or passion is a compound of either painful or agreeable sensations, with desires to avoid the painful, or obtain the agreeable, object" (pp. 222, 234).

In this passage, and some others, Dr. Burton comes near to acknowledging — what his theory would not allow him to acknowledge — the existence of complex mental affections, made up of the sentient and the voluntary. That several of our religious affections are of this nature, there can be no doubt. Thus, repentance is a complex affection, made up of sorrow for sin, which is chiefly sentient, with a turning from sin, which is voluntary. Paul says that "godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation." Of course, it does not constitute the whole of it. Faith, too, is a complex mental affection, involving an intellectual assent to the doctrine of Christ, and a voluntary committing of the soul to his hands. Indeed, many of those affections which are enjoined upon us in the scriptures are complex. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." The affections here enjoined are chiefly sentient; and yet they are so far under the direction of the will as to render them proper subjects of command. Without a knowledge of these complex affections, it is impossible to understand or to vindicate many of the commands of scripture.

Dr. Burton describes the will as a distinct faculty, whose office-work it is to put forth volitions — to choose and refuse. The will, he says, is moved, not as material bodies are, by physical force, but by motives. And he correctly divides motives into two general classes — the external and internal. "External motives include all objects which either please or disgust us. Every object which pleases us excites to those actions which are necessary to obtain the agreeable object; while those objects which displease excite to those actions which are necessary to avoid them." By internal motives he understands the feelings — "everything in the heart or taste which stimulates to action" (pp. 139, 140). As before remarked, he holds that these two classes of motives must operate conjointly, in order to move or influence the will. He also holds that the will is always as the strongest motive, or as that which appears the strongest or is most pleasing at the time. To do as one pleases is to yield to the strongest motive; and this is liberty — all the liberty which a rational being can desire.

But although, on these points, we might be willing to accept what Dr. Burton teaches respecting the will, on others we feel constrained to differ. He says there is but one class of voluntary exercises, and these are simple, executive volitions — those which stand connected with overt action. "They do not admit of any subdivision, or of being resolved into specific classes" (p. 92).

If we believed this, we should say, with our author, that the exercises of the will, instead of being the seat and source of moral character, have in themselves no moral character. For, certainly, we do not attribute a moral character to mere external executive volitions, considered as distinct from the desires, the purposes, the intents out of which they grow, more than we do to the muscles which are moved by them, or to the instruments which our hands employ.

But what are we to think of the position that these executive volitions are the only exercises of the will—that there is nothing of a voluntary nature beneath them, by which they are prompted, and which they go to execute? Here are our resolutions, our purposes, our plans of life, all formed under the influence of motives, and as truly voluntary as our simple choices. Here, too, are our intents, our preferences, our desires and wishes—all of them exercises of the will. It is these internal exercises, the most of them purely voluntary, and into all of which the voluntary element enters more or less, which are the subjects of divine command or prohibition; which go to constitute our moral characters; which render us holy or sinful, praiseworthy or blameworthy in the sight of God. They are not, like our simple volitions, evanescent and transitory, but remain, in most instances, long upon the mind, sometimes life-long, and impress upon it a permanent character, either good or bad.

It is affirmed by Dr. Burton, and by many others, that these internal affections are not exercises of will, because they cannot be produced by an exercise of will. "A person, by willing, can no more produce love to God in his heart, than he can produce a world by willing it. If any one is not convinced of this truth, let him make the experiment" (p. 90). We admit that no person can produce love to God in his heart, simply by willing it; and no more can he produce, in this way, any other voluntary exercise, not even a simple, executive volition. This is not the way in which voluntary exercises are produced. They are exercises of the will, and not the creations of such exercises. They are excited, put forth, under the influence of motives, and not caused, produced, one by another.

I have before said that Dr. Burton makes moral freedom, or liberty, to consist in choosing and acting as we please; or (which is the same) in acting from what is, at the time, the strongest motive. And we should have no objection to this, did he not couple with it another idea, viz. that when we thus act we have no natural ability to act otherwise. He denies the distinction between natural and moral ability, and holds that men have no ability of any kind to act differently from what they do (p. 182). But we ask, does not this contradict the common sense, the common apprehensions of all men? Does it not conflict with the very idea of freedom? Do we not all know that we *can* act differently from what we do, and that, in thousands of instances, we ought to act differently? It is not enough to say that we can do differently, *if we will*; in the sense of natural

ability, we can do differently if we do not will. And in every case of sin we ought to act differently, whether we will or no. Thus much, it seems to us, enters into the very idea of freedom.

We believe, indeed, with Dr. Burton, that men always do act from what is to them, at the time, the strongest motive; that it was certain to the mind of God, from all eternity, that they would so act; and that this certainly constitutes a moral necessity, which is not at all inconsistent with human freedom, but the rather implies it. On this ground we hold, as he does, that the doctrine of predestination, unconditional election, and the perseverance of saints, are all of them consistent with the free-agency of man. Still, this representation conflicts not at all with the idea of a natural ability, which consists solely in possessing the requisite faculties and opportunity, to act differently from what we do.

With Dr. Burton's theory of morals we are even more dissatisfied than with his philosophy of the human mind. He teaches that "happiness is the only absolute good, and that the greatest sum of happiness is the highest possible good" (p. 147). "Holiness is not an absolute but a relative good. Indeed, without happiness, why not as well be without holiness, as to have it? Of what value is a universe, however holy, if there be no happiness?" (p. 149). "Why do we consider holiness, with all its operations and exercises, to be a good? Because they promote happiness. This is their motive and tendency" (p. 152).

