

SPECIAL ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK REVIEWS

THE EVENING LAMP.

By Rev. James A. R. Dickson, B.D., Galt.

When the toils of the day are over, and the evening meal has been enjoyed, and the family group is gathered around the evening lamp, either reading the entertaining page of classic story, or monthly magazine, or daily newspaper; or listening to a conversation that has sprung up as the wind springs, no one knows whence, each by turns taking part, and adding his share to the feast of reason; while some, perchance, ply the busy needle, embroider, embellishing or knitting—what a sight is this! No more beautiful sight can be seen; no more pleasing picture can be painted. It speaks of family union, joy and content. It says, as loudly as it can be said, what the sweet old song says:

Home! home! sweet, sweet home!  
There's no place like home! There's  
no place like home!

In the soft radiance each face is intelligent and loving and beautiful. Each countenance beams with animation and interest. Each heart beats with a tender affection that grows with the growth and strengthens with the strength. It is a familiar scene; but we seldom think to how much in life and "in the world's broad field of battle" it ministers. That light shines not only for the present, but the future. It casts its rays far out into the ways of the outer world, and cheers and gladdens by its kindly gleam when darkness may be gathered around the spirit, and hope fading from the soul. It lightens up all life. The evening lamp of one's early days never goes out, but shines on through all the coming years, more bright, and clear and glad-some. What the sun is in the noonday sky this lamp is in the heart. This, we think, must stand unquestioned. The Rev. Richard Cecil says: "I had a pious mother, who dropped things in my way. I could never rid myself of them. I was a professed infidel; but then I liked to be an infidel in company, rather than when alone. I was wretched when by myself. These principles and maxims and data spoiled my jollity. With my companions I could sometimes stifle them; like embers we kept one another warm. Besides, I was here a sort of hero. I had beguiled several of my associates into my own opinions, and I had to maintain a character before them. But I could not divest myself of my better principles. I went with one of my companions to see the "minor." He could laugh heartily at Mother Cole—I could not. He saw in her the picture of all who talked about religion—I knew better. The ridicule on Regeneration was high sport to him—to me it was none; it could not move my features. He knew no difference between regeneration and transubstantiation—I did. I knew there was such a thing. I was afraid and ashamed to laugh at it. Parental influence thus cleaves to a man; it harrasses him—it throws itself continually in his way. . . . I find myself today laying down maxims in my family, which I took up at three or four years of age, before I could possibly know the reason of the thing." Ah! as the light of the evening lamp sinks into the eye and fills it, so the words spoken around it are dropped quietly, and often unwittingly, as seeds into rich soil—Banyan seed, that give birth not only to one tree, but to a whole forest.

How influential in the formation of character is the atmosphere of the evening lamp! What made Dr. Duff a missionary? Was it not the conversation at home? These are his own words: "Into

a general knowledge of the objects and progress of modern missions I was initiated from my earliest youth by my revered father, whose Catholic spirit rejoiced in tracing the triumphs of the Gospel in different lands, and in connection with the different branches of the Catholic Church. Pictures of Jungernaut and other heathen idols he was wont to exhibit, accompanying the exhibition with copious explanations, well-fitted to create a feeling of horror towards idolatry and of compassion towards the poor blinded idolaters, and intermixing the whole with statements of the love of Jesus." And what does Froude tell us of the origin of Thomas Carlyle's peculiar style? Simply this, that it originated with the converse of his mother and his father. Froude says: "This style, which has been such a stone of stumbling, originated, he has often said to himself, in the old farm-house at Annandale. The humor of it came from his mother. The form was his father's common mode of speech, and had been adopted by himself for its brevity and emphasis. He was aware of its singularity, and feared that it might be mistaken for affectation, but it was a natural growth, with his merit among others, that it is the clearest of styles. No sentence leaves the reader in doubt of its meaning." . . .

Where are those questions put, half in fun and half in earnest, which provoke so much thought and talk in children? Is it not around the evening lamp? Miss Harriet Martineau, in her brief biographical sketch of Samuel Rogers, says: "In his early youth, his father one evening asked all his boys what they would be. Sam would not tell unless he might write it down, for nobody but his father to see. What he wrote was: 'A Unitarian Minister.' His life, however, was to flow in another channel. Dr. James Hamilton, the author of many precious books and "Our Christian Classics," tells us how the early days determined his future course. In the preface to the last mentioned volumes, he says: "In the following pages the compiler must plead guilty to a certain amount of self-indulgence. It was his lot to be born in the midst of old books. Before he could read them, they had become a kind of companions, and, in their coats of brown calf and white vellum, great was his admiration for tomes as tall as himself By-and-bye, when he was allowed to open the leather portals and look in on the solemn authors in peaked beards and wooden ruffs, his reverence deepened for the mighty days of the great departed; and with some vague prepossession, his first use of the art of reading was to mimic an older example, and sit poring for hours over Manton and Hopkins, Reynolds and Horton. Indeed, so intense did his old-fashioned affection grow, that he can well remember, when compelled to shut the volume and retire to rest, how, night after night, he carried to his cot some bulky folio, and only fell asleep to dream of a paradise where there is no end of books, and no thing to interrupt the reader." . . .

Did not Sir Walter Scott receive his first bent toward ballad literature by hearing his mother and grandmother recite long before he himself had learned to read? Could we but know what is said, talked about, discussed, around the evening lamp, we should find little difficulty in outlining much that might be expected in the individual life of particular men, or in the wider life of the nation. There the spirit of the family breathes forth freely, there the sentiments of the family are planted and

watered and cultivated, there the fashioning energies of family character and life are felt—felt feebly or forcibly—but felt in such a way that though at first they are light as gossamer threads, by and-by they become like mighty chains. What need, then, to keep the light of the evening lamp sweet and beautiful, bright and joyous, clear of everything that would dim it or destroy its power. It is one of the most potent factors in both family and national life. But what if there be none in some homes? That can hardly be. Something must be spoken of, for it is impossible for human beings to live together without discourse of some kind. It may be low and debasing, and unworthy of their nature, tending only from low depths to lower depths still; but it is there. Men must have fellowship.

It is, therefore, well worth while to remember that the evening lamp needs trimming, lest it smoke and burn up its oil in darkness. And that it requires to be fully placed that it may give light to all that are in the house. Let it be lighted up then, clear and luminous, and win some, by such discourse as will aid and encourage every good thought, every beautiful wish, every noble purpose. Let it shed its cheering, warming and attractive rays in such a way that it may stimulate all that is virtuous in the heart. As the sun rises upon the world "sows the earth with orient pearl," so let the evening lamp make radiant all that lies within the immortal realms of the home; by bringing into it all that is desirable as objects of consideration, as principles of action, as modes of life. All that is worthy. The short and easy way most effectually to master every evil is to encourage and strengthen every element of good. Bend the soul to the unholding of the good and the evil shall fall, because it lacks support.

Galt, Ont.

FERNIE RELIEF FUND.

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