

GENERAL LITERATURE.

EMOTION AND PRINCIPLE.

BY REV. JACOB ABBOT.

One of the most common religious errors of the present day, is the habit of confounding religious interest with religious emotion. Interest in religion is our constant duty. Emotion is one of the forms which this interest occasionally assumes. Now many persons confound the two, and think that they are in a cold, stupid state, unless their hearts are full of a deep, overwhelming emotion. They struggle continually to awaken and to sustain this emotion, and are distressed and disappointed that they cannot succeed. They fail, for the obvious reason that the human heart is incapable of long-continued emotion of any kind, when in a healthy state. Susceptibility of emotion is given by the Creator for wise and good purposes, but it is intended to be an occasional, not an habitual state of the mind; and in general, our duty is to controul, rather than to cherish it.

For example, a man loves his wife and his little children, and thinks that he may promote their permanent good in the world, by removing to a new home in the West, where he can make his labors far more effectual in laying a foundation for their wealth and prosperity, than he can in the home of his own childhood. He sets off, therefore, on the long and toilsome journey, to explore the ground and prepare the way for them to follow. As soon as he gets fairly upon the confines of the settled country, his mind is daily engrossed by his labours and cares. Now, he is rolling over the rough and miry road—now hesitating upon the bank of a rapid stream—now making his slow and tedious way through the unbroken forest, his mind intent on studying the marks of the trees, or the faint traces of the Indian's path. During all this time he feels no emotion of love for his wife and children, but his mind is under the continued influence of the strongest possible interest in them. It is love for them which carries him on every step of the way. It is this that animates him, this that cheers and sustains; while he perhaps very seldom pauses in his labours and cares, in order to bring them distinctly to his mind, and fill his heart with the flowing of a sentimental affection.

At length, however, at some solitary post office, in the cabin of a settler, he finds a letter from home, and lays the reins upon his saddlebow, and reads the welcome pages, while his horse, willing to rest, walks slowly through the forest.

As he reads sentence after sentence of the message which has thus found its way to him from his distant home, his ardent affection for the loved ones there, which has through the day, remained calm within, a quiet steady principle of action, awakes and begins to agitate his bosom with more active emotions; and when, at the close of the letter, he comes upon a little postscript, rudely printed, asking "father to come home soon," it calls to his mind so forcibly that round and happy face which smiled upon him from the steps of the door when he came away, that his heart is full. He does not love these absent ones any more than he did before; but his love for them takes for the moment a different form. Nor is it that his affections is merely in a greater state of intensity than usual, at such a time. It is in a totally different state; different in its nature, and different, nay, the reverse in its tendency. For while love as a principle of action would carry him forward to labour with cheerfulness and zeal for the future good of his family—love, as a mere emotion, tends to destroy all his interest in going forward, and to lead him to turn round in his path, and seek his shortest way back to his home. He readily perceives this, and though the indulgence of such feelings may be delightful, he struggles to put them down. He suppresses the tear which fills his eye—folds up his letter—spurs on his horse, and instead of considering the state of emotion the one to be cultivated, as the only genuine evidence of true love, he regards it rather as one to be controlled and suppressed, as interfering with the duties and objects of genuine affection.

Now the discrimination which it is the design of the foregoing case to set in a strong light, is very often not made in religion. But it should be made. Piety, if it exists at all, must exist generally as a calm and steady principle of ac-

tion, changing its form, and manifesting itself as religious emotion only occasionally. The frequency of these emotions, and the depth of the religious feelings which they will awaken, depend upon a thousand circumstances, entirely independent of the true spiritual condition of the soul. The physical influences by which we are surrounded—the bodily temperament—the state of the health—the degree of pressure of active duty—the social circumstances in which we are placed—the season, the hour, the scenery—a thousand things may, by the combined influence of some or of all of them, fill the heart with religious emotion—provided that principle of religion be already established there. But we must not suppose that religion is quiescent and inactive at other times. Religion is, to say the least, quite as active a principle when it leads a man to his work in the cause of God, as when in his retirement it swells his heart with spiritual joys.—They are, in fact, two distinct forms, which the same principle assumes, and we cannot compare one with the other, so as to assign to either the pre-eminence. Neither can exist in a genuine state, without some measure of the other. It is, however, undoubtedly the former which is the great test of Christian character. It is the former, which we are to strive to establish in our hearts, and in which we may depend upon making steady and certain progress just in proportion to the faithfulness of our vigilance, and the sincerity of our prayers.

But in point of fact, the attention of Christians in their efforts to make progress in piety, very often looks almost exclusively to the latter.—They think that continued religious emotion is the only right frame of mind—while the human mind is so constituted, that continued emotion of any kind is consistent only with insanity. They toil and struggle for emotion—but they labor in vain; for emotion of any kind is just the very last thing to come by being toiled and struggled for. The result is, therefore, either a feeling of dejection and confirmed despondency—or else the gradual cultivation of a morbid sentimentalism, which has nothing but the semblance of piety.

THE ATTRACTIONS OF HOME.

BY REV. J. N. DANFORTH.

THESE are sweet words. Who is not charmed with its music? Who hath not felt the potent magic of its spell?

By home I do not mean the house, the parlor, the fireside, the carpet, or the chairs. They are inert material, things which derive all their interest from the idea of the home which is their locality. Home is something more ethereal, less tangible, not easily described, yet strongly conceived—the source of some of the deepest emotions of the soul, grasping the heart-strings with such a sweet and tender force, as subdues all within the range of its influence.

Home is the palace of the husband and the father. He is the monarch of that little empire, wearing a crown that is the gift of heaven, swaying a sceptre put into his hand by the Father of all, acknowledging no superior, fearing no rival, and dreading no superior. In him dwells love, the ruling spirit of home. She that was the fond bride of his youthful heart, is the affectionate wife of his maturer years.

The star that smiled on their bridal eve has never set. Its rays still shed a serene lustre on the horizon of home. There too is the additional ornament of home—the circle of children—beautifully represented by the spirit of inspiration as "olive plants round about the table." We have been such. There was our cradle. That cradle was rocked by a hand ever open to supply our wants—watched by an eye ever awake to the approach of danger. Many a live-long night has that eye refused to be closed for thy sake, reader, when thou, a helpless child, wast indebted to a mother's love, sanctified by heaven's blessing for a prolonged existence through a sickly infancy. Hast thou ever grieved that fond heart? No tears can too freely, too sincerely shed, for such an offence against the sweet charities of home. If there was joy in the palace at thy birth, oh, never let it be turned into sorrow by any violation of the sacred laws of home.

We that had our happy birth like most of the human race, in the country, can recall many tender and pleasant associations of home. There

is earnest poetry in this part of our life. We remember with delight the freshness of the early morn; the tuneful and sprightly walk among the dewy fields; the cool repose amid the sequestered shades of the grove, vocal with the music of nature's inimitable warblers; the "tinkling spring," where we slaked our thirst with the pellucid waters as they came from the hand of the Mighty One—the bleating of the flocks, the lowing of the herds, the humming of the bees, the cry of the whippoorwill, the melancholy, monotonous song of the night bird, relieved only by the deep bass of that single note, which he uttered as he plunged from his lofty height into a lower region of atmosphere—these are among our recollections of home. And they come softened and sobered through the medium of the past, but without losing their power to touch the heart, and still endear the word home.

There too perhaps we saw a father die; having attained to a patriarchal age, he bowed himself on his bed, saying, "behold I die, but God shall be with you," and was gathered to his people. Nor can the memory ever forget that mother in her meek and quiet old age, walking through many a peaceful year on the verge of heaven, breathing its atmosphere, inhaling its fragrance, reflecting its light and holy beauty, till at length she left the sweet home of earth for her Father's home in heaven.

"So gently dies the wave upon the shore."

Home too is the scene of the gay and joyous bridal. When the lovely daughter, affianced to the youth of her heart, stands up to take the irrevocable pledge. What an interesting moment! I saw not long since such an one. She stood unconscious of the blended charm which innocence and beauty threw around her face and person: her soft, smooth, polished forehead, was circled with a wreath of flowers; her robe was of purest white, and in her hand was held a bouquet of variegated roses. Beside her stood the happy man for whom she was to be

"A guardian angel, o'er his life presiding,
Doubling his pleasures, and his care dividing."

As I pronounced the words that made them one, adding the nuptial benediction, a tear fell from the eye of the bride on the wreath in her hand! It was a tribute to "home sweet home." Not that she loved father and mother less, but husband more. That piece of music, "The Bride's Farewell," plunges deeper into the fountain of emotion in the soul, than any other combination of thought and song to which I ever listened. Was the bride ever found who was equal to its performance on the day of her espousals, or rather in the hour of her departure from her long-loved home, when the time had arrived to bid farewell to father, mother, brother, and sister? Perhaps in looking at the picture of domestic life, as exhibited in such circumstances, we should not omit to notice some of the least prominent traits and colouring, for they never escaped the keen and practised eye of the true poet. Thus Rogers, in his graphic and natural poem of "Human Life" in which he snatches so many graces "beyond the reach of art," does not, in describing the wedding scene, forget the young portion of the family, even the little daughter, so often the joy and the gem of home.

"Then are they blest indeed, and swift the hours
Till her young sister wreath her hair with flowers,
Kindling her beauty—white, unseen the least,
Twitches her robes, then runs behind, the rest,
Known by her laugh, that will not be suppressed."

But even this picture must be shaded. If the cradle be one of the things of home, so is the coffin! The bridal robe is, alas! too often succeeded by the funeral pall. "Six years ago," heard I the minister of God say, at the funeral of a young and lovely member of a friend's family, "she who lies there stood here to take the marriage vows. She is now the bride of death." Striking thought! How short the passage from the home of love and felicity to the grave! A few years since I sat amidst a domestic circle of father, mother, three sons, and a daughter. It was the home of hospitality. Where are they now? The solemn churchyard will tell. They have all sunk into the long, dreamless repose of the grave. Silent are those halls, that once echoed to the cheerful sound of their voices. They have gone to their "long home." And we follow. In the fine language of Paul, "it becomes those who have wives, to be as though