Holding these views, Dr. Burton cannot admit that the difference between right and wrong lies in the eternal nature, fitness, and relations of things; but only in their tendencies to produce happiness or misery. Nor can he admit that there is any standard of right and wrong, out of the mere will of God, to which he is under obligations, as a moral agent, to conform his will. And all this he expressly concedes (p. 361).

We have no time to discuss these positions here. We consider them as not only false and absurd, but as striking at the foundation of morals and religion. Of course, the venerable author did not so think or intend; but we can come to no other conclusion. All the commands of God require us to be holy; thus showing that holiness is the supreme and ultimate good; and when Moses besought the Lord to show him his glory, he said, "I will make all my goodness to pass before thee" (Ex. xxxiii. 19). That holiness tends to promote happiness, there can be no doubt; but does not this prove that there must be something excellent in the very nature of holiness, to give it such a tendency? And the kindred position, that there is no independent standard of right in the very nature and relations of the Supreme Being, to which his holy character is conformed, goes to annihilate his moral character.

The mistakes of Dr. Burton on these vital topics led to others equally strange and unaccountable; such as that "liberty is not necessary to virtue and vice"; and that "natural and moral evil are in nature the same" (pp. 131, 154).

Dr. Burton has an "Essay on Regeneration." In this he uses the words "heart" and "taste" to denote both the faculty of feeling, and the *appetencies* and *motions* of this faculty. But in whichever sense the words are used, they denote the seat of the change in regeneration,—a change in which the subject of it has no voluntary concern.

In the conclusion of this Essay, which seems to have been originally a sermon, the author calls upon his impenitent readers or hearers to consider "how inconceivably stupid, blind, and mad they are. You travel the road to hell with pleasure, and are every day treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. To excuse and justify yourselves, you often say that you cannot help it. Yet nothing but attention is wanting in order for you to see your vileness, your danger, your just desert of death, and your dependence on sovereign mercy; and if you saw all this, could you live a secure and quiet life? Would not your dependence increase your fears, and cause you to cry aloud for mercy? Look, then, and learn, that you are deaf, blind, naked, dead, and lost, and are dependent on Christ for help. Then will you begin to beg and cry for mercy. And till you do thus see your ruined state and your dependence on unmerited grace, and do come and cry for mercy, there is no hope for you" (p. 349). Here is no direction like those of the sacred writers, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"; "Make you a new heart and a new spirit"; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved." But "come to a knowledge of your situation; feel your dependence, and cry to God for help." And as the object of the prayer is to obtain a new heart, it must, of course, proceed from the old heart of sin. And to the cry of such a heart where in the Bible is the promise of deliverance made?

The great error of Dr. Burton's system, so far as this matter of preaching to the impenitent is concerned, lies in his unfortunate classification of our mental exercises and affections. He is right in supposing that there is in the human mind a department or faculty of feeling,—a faculty of great importance, and quite indispensable to moral agency. But he errs in ascribing to this faculty whole classes of affections which are not feelings,—desires, aversions, aspirations, preferences, which belong, obviously, to the will. Indeed, he ascribes to it all the different classes of internal voluntary exercises,—our resolutions, purposes, wishes, intents,—leaving to the will proper only the putting forth of simple, executive volitions.

He seems to be sensible, at times, that he is putting too much upon the faculty of feeling—that he is ascribing to it exercises which have no place there. Hence he calls it, as we have seen, a "compound faculty," and an "active faculty," and speaks of its feelings as prompting desires. Still, he cannot give over its active exercises to the will, where they properly belong, and hence can, with no logical consistency, call upon the un-renewed sinner to love, repent, and obey the gospel.

After all, the advocates of the Taste and Exercise Schemes are probably nearer to each other, on this point, than they think they are. They differ chiefly in classification and names. The new relish or the taste in man is but a new love—an internal exercise of the will—which the Bible calls upon the sinner not to produce by a previous executive volition, but actively to put forth, under the influence of motives, and thus come at once into the embrace of the gospel.

ARTICLE X.

NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

Want of space compels us to defer two lengthened communications on the Life and Writings of Professors Tischendorf and Ewald; also several Notices of German and English publications.

UHLEMANN'S SYRIAC GRAMMAR. Translated from the German, by Enoch Hutchinson. With a Course of Exercises in Syriac Grammar, a Chrestomathy, and brief Lexicon, prepared by the Translator. Second Edition, with additions and corrections. 8vo. pp. 459. New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1875.

The first German edition of this Grammar was published in 1829; the first American edition in 1855. It has been adopted as a text-book in several of the highest institutions of learning in this country and in Great Britain. It is the *standard* Grammar of the Syriac language. It is translated with great care and skill. The first edition richly merited the encomiums which it received (see *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. xii. p. 383); the second edition has still higher claims to our praise.

VOICES OF THE PROPHETS. Twelve Lectures Preached in the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn in the Years 1870-1874, on the Foundation of Bishop Warburton. By Edwin Hamilton Gifford, D.D., formerly Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Head Master of King Edward's School, Birmingham; Rector of Walgrave, Honorary Canon of Worcester, Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of London. 12mo. pp. 264. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark. 1874. Special edition imported for use in this country by Scribner, Welford, and Armstrong. \$2.50.

Dr. Gifford rightly considers the biblical prophecies as miraculous. He defends the doctrine that miracles are possible, and that they have occurred, and that they can be proved. The old objection to the possibility of proving miracles is, "that testimony can reach only to external facts, not to a supernatural cause; and that of such external facts as are alleged in