

Aunt Harding's Keepsakes eBook

Aunt Harding's Keepsakes

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GUESSING.

“Can you guess,” said Louisa to her sister, as they sat at their work in the summer-house, “can you guess what aunt Harding will give us, as a keepsake, before she goes away?”

“No, I have not thought about it,” said Emma; “and aunt has lately given us so many pretty things, that we can scarcely expect any more for a long time to come. There is my doll and its cradle, you know, and your baby-house and furniture, how much money they cost! No, I do not think aunt intends to give us anything else.”

“But I am quite sure she will,” replied Louisa; “for I was going past mamma’s dressing-room this morning, when the door was a little way open, and I heard aunt Harding say, ‘I should like to give the dear girls something really useful, which they may value as they grow older.’ I did not hear anymore, because mamma has always told us it is not right to listen, and so I came away as fast as I could.”

“Well, I wonder what the present will be?” said Emma, now quite convinced.

“What should you think of two handsome work-boxes—or, perhaps, as I am the eldest, of a work-box for yourself, and writing-desk for me?”

“That would be charming!” said Emma; “and I would let you use my work-box, and you could lend me your writing-desk sometimes.”

“I will not make any promises,” said Louisa; “you know you are very careless, and I should not like my nice new desk to be stained with ink, or, perhaps, scratched with the point of a pin.”

“But mamma says I am growing more careful,” said her sister; “and I do not think I am so heedless about other people’s things, though I often spoil my own.”

“Remember my wax doll,” said Louisa, “which you left in the garden through that heavy shower of rain, so that I could never play with it again.”

“O, that was such a very long time ago!” said Emma, looking a little vexed.

“Perhaps it will not be a writing-desk nor a work-box that aunt Harding will give us,” said Louisa; “there are many other things which we should like. I wish she would ask us to choose.”

“So do I,” added Emma; “but there is nothing that I should like better than a work-box.”



Louisa thought of many other things which she should be glad to have; for she was apt to indulge in a foolish habit of wishing for what she was not likely to possess. It is a bad thing to give way to this failing; for by doing so we may often make ourselves unhappy, without any good or real cause. People who do so should think of the words of St. Paul: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Philip. iv, 11. And children, who have kind parents or friends to provide for all their wants, should learn that it is very sinful to let the thoughts be often dwelling upon things that they cannot have, and do not really need. Pray for a grateful heart, that you may rejoice in the blessings that surround you, and be thankful to your heavenly Father, who gives you all things richly to enjoy.



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CHAPTER II.

THE PRESENTS.

Mrs. Harding, the aunt of these little girls, had been paying a farewell visit to their mamma, before going with Mr. Harding to India, where it was likely that they would remain for some years. She had kindly given many little presents to her nieces during her stay with them; but they were such as Louisa and Emma would cease to value when they became old enough to "put away childish things;" and being a person of piety and judgment, she wished her last gift to be one which might be worthy of their regard in youth and in age, and through all the changes of life. It did not take any long time to determine what this parting gift should be.

The evening before she went away, she called Louisa and Emma into the room. They both looked round upon the table and chests of drawers, but no sign of a present was to be seen; no parcel neatly wrapped up in brown paper, nor anything like a work-box or a desk. But, to do them justice, the thought of what they might receive was not then uppermost in their mind; for their heart was full of grief at the prospect of parting with their aunt, whom they dearly loved, and who was going so very far away.

"Sit down beside me, dear children," said their aunt Harding, "and let us have a little talk together, quietly by ourselves. I wish to give you a few parting words of advice. I am sure that you will not forget me when I am gone; and when you think of me, I hope that the good things which I have tried to teach you will also come into your mind."

Both Louisa and Emma said, again and again, that they could never forget her, and they promised to remember her advice.

"Your mamma will often write to me concerning you," said aunt Harding, "and I cannot express the joy that it will afford me to hear that you are learning to hate sin more and more, and to live like children of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I shall be glad to find that you are improving in your studies, and I hope that every letter will bring me an account of your progress in useful knowledge; but I shall be far more anxious to hear of your being good and dutiful to your parents; and, above all, I shall long to know if you seek in earnest for the pardon of your sins, through the blood of Christ, and whether there is any proof in your conduct that your evil hearts have been changed by the grace of the Holy Spirit."

