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Poor Sarah.

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POOR SARAH,

OR THE

BENEFITS OF RELIGION EXEMPLIFIED

IN THE LIFE AND DEATH OF AN

INDIAN WOMAN.



“ Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure ;
Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor.”—Gray.



It was a comfortless morning in the month of March, 1814, when I first formed an acquaintance with the subject of the following sketch.

She called to solicit a few *crusts*, meekly saying, she “ desired nothing but the *crumbs*—they were enough for her poor old body, just ready to crumble into dust.” I had heard of *Sarah*, a pious Indian woman, and was therefore prepared to receive her with kindness. And remembering the words of my Lord who said “ inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the *least* of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” I was ready to impart a portion of my *little* unto her (for little alas, was all my store.) And how, (I asked her) have you got along, this

long, cold winter, Sarah? "O, Misse, (she replied) God better to Sarah than she fear. When winter come on, Sarah was in great doubt. No husband, no child here, but —, she wicked, gone a great deal. What if great snow come? what if fire go out? nabor great way off—what if sick all 'lone? what if die? nobody know it. While I think so, in my heart, then I cry: while I crying, so something speak in my mind, and say, trust God, Sarah; he love his people, he never leave them, he never forsake them; he never forsake Sarah, he friend indeed. Go tell Jesus, Sarah, he love hear prayer, he often hear Sarah pray. So I wipe my eyes, don't cry any more; go out in bushes, where nobody see, fall down on my old knees and pray. God give me great many words; pray great while. God make all my mind peace. When I get up, go in house, can't stop praying in my mind. All my heart burn with love to God; willing live cold, go hungry, be sick, die all 'lone if God be there. He know best; Sarah don't know, so I feel happy; great many day go singing Baptist hymn—

"Now I can trust the Lord forever,
He can clothe, and he can feed,
He my rock, and he my Saviour,
Jesus is a friend indeed."

Well Sarah, have you been comfortably supplied? "O yes," she replied, "I never out corn-meal once all winter." But how do you cook it, Sarah, so as to make it comfortable food? "O, I make porridge, Misse; sometimes I get out, like to-day, and I go, get some crusts bread and some salt put in it, then it is so nourishing to this poor old body; but when can't get none, then make it good I can, and kneel down, pray God to bless it to me; and I feel if God feed me, and be so happy here (laying her hand on her heart.) Oh what a lesson, thought I, for my repining heart. But do you have no meat or other necessities, Sarah? "Not often, Misse; sometimes I get so hun-

gry for it, I begin feel wicked, then think how Jesus hungry in the d. sart. But when Satan tempt him to sin, to get food, he would not. So I say, Sarah won't sin to get victuals. I no steal, no eat stole food, though be hungry ever so long.* Then God gives me small look of hisself, his Son, and his glory. And I think in my heart, they all be mine soon; then I no suffer hunger any more—my Father have there many mansions.” Sarah, said I, you seem to have some knowledge of the Scriptures; can you read? “I can spell out a little, I cant read like you white folks; Oh, if I could.” Here she burst into tears. But after regaining her composure, she added, “this, Misse, what I want above all things, more than victuals or drink. O how often I beg God teach me to read, and he do teach me some. When I take Bible, kneel down and pray, he show me great many words, and they be so sweet, I want to know a great deal more. O when I get home to heaven, then I know all, no want to read any more.” In this strain of simple piety, she told me her first interesting story. And when she departed I felt a stronger evidence of her being a true child of God, than I have acquired of some professors, by a long acquaintance. In one of her many visits she afterwards made me, she gave me in substance the following account of her conversion. She lived according to her own account, until she became a wife and a mother, without hope and without God in the world (having been brought up in extreme ignorance,) her husband treating her with great severity. She beame dejected and sorrowful, and to use her own simple language, “I go sorrow, sorrow all day long. When the night come, husband come home angry, beat me so, then I think, O, if Sarah had friend, Sarah no friend; I no want tell nabor I got trouble, that make only worse. So I be quiet, tell nobody, only cry all night and day for one good friend. One Sunday, good nabor come, and say, come Sarah, go Meetin. So I called my children, tell ’em

