MEMOIR OF DANIEL APPLETON WHITE

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BY GEORGE W. BRIGGS.

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MEMOIR.*

BOYHOOD AND YOUTH.

DANIEL APPLETON WHITE was born in that part of the old town of Methuen which is now included in the City of Lawrence, June 7th, 1776. His ancestor, William White, came to this country from Haverhill, Norfolk Co., England, in 1635, in company with Rev. Mr. Ward, the first minister of Haverhill, Mass. Mr. White first went to Ipswich, thence to Newbury; but finally settled at Haverhill. The place on which he built his house is still occupied by a lineal descendant, who bears the name of White, and has been in the possession of the family since the settlement of the town in 1640. William White died Sept. 28th, 1690, when about eighty years of age. John White, his descendant in the fifth generation, the father of the subject of this memoir, was born Feb. 7th, 1719–20. He removed to Methuen about the year 1772, and died July 11th, 1800. He was twice married; first to Mrs. Miriam Hazen, in 1753, by whom he had six children; and again to Elizabeth Haynes, the mother of Daniel, Feb. 18th, 1767. She had eleven children, of whom Daniel was the fifth.† Thirteen of this family of seventeen, had families of their own.

* The writer desires to refer to the admirable memoir of Judge White, by Rev. Dr. Walker, published in the proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, which contains many things of which he would have been glad to avail himself in this brief sketch, if they had not been already used by a far more skilful hand.

† The genealogy is as follows: John White, the only son of William and Mary White, married Hannah French, at Salem, Nov. 25th, 1652, and died Jan. 1st, 1668, at the age of 29 years. His only son, Capt. John White, was born March 8th, 1663-4. He married Lydia Gilman, of Exeter, Oct. 24th, 1687, and died Nov. 20th, 1727. He had a large family of fourteen children, one of whom, Timothy White, graduated at Harvard College in 1720. His fourth child, Deacon William White, the grandfather of Daniel, was born Jan. 18th, 1693-4, and died Dec. 11th, 1737. He was married in Boston, June 12th, 1716, to Sarah Phillips, sister of Rev. Samuel Phillips, of Andover.

Daniel's childhood and youth were passed upon his father's farm until he went to Atkinson Academy, in June 1792, when he was just sixteen years old. In a charming autobiographical sketch written for his children, during a long illness, in the winter of 1836–7, and which he says he might never have found "time and opportunity to write in a state of health," he has drawn a delightful picture of his early life. It unveils the beauty of a genuine New England home. Everything conspired to make his boyhood and youth bright and happy. His father's farm was charmingly situated, stretching from the Spicket to the Merrimac, when both of those streams flowed on through level meadows, or rushed over falls and rocks, in their native grace and wildness. In the Salem Gazette of June 17th, 1796, Rev. Dr. Bentley gave a very enthusiastic account of a visit which he had then lately made to this part of Methuen, and of the beauty of the cascades and falls upon the rivers. The farm itself abounded in wood, as well as in finely cultivated fields; thus presenting a variety of beautiful scenery, with picturesque and delightful prospects. Birds flocked among the trees, and berries abounded in the pastures. A combination of circumstances was presented, so far as external nature was concerned, of which the subject of our memoir always spoke with delight and gratitude.

Other influences seemed equally propitious. These bright surroundings were a fit symbol of the home itself. His father's house was filled with young and loving hearts, and graced by the frequent presence of the most cultivated people in the neighborhood, of many of whom he gives attractive sketches, and of relatives from other places, and visitors to the town, who were welcomed with an abounding hospitality. It was presided over with a happy blending of wisdom and affection. He gives a picture of his parents in the following words:

"My father was a tall, erect and finely formed man; and with his handsome suit of snuff-colored cloth, which my mother caused to be annually manufactured for him, and his beaver hat, he always appeared in the character of a gentleman farmer. Well skilled in overlooking and directing the management of his farm, he did little more himself than sow the grain, which he could do better than any one else, and occasionally to follow the plough, and in Summer to stir up the hay. I speak of the time when I was a boy at home, and he was from sixty to seventy years of age. My mother, burdened with the care of a numerous and increasing family, manifested a devotion to her duties in the relation of wife and mother, above all praise. Though so much younger than my father, she seemed to me to be exactly suited to him in all respects, and he to her. I have no recollection of an unkind look or word that ever passed between them, though my father was not unfrequently roused to an indignant and somewhat harsh expression of his feelings in respect to others."

The features of his father's character, and its excellence, are still more distinctly stated in an Obituary Notice in the Mass. Mercury, in Boston, July 18th, 1800. After speaking of his peculiar fondness for rural occupations and domestic life, the writer says:—

"Born in affluence, he lived easy. Economy and industry were inherent virtues; but possessing a generous heart, he added not to his possessions. Riches were not his God, and money he esteemed only for its necessary uses. He possessed a strong mind, and a firm understanding. Cheerfulness was his constant companion. His heart overflowed at the reception of a friend. The poor have called him blessed. Courteous in his deportment; resolute in enterprise; just and quick in apprehension, but compassionate in temper; open and explicit in all his views, he lived respected and died happy."

With such parents, the spirit of the household must have been one of wisdom as well as love. There was a perfect toleration of all innocent youthful sports. The parents were strictly religious, connected with the Baptist denomination. But they were very careful to make no requisition upon the Sabbath, which would give their children gloomy associations with that day. The family were required to attend meeting, and read some chapters in the Bible. Still, both before and after Public Worship, they were permitted to walk over the farm and enjoy the influences of nature, and the loving intercourse of innocent and youthful hearts. The liberty of the household is thus described: "Our freedom in all respects was greater and more delightful, than that of any boys I ever knew, situated as we were." But there was a quiet authority, an omnipresent influence which drew those young hearts towards generous affections and Christian purposes. It was a power all the more effective, perhaps, because so seldom exerted in any direct, outward pressure. The theory of early education which the son states as his own ideal in later years, grew out of the life of that Methuen home. It was a theory which recognized the fact, that "the spontaneous life, in its own time and place, is as sacred as the reflective and moral life;" a theory that aimed to avoid "the excess of regulation and discipline, as much as the opposite extreme of indulgence," and which, while it insisted upon "implicit obedience as the indispensable foundation of character, endeavoured to allow nature free scope in unfolding and maturing all her generous feelings and principles." It was the power of character, the beauty of holiness, rather than direct authority, which moulded the lives in his early home. These spiritual forces certainly did their work upon himself. In his case, "the boy was father of the man." The features of his manhood distinctly unfold themselves in the picture which he draws of his youth; and we feel that he not only speaks the simplest truth when he says, "Innocence and simplicity had not

deserted me, certainly, when, at the age of sixteen, I left home for the Academy and the College," but that these graces became so inwrought into his character amid the benign influences of his early home that they never deserted him, and accompanied him as angels on either hand till he passed on to a new and still higher youth.

Only two troubles clouded his youthful days. The first and greatest of these came from his questionings upon the subject of religion. Those questionings began at a very early date. From his childhood he had been accustomed to read the Bible; and he had read it through before he was eight years old. Many of its narratives made a deep impression upon his imagination. He associated the characters in the Bible with persons of the same name whom he knew. Joseph was the image of his own brother Joseph. "Stephen, the first martyr, looked like Stephen Sargent, the older son of a neighbor." The father of the Prodigal Son bore the image of his own father, and the elder brother that of his brother John. "And so," he says, "they have since appeared." He gave "a local habitation," also, to the scenes of sacred history, by fixing upon some spot upon the farm, which seemed suited to the transaction represented. Thus both his mind and his imagination were early filled with religious thoughts and associations. Though eminently social and cheerful in temperament, both in early and later life, he possessed a thoughtful nature, and had a peculiar interest in religious exercises, even in his boyhood. The following extract from his Journal gives a striking proof of this:

"I remember that the day I was eleven years old, June 7, 1787, there was the raising of a parsonage house, for Mr. Williams, a great occasion for boys, and the funeral of a Mrs. Frye, three or four miles off, and that while others went to the raising, I walked to the funeral in preference, and back to the graveyard, nearly as far."

He mentions also the funeral of a young married friend not long afterwards,—a great favorite of his on account of her beauty, and kindness to him, which affected him deeply. With characteristic candor, he says, "The excitement and sympathy felt on these solemn occasions afforded me, I suppose, something of the sort of pleasure derived from witnessing the pathetic scenes of a tragedy; and this may in part account for my desire to attend them." But he truly adds, "It was doubtless owing in part to their being in accordance with my religious feelings."