"If mamma sends you a good account of us," said Louisa, "please to remember, aunt, that you promised to write to us when that was the case. And you will write to me first, because I am the eldest, you know."



“Since you claim to be thought of first,” replied her aunt, “because you are a year older than your sister, I hope you intend to take the lead by setting before her a good example, that it may be well for her to imitate you in every respect.”

Louisa blushed, and was silent. “We will try our very best, dear aunt,” said Emma, “that mamma may send you good news, and then you will write to us both. And, perhaps, before you come back, we shall be grown such good girls, that you will not be able to find fault with either of us.”



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“I am afraid that is not very likely,” said Louisa; “for it seems as if we could not help being naughty sometimes. I am sure I have often said to myself, ‘Mamma shall not have to reprove me once to-day,’ and yet, directly after, something has been amiss.”

“O! that is quite true,” said Emma, with a sigh.

“The reason is this,” their aunt replied; “you were born with an evil nature, which loves sin and leads you to do wrong, so that you cannot be good and dutiful of yourselves. When you have made such resolves, it has been in your own strength, without your having asked for help from God; and this being the case, it was not possible that you should keep from sin. The only way to lead a holy life is to put no trust in ourselves, to have a constant sense of our need of divine grace, and to pray earnestly that it may be given to us for Christ’s sake.”

“But you talk of my return,” added she, “as if it were certain that we should meet again; yet how many things may happen to prevent it! Nothing can be more uncertain than the future, though young people are apt to think that all will fall out just as they wish. I may not live to come back; or if I should be spared to do so, who can tell that you will be here to meet me? Long before that time you may be laid low in the narrow grave. ‘For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.’ James iv, 14.”

Before their aunt Harding had done speaking, both the children were in tears; for the thought that they might never see her again was more than they could bear. Seeing that their hearts were softened to receive the word of instruction, she went on to talk to them in a kind and earnest manner on the great importance of preparing for another world, showing them their awful state without the Saviour, and urging them to seek him at once by faith and prayer; then, further to impress her advice upon their minds, she unlocked a little cabinet which stood near her, and taking out two handsome Bibles,[A] gave one to each of her nieces, telling them that as it was the best present she could give them, so she hoped they would value it, not only for her sake, but because it was the word of God, and taught the way of eternal life. After this, she desired them to kneel down with her, while she offered a fervent prayer that God would bless them, and that they might be led by the Holy Spirit into the fold of Christ, who died to take away their sins. And she also prayed, that if they should never more see each other in this world, they and all whom they loved might meet again and be happy for ever in heaven.

[Footnote A: See frontispiece.]



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Now I will not say that when the sisters were alone together, and looked at their handsome Bibles, a thought of the work-box and the writing-desk never crossed their minds; but it is certain that there was not a word said upon the subject, and each seemed to be greatly pleased with her present, admiring the rich purple binding, and opening the book with care, to look at the name which had been nicely written by their aunt on one of the blank leaves at the beginning. In Louisa's Bible, just under her name, was the text, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," Psa. cxix, 18; and in Emma's, in the same place, was written, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." Prov. viii, 17.

CHAPTER III.

USE OF THE KEEPSAKES.

The next day was a sorrowful one, both to the friends who went away, and to those who were left behind. The children could talk of little else than their uncle and aunt Harding. They asked their mother many questions about the journey they had begun, and the country to which they were going. When Louisa and Emma saw that their mamma was very sad, and not so ready as usual to join in their talk, they did not tease her, as some thoughtless children would have done, but each chose for herself a pleasant and quiet employment. Louisa began to arrange the furniture in her baby-house, and Emma brought a piece of brown silk from her drawer of treasures, and set about making a cover for her new Bible.

"Why, Emma, what are you about?" cried Louisa, after watching her sister for a moment; "surely you are not going to use that beautiful book?"