* This might refer to food stolen by her wicked daughter.

stay in house while I go Meetin. When got there, minister tell all about Jesus ; how he was born in stable, go suffer all his life, die on great Cross, bury, rise, and go up into heaven, so always be sinner's friend. He say too, if you got trouble, go to Jesus. He best friend in sorrow, he cure all your sorrow, he bring you out of trouble, he support you, make you willing suffer. So when I go home, think great deal what minister say, think this the friend I want, this the friend I cry for so long. Poor ignorant Sarah, never hear so much about Jesus before. Then I try hard to tell Jesus how I want such friend. But, O, my heart so hard, can't feel, can't pray, can't love Jesus, though he so good. This make me sorrow more and more. When Sunday come, want go Meetin 'gain. Husband say, you shan't go ; I beat you if you go. So I wait till he go off hunting, then shut up children safe, and run to meetin, sit down in door, hear minister tell how bad my heart is — no love to God, no love to Jesus, no love to pray. So, then, I see why can't have Jesus for friend, cause got so bad heart : then go prayin all way home, Jesus make my heart better. When get home find children safe, feel glad husband no come ; only feel sorry 'cause my wicked heart don't know how make it better. When I go sleep, then dream I can read good book ; dream I read there, Sarah must be born again : In morning keep thinking what that word mean. When husband go work, run over my good nabor, ask her if Bible say so. Then she read me, where that great man go see Jesus by night, 'cause 'fraid go in day time. I think he just like Sarah. She must go in secret, to hear 'bout Jesus, else husband be angry, and beat her. Then feel 'courage in mind, determined to have Jesus for friend. So ask nabor how get good heart. She tell me, give your heart to Jesus, he will give Holy Spirit, make it better. Sarah don't know what she mean — never hear 'bout Holy Spirit. She say must go meetin next Sunday, she will tell minister 'bout me — he tell me what to do. So Sarah go hear how must be born 'gain ; Minister say, you must go fall down 'fore God ; tell

him you grieved 'cause you sin—tell him you want better heart—tell him for Christ Jesus' sake, give Holy Spirit, make your heart new. Then Sarah go home light, 'cause she know the way. When get home, husband beat me, 'cause I go meetin—don't stay home work. I say, Sarah can't work any more on Sunday, 'cause sin 'gainst God. I rather work nights when moon shine. So he drive me hoe corn, that night, he so angry. I want to pray great deal, so go out hoe corn, pray all the time. When come in house, husband sleep. Then I kneel down and tell Jesus take my bad heart—can't bear bad heart; pray give me Holy Spirit, make my heart soft, make it all new. So great many days Sarah go beg for a new heart. Go meet in all Sundays; if husband beat me, never mind it; go hear good nabor read Bible every day. So after great while, God make all my mind peace. I love Jesus; love pray to him; love tell him all my sorrows: He take away my sorrow, make all my soul joy; only sorry 'cause can't read Bible—learn how to be like Jesus; want to be like his dear people Bible tell of. So I make great many brooms, go get Bible for 'em. When come home, husband call me fool for it; say he burn it up. Then I go hide it; when he gone get it, kiss it many times 'cause it Jesus good word. Then I go ask nabor if she learn me read; she say yes. Then I go many days learn letters, pray God all the while help me learn read his holy word. So, Misse, I learn read Baptist Hymn; learn spell out many good words in Bible. So every day take Bible, tell my children that be God's word, tell 'em how Jesus die on cross for sinner: then make 'em all kneel down, I pray God give them new heart; pray for husband too, he so wicked. O how I sorry for him, fear his soul go in burning flame." Sarah, said I, how long did your husband live? "O he live great many year." Did he repent and become a good man? "No, Misse, I 'fraid not; he sin more and more. When he get sick I in great trouble for him; talk every day to him, but he no hear Sarah. I say, how can you bear go in burning fire, where worm never die, where fire never

go out. At last he get angry, bid me hold my tongue. So I don't say any more, only mourn over him every day 'fore God. When he die, my heart say, Father, thy will be done—Jesus do all things well. Sarah can't help him now, he be in God's hands; all is well. So then give my heart all away to Jesus, tell him I be all his; serve him all my life; beg Holy Spirit come fill all my heart, make it all clean and white like Jesus. Pray God help me learn more of his sweet word. And now, Sarah live poor Indian widow great many long year: always find Jesus friend, husband, brother, all. He make me willing suffer; willing live great while in this bad world, if he see best. 'Bove all, he give me great good hope of glory when I die. So now I wait patient till my change come."

While she was giving this narration, her countenance bore strong testimony to the diversified emotions of her soul. I might greatly swell the list of particulars; but I design only to give the outlines of an example, which would have done honor to the highest sphere in life; and which in my opinion, is not the less excellent, or less worthy of imitation, because shrouded in the veil of poverty and sorrow. It was evident she meditated much on what little she knew of divine things: And what she knew of God's word, was to her like honey and the honey comb.

She was in the habit of bringing bags of sand into the village, and selling it for food. Sometimes she brought grapes and other kinds of fruit. But as she walked by the way, she took little notice of any thing that passed (except children, whom she seldom passed without an affectionate word of exhortation to be good, say their prayers, learn to read God's good word, &c. accompanied with a bunch of grapes or an apple. Thus she engaged the affection of many a little heart,) but seemed absorbed in meditation, and you might often have observed her hands uplited, in the attitude of prayer. One day, after having observed her as she came, I asked her how she could bring such

heavy loads, old as she was, and feeble. "O," said she, "when I get great load, then I go pray God give me strength to carry it. So I go on, thinking all the way how good God is, give his only Son die for poor sinner; think how good Jesus be, suffer so much for such poor creature; how good Holy Spirit was, come into my bad heart, make it all new: so these sweet thoughts make my mind so full joy, I never think how heavy sand be on my old back." Here, said I to my heart, learn how to make thy heavy load of iron cares easy.

One day she passed with a bag of sand. On her return she called on me; I enquired how much Mrs. — gave her for the sand. She was unwilling to tell, and I feared she was unwilling lest I should withhold my accustomed mite, on account of what she had already received; I therefore insisted she should let me see. She at length consented, and I drew from the bag a bone, not containing meat enough for half a meal. Is this all? Did that rich woman turn you off so? How cruel, how hard hearted, I exclaimed! "Misse," she replied, "this made me 'fraid let you see it; I 'fraid you would be angry: I hope she have bigger heart next time, only she forget now, that Jesus promise to pay her all she give Sarah. Don't be angry, I pray God to give her a great deal bigger heart." The conviction, that she possessed in an eminent degree the spirit of Him, who said, "bless them that curse you," and prayed for his murderers, rushed upon my mind with energy, and I could compare myself in some measure to those who said, "shall we command fire to come down from Heaven," &c. I think I never felt deeper self-abhorrence and abasement: I left her for a moment, and from the few comforts I possessed, gave her a considerable portion. She received them with the most visible marks of gratitude—arose to depart, went to the door, and then turned, looking me in the face with evident concern. Sarah, said I, what would you have? (supposing she wanted something I had not thought of, and feared to ask.) "O

my good, Misse," said she, "nothing, only 'fraid your big heart feel some proud, 'cause you give more for nothing than Misse ——— for sand." This faithfulness, added to her piety and gratitude, completed the swell of feeling already rising in my soul, and bursting into tears, I said, O Sarah! when you pray that Mrs. ——— may have a bigger heart, don't forget to pray that I may have a humbler one. I will Misse, I will," she exclaimed with joy, and hastened on her way. Another excellence in her character, was, that she loved the habitation of God's house, and often appeared there, when from bad weather or other causes, many a seat of affluence was empty. She was always early, ever clean and whole in her apparel, though sometimes almost as much diversified with patches as the shepherd's coat. She was very old and quite feeble, yet she generally stood during public service, with eyes rivetted on the preacher.

I have sometimes overtook her on the steps, after service, and tapping her on her shoulder, would say, have you had a good day, Sarah? "All good, sweeter than honey," she would reply.

In the spring of 1818, it was observed by her friends that she did not appear at meeting as usual, and one of her particular female benefactors asked her the reason; when she with streaming eyes told her, that her clothes had become so old and ragged that she could not come with comfort or decency; but said she had been praying God to provide for her in this respect, a great while, and telling Jesus how much she wanted to go to his house of prayer, and expressed a strong desire to be resigned and submissive to his will. This was soon communicated to a few friends, who promptly obeyed the call of Providence, and soon furnished this suffering member of Christ, with a very decent suit of apparel. This present was almost overpowering to her grateful heart. She received them as from the hand of her heavenly Father and kind

Redeemer, in answer to her special prayer. But this did not in the least diminish her gratitude to her benefactors; but said she would go on tell Jesus how good his dear people was to this poor old creature, and pray her good Father to give them great reward.

Two of the garments given her, she received with every mark of joy. On being asked why she set so high a value on these, she replied; "O, these just what I pray for so long, so to lay out my poor old body, clean and decent, like God's dear white people when I die." These she requested a friend to keep for her, fearing to carry them home, lest they should be taken from her. She was, however, persuaded to wear one of them to meeting, upon condition that if she injured that, another should be provided; the other was preserved by her friend, and made use of at her death.

Thus was this humble band of female friends, honoured, by anointing as it were the body, beforehand, to the burial. And I doubt not but that her prayer was heard, and will be answered in their abundant reward. The last visit I had from her, was in the summer of 1818. She had attended a funeral, and returning, called at my cottage. She complained of great weariness, and pain in her limbs, and showed me her feet, which were much swollen. I enquired the cause: "O," said she, with a serene smile, "Death come creeping on, I think in grave yard to day, Sarah must lie her soon." Well, are you willing to die? do you feel ready? "O, I hope Misse, if my bad heart tell true, I willing and ready to do just as Jesus bid me; if he say you must die, I glad to go be with him; if he say, live and suffer great deal more, then I willing do that; I think Jesus know best. Sometime I get such look of Heaven, I long to go see Jesus; see happy angel, see holy saint; throw away my bad heart, lay down my old body, and go where I no sin. Then I tell Jesus; he say, Sarah, I prepare a place for you, then come take you to myself. Then I be quite

like child, don't want to go till he call me." Much more she said upon this interesting subject, which indicated a soul ripe for heavenly glories. When we parted, I thought it very doubtful whether we ever met again below. In the course of three weeks from this time, I heard that Sarah was no more. Is Sarah dead? said I: and the enquiry gave rise to the thoughts contained in the following lines:

Is Sarah dead? let not a sigh arise,
To mourn her exit from this world of wo
Rather let tears of joy suffuse the eyes
That oft have wept her suffering state below.

Is sarah dead? then those poor aged limbs
So long with pain and weariness oppressed,
An easy bed in yonder grave shall find,
"And long and sweet shall be the sacred rest."

Is Sarah dead? then never, never more,
Shall hunger force her from her wretched cot
With eager step, a morsel to implore,
Where poverty and tears are heeded not.

No longer bent beneath a heavy load,
I see her struggle on her weary way,
With lifted hands, imploring strength of God
To bear the heat and burden of the day.

That untaught mind shall now lament no more
Its scanty knowledge of God's holy word;
Or grieve that she had not begun before
To banquet on the goodness of the Lord.

I lov'd the Sarah, for I well could trace
My Saviour's image on thy humble soul;
Your heart the seat of his Almighty grace,
And every action prov'd its sweet control.

O happy Sarah ! though so poor and low,
that few on thee would cast a pitying look,
Since thy Redeemer deign'd his love to show,
And wrote thy name in life's immortal book :

And rather far, would I thy triumph's share,
(And ere the triumph all thy sorrows feel)
Than gain the laurel earthly conqu'rors wear,
And all the sceptres kings and princes wield.

Thus, while the pen of many a ready writer is employed in imparting instruction, reproof, or correction, to the rising, or risen generation ; while the deeds of the mighty are recorded with splendour, the exploits of the heroes proclaimed from the house tops, and the virtues and charities of God's people are exhibited, that others may see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven, I would, according to my humble ability, snatch from oblivion the example of one, who, though scorned by the proud, and overlooked by the great, yet was known and beloved by a humble few, and by them the grace of God was magnified on her account.