A nature so predisposed to thoughtfulness, to which the scenes and characters of Sacred History became real by constant reading of the Bible; a nature unfolded in the atmosphere of a religious home, where he heard the con-

versation of the ministers who were such frequent guests at his father's house, must have been open to intense religious impressions. But they came in a form that profoundly tried him. His parents belonged to the "New Lights," as they were then termed, and fully sympathized with the doctrines of Whitefield; and the idea became impressed upon the boy's mind that the true religion could only be gained by a miraculous change of heart, without which the soul must be forever lost. He says:

"Everything conspired to deepen these awful impressions, and to produce in my mind a full conviction that such, and such only, were the true doctrines of Christianity. I well remember that it seemed astonishing that we should be unable to do anything to save our souls from perdition, when we were so constantly commanded in the Bible to exert ourselves for the purpose; to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and were promised a reward for our endeavors. But these expressions were explained away in a manner which I did not think of questioning. We could not strive, or knock, or even ask aright, without the suggestions and aid of the Holy Spirit. Hence, at about the age of twelve or fifteen, I was reduced to a state of most distressing perplexity, almost despair, as to my future condition."

Many persons trained in these New England homes have known an experience similar to his. Happily the profound impressions already made upon his heart became an anchor amid the agitations of his thought, and held him in true loyalty to religion itself, in the struggles of his youth and early manhood, until after a number of years he dared fully to trust the convictions which had then begun to form themselves in his mind. At one time he says, that "he does not know what might have been the fate of his christian faith, if he had not found some satisfactory substitute for these first convictions. Perhaps it might have been wholly wrecked." But a mind like his was sure to find a satisfactory substitute. When the heart is penetrated by a reverence and awe for religious truth, faith cannot suffer wreck. If Priestly's writings, which he read with so much interest when an under graduate, or the writings of other men, had not helped to a solution of his difficulties, the workings of truth, the teachings of experience, and the leadings of the divine spirit, must have brought him to a settled faith. In religious things, indeed, as in other respects, his manhood was the natural development of his early character. He says, "It is remarkable how little have changed my impressions as then received of Jesus, and his disciples, by subsequent reading and reflection. The divine superiority of Jesus to his disciples, and all other men, was then clear to me, as it has been ever since." His character and training pre-determined the faith in which he finally rested; the faith "which permitted, and taught

him to behold in his Creator a kind and beneficent father; in his Savior, an infallible guide, teacher and friend; and in the Holy Spirit a sure and never failing reward for every sincere endeavor to do the will of God, to improve his gifts, and fulfil the law of love to his creatures." God graciously led him out of all his doubts to a religion whose final expression was, "My reliance is upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, and my own repentance for sin, which I know I have felt for years; and therefore I have perfect trust and peace."

The only other trouble of his youthful days grew out of his great desire to obtain a public education. This seemed very doubtful for a long time. Although his father was in easy circumstances, with his family of seventeen children, it was difficult to meet the expense of sending one of his sons to the University. But this difficulty was happily solved. In his earlier school-days Daniel was behind the other boys; and he describes the mortification which he felt upon one occasion, on that account. But he soon outstripped them by diligent application, and therefore became a favorite with his various instructors. One of them, a somewhat eccentric man, when he had taken the foot of the spelling-class in consequence of detention at home by sickness, but was so fortunate as to regain his usual place at the head on the first evening, ordered a general clapping of hands of the whole school. It was a compliment which seems to have been repeatedly awarded him. His first severe illness was occasioned by his devotion to study. After having been hard at work with the men in the woods in Winter, he came home and got into the bedroom window to perform sums in Arithmetic, which, as he expresses it, was then his hobby. He thus became, unconsciously, so thoroughly chilled, that the consequence was a dangerous fever. But such diligence had its reward, and on the 11th of June, 1792, he was sent to Atkinson Academy, then under the charge of Mr. Silas Dinsmoor, a graduate of the previous year, and an excellent instructor. He had a permit to enter from Rev. Stephen Peabody, one of the Trustees, whose eminent character and services were both so gratefully, and so gracefully depicted by the late Rev. Dr. Gilman in the Christian Examiner for May, 1847, and whose constant friendship he always enjoyed. Here, too, he secured the marked favor of his teachers. His efforts were unwearied, and his progress very rapid. When he studied fourteen, fifteen, and sometimes sixteen hours a day, we scarcely wonder that he could recite four hundred lines in the Georgics, and sometimes seven hundred at a lesson, or, on a review, one thousand to thirteen hundred in the Æneid. By this diligence he read the whole Greek Testament in five and a half weeks, and prepared for College in seven and a half months. On account of such conscientious devotion, his teachers allowed