"Yes, I am," said Emma, quietly; "I mean to read a little in it every day. Ah! I see that you think it will soon be torn and soiled; but I assure you I intend to be very careful; and look, what a nice cover this will make!"

"I am afraid," said Louisa, laughing, "you will never be careful as long as you live. To think of so soon beginning to use that handsome book! I have made up my mind to read a chapter every day, but not out of my new Bible. I think the old one, that lies in the school-room, will do just as well."

"So it would," returned Emma; "and I thought of that myself last night, when aunt Harding told us how much she wished us to be good, and to love the Scriptures: but then the school-room Bible is not always in its place, and that might sometimes hinder me from reading at all. Now I shall keep this book in my little drawer in our room, where I can find it in a minute."

“You must please yourself, I suppose,” said Louisa; “but I will ask mamma whether it is better to use aunt Harding’s Bible or the old one.”



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Mrs. Western heard what her little girl had to say, but did not give just the answer that Louisa expected. "You are right," she said, "in supposing that it does not signify whether you read in an old Bible or a new one. It is from the divine blessing upon what we read, and not from the book itself, that we must look for benefit to our souls. If you pray for this blessing with all your heart, you will find the way of salvation as plainly declared in the worn-out school-room Bible as in your aunt Harding's keepsake, with its purple binding and shining gilt leaves. But yet I approve of Emma's wish to use her new Bible from this time, and advise you to follow her example. For though it ought to be our great delight to read the Scriptures, yet we have such sinful hearts, so ready to put off doing what is right for any poor excuse, that even such a little thing as having to look for the Bible, when it happens to be mislaid, will be likely to prevent you from reading it so constantly as you intend."

To this Louisa made no reply. She had wrapped up her beautiful book in silver paper, and laid it carefully in a box, under lock and key, and she did not mean to disturb it, except perhaps now and then for a few moments, that it might be looked at and admired. As for Emma, she went on fitting the brown silk cover as neatly as she could; and hoping that, if she prayed for the divine blessing, as her mother and aunt had told her, she might learn from her precious Bible the way to be good and happy.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO CHARACTERS.

It is time that I should tell you the age of these two little girls. Louisa was just turned of ten, and Emma was one year younger. I have no doubt that although you know so little about them, you already like Emma better than her sister; and the reason of this is plain. No one could be long with Louisa without finding out that she was a selfish child; while Emma, though she had many faults, of which carelessness was the chief, was of a kind, good-natured disposition, always ready to oblige. Louisa, too, was often willful, and would not give up her own way; while Emma was humble-minded, knowing that she had much to learn, and thankful to be taught. Both of these children were sinners, like all who are born into this sinful world: but Louisa cared little about the concerns of her soul; while Emma had begun to pray in secret for pardon through Christ her Saviour, and for the new heart which is the gift of his Holy Spirit.

Reader, you too are a sinner, and by nature far from God. Do you ever consider what is your present state? Have you been brought near to him by the blood of Christ, the new and living way? You may have heard of these things before, but without giving heed to the salvation of your own soul, or seeking to prepare for the world to come. If this has been the case, pause now, and ask yourself whither



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you are going, and what must be the end, if you do not repent and turn from sin. There are many awful texts in the Bible concerning those who trifle with the offers of divine mercy, and harden their hearts against the Saviour's gracious call. O! pray that you may not be one of this unhappy number. Seek the Lord while he may be found, before the day of grace is past. God has said that his "Spirit shall not always strive with man," Gen. vi, 3; and if you will not repent to-day, to-morrow may be too late.

Emma's Bible was nicely covered, and laid in her own little drawer; and every morning she read a chapter before she went down stairs. She prayed that God would teach her by his Holy Spirit to understand what she read; and though her prayers were very simple, and she scarcely knew what words to use, yet she felt sure that he would hear her, because he has promised to do so, for the sake of his dear Son. And by degrees, as she began to love her Bible more and more, she learned a habit of going to their little room alone, once in each day, to read a few verses in private, and to offer a short prayer to her "Father who seeth in secret." Matt, vi, 6. She found a great blessing in this; and it often happened that the thought of a text of Scripture which she had been reading in her room alone would come into her mind when she was afterward tempted to say or do something wrong, and thus help to keep her from sin.

It was not so with Louisa. The Bible was often wanted in the schoolroom—for the children had a governess who came to teach them every day; and Louisa soon found it too much trouble to take the book up stairs at night, and to carry it down again the next morning. Besides this, she did not always rise from her bed in time to read a chapter, so that it was often put off till after breakfast, and then it commonly happened that she had other things to do, and did not read it at all. Emma would sometimes gently remind her that her Bible reading had been forgotten; but this made Louisa so cross that she left off doing so at last. The truth was, that this poor child had no real love for the Scriptures; and as she did not seek for grace to help her, the good resolves that she had made passed away quickly from her mind.

The difference between the sisters was seen in their outward conduct; for Emma's reading of the Bible would have been in vain if the effects had not been shown in her temper and daily life. I do not mean to say that she never went wrong; for Emma had still an evil nature, and a sinful heart, often leading her to forget the commands of God. But she was truly sorry when this had been the case, and would ask to be forgiven with many tears; and she also prayed for divine grace, that she might try to be more watchful for the time to come. Louisa, on the other hand, thought too highly of herself to be easily convinced of a fault; and as she seldom received reproof in an humble and proper manner, she made but little progress toward improvement.



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CHAPTER V.

LETTERS FROM INDIA.

Some months passed before there came a letter from Mrs. Harding; for India, as you know, is many thousands of miles from here, and it takes a long time for a ship to sail over the wide sea which lies between. But great was the joy of the children and their mother when at last the good tidings came that, through the mercy of God, their friends had reached that distant country, safe and well. Louisa danced and clapped her hands; and Emma felt very happy, sitting beside her mother, and looking up in her face, while she read the letter through tears of pleasure.

Mrs. Harding had written a few lines to the children, which their mother read aloud to them, and then allowed them to look at for themselves. The words were these: "I often think of you, dear Louisa and Emma, and pray for divine blessings upon you both; and I hope to hear that you are giving yourselves to the Saviour, who died upon the cross for you. You know the love of Jesus for the young; his kindness to them when he was upon earth; and the tender way in which he still invites them to come to him. Go, then, to Christ without delay: ask him to be your friend, and you will be happy for evermore."

A few weeks after this letter had been received, Mrs. Western's birthday arrived, when it was usual for her children to have a holiday and a little treat. On the morning of this day, as Emma was running up stairs, her mamma called to her from her dressing-room, and desired her to come in, and to shut the door. Emma did as she was bid; and then Mrs. Western, with a smile on her face, told her to look round, and try if she could discover anything in the room that she had not seen before.

Almost before her mother had done speaking, the little girl fixed her eyes upon a handsome work-box, standing upon the table with the lid open, and showing a lining of pale blue silk, edged with silver; while within were scissors and thimble, an abundance of needles and cotton, everything, in short, that Emma had long been wishing for in vain.

"It is yours, my dear," said her mamma; "it is a present from your aunt Harding, who, in her letter, requested me to choose for you on my birthday something that you would like, if your conduct should have been such as to deserve a token of our approval. I am happy to see that you strive to amend your faults, and I trust that you will still go on trying to improve."

"O, mamma, how beautiful! and how kind in aunt Harding! Indeed I will try to deserve it." And the little girl went close to the box, and looked at its contents, but without venturing to touch them; then gently closing the lid, she stood gazing upon it with silent delight.



“But, mamma,” said Emma, looking up with a sudden thought, and casting her eyes round the room as if in search of something which was not to be seen, “where is Louisa’s present? She would like a writing-desk, I know; for the old work-box which she has had so long is not yet worn out, because she is so very careful.”



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“I am sorry to say,” returned Mrs. Western, “that Louisa is not deserving of any present, and therefore it would have been wrong to provide one for her.”

At hearing this, Emma changed color, and looked almost ready to cry. “Dear mamma,” said she, “do pray have pity on poor Louisa. I cannot bear to show her my beautiful box, if she is not to have a present too. She would be so much grieved.”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Western, “do you not perceive that it would be unjust and contrary to your aunt’s wish, if, while Louisa gives way to her faults, I were to treat her as though she were seeking to overcome them? It is quite as painful to me as to yourself to make this needful difference between you; but in all our actions we must think of what is *right*, and not of what it would be *pleasant* to do. When I see any sign of improvement in your sister, I shall gladly provide her with a writing-desk; but not till then.”

Emma paused for a moment; her eyes filled with tears, and the color rose to her face. “Then mamma,” said she, “I will wait, if you please, for my work-box, until you think proper to give Louisa her desk. Please to put it away in some safe place, and I will not say anything about it. I can do very well without the box a little while longer, you know.”

When Mrs. Western found that Emma was willing to deny herself a pleasure rather than give pain to her sister, she consented to her wish, because she desired to encourage kind and tender feelings between them; and she knew it would be easy to find some other way of showing Louisa that her friends were grieved and displeased by her conduct. So the work-box was safely put away for the present; though Emma had her hopes that the time would soon come when, with the promised writing-desk, it might be again brought forward.

CHAPTER VI.

TROUBLE BETWEEN SISTERS.

I have told you that Emma was not without her faults; and whether she was a little lifted up by her mother’s approval, so that she became less watchful over herself, and felt less her need of the grace of God, I cannot say: but so it was, that on the very same evening of their mother’s birthday, the sisters had a quarrel, which would certainly have been worse, if Mrs. Western had not been sitting by. Louisa was the first to blame; but, on the other hand, Emma did not behave like a meek and Christian child.

It was about Louisa’s old work-box that this quarrel took place. Emma wished to have the use of it for a short time, as Louisa did not want it herself: but Louisa, as you have seen, was not very willing to lend; and some sharp and unkind words passed between them, such as children too often use when they give way to angry and sinful passions. No doubt the thought of her own work-box was in Emma’s mind when she said, “You

are selfish and ill-natured, Louisa, and do not deserve that people should give up any pleasure for you.”



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While she was speaking, she saw her mother's eyes turned toward her with a look of surprise and sorrow; and at the same moment the words of Scripture, "Be kindly affectioned one toward another," came into her mind. She blushed and looked down while Mrs. Western reproved them both, and told them of the grief which, she felt on account of their sinful conduct, reminding them also of the example of the meek and lowly Jesus, who has commanded us to live in love. Emma was soon brought to tears, and went out of the room to weep alone, and ask forgiveness, for her Saviour's sake, from the holy God whom she had displeased by her sin: but Louisa, as usual, was inclined to be sullen, and did not think that she had been at all in the wrong. Upon this, her mother pointed out to her the unkindness of refusing so small a favor to her sister; and in the hope of bringing her to a sense of her fault, she told her what had passed in the morning, and made known to her the whole affair of the work-box. Louisa was so much struck by this proof of Emma's love, that her heart was quite softened, and she not only owned that she had done amiss, but ran to seek her sister, and asked her to forget their quarrel and be friends.

Emma was very glad to agree to this, and was also ready to take her share of blame, saying that she had been very wrong in speaking so unkindly, and she hoped never to be so naughty again. It was pleasant after this, to see Louisa's desire that her sister should use the old work-box, and what care Emma showed in keeping all its contents nicely in their place.

The loss of the birthday present had a great effect upon Louisa, so that she became more watchful over her temper and conduct. In a few months she had improved so much, that though she was still far from being all that could be wished, yet her mother thought she might safely buy her the writing-desk, according to the desire of her aunt Harding. Emma had still waited for her work-box with hope and patience; and you may imagine the joy of both when they at last received these long wished-for gifts. And as Emma was now not so careless as formerly, and Louisa had grown more kind, the work-box and the writing-desk were often lent in exchange; while the sisters soon found out the truth of what their mother told them, that such little frequent acts of mutual kindness do more to increase love than those greater deeds which children sometimes talk about, but seldom have the power to perform.

The second packet from aunt Harding was received with not less joy than the first; for there was in it a letter for Louisa and Emma; and that she might show no favor to one above the other, she had directed it to both. Louisa, however, claimed and was allowed the privilege of breaking the seal. I wish you could have seen their happy faces, as Emma leaned upon her sister's shoulder to read the welcome letter which had been sent to them from a country so distant, and by a friend whom they loved so well.



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CHAPTER VII.

AUNT HARDING'S LETTER.

Would you like to know what aunt Harding Wrote to her nieces? Here then is the letter, word for word:—

“My dear children, Louisa and Emma,—It is with great pleasure that I read in your mamma’s letter the account of your improvement, and I am glad to fulfill the promise which I made of writing to you when that should be the case. I hope that you will go on trying to grow better and better; and for this end you should pray daily for the grace of God to help you every moment of your lives. Without his grace the evil desires of your sinful hearts will lead you from the right way; and as one sin always brings on others, you would, if left to yourselves, wander further and further from that which is good, until you lost all love for your Saviour and his commands.

“I often think of you, and wish that you could see the poor little Hindoo children, who have never heard of the true God, but are taught by their heathen parents to kneel down, and pray to idols of wood and stone. There is a river in this country, the river Ganges, which the people believe to be a goddess, and they think that its waters can wash away their sins. Mothers often bring their little infants and bathe them in this river, because they believe it will make them holy. Do you not pity these poor people, whose souls are perishing for want of knowledge? Do you not wish that some one would go among them, and tell them about Jesus the Son of God, who gave himself to die for sinners, and whose blood alone can wash away sin? If so, you will be glad to know that there are some good men here who have left their own dear home and friends to live in this heathen country, and to teach the poor Hindoos the true and only way to heaven. Christians in other places, who love the Saviour, and wish that the heathen should learn to love him too, give money to send these good men here, and to pay for Bibles, and for other books which have been written on purpose to show how sinners may be saved. All may help to do this who will spare a little money from their own wishes and wants. *You* may help, if you love the Saviour enough to deny yourselves some little pleasure now and then. I think you would resolve to do so, if you could go with me sometimes to the missionary school, and see the little children sitting in rows, learning to read about Jesus, and hear them asking for more books to take home, that they may tell the tidings of salvation to their heathen parents. O yes! I am sure you would want to help them then; for you would remember that heathen children, like yourselves, have souls which must live for ever and ever; and you would long that they should come to the knowledge of the Saviour, who died for them as well as for you.

“It is now time that I should finish this long letter; so farewell, dear Louisa and Emma. Your uncle sends his love to you. We often talk of you, and pray that you may be the children of God, through faith in his dear Son. Your ever affectionate,



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"Aunt Harding."

CHAPTER VIII.

USE OF MONEY.

Emma found a great deal to think about in this letter, and it led to frequent talk with her mother about the heathen, for whom she began to feel much concern. When she heard how Christian people were trying to help them, and had read some accounts which her mother lent to her, telling of the happy change that, through the blessing of God, had been brought about in many cases by the preaching of the gospel, she wished that Louisa and herself could join in doing something, though ever so little, for this good cause. The love of Christ was in her heart: when this is the case, it will be sure to show itself in love for the souls of others.

But Louisa, when spoken to on the subject, said that she had not anything to give. "I am very sorry, though, that the poor Hindoos should worship idols," she said; "and when I grow older, and have more money, I will do a great deal for them, depend upon it."

"But why not help them a little *now*?" said Emma.

"Because I have no money," replied Louisa; "no money I mean except what is in my little savings bank, and I should not like to part with that. As for you, Emma, you never can save up a shilling; so that I am sure you have not anything to spare."

"Ah," said Emma, "that is true, to be sure; I never can save my money, and so I will tell you what I mean to do. Mamma gives us threepence a week, to spend as we please, you know; but I will only take twopence for the time to come, and I shall ask her to give the other pennies to the Tract Society at the end of the year. Four shillings and fourpence is not much, indeed, yet it will buy some nice little books for the Hindoo children in the schools; and if you will also give a penny a week, that will buy just as many more."

It was of no use. Louisa would not be persuaded to do anything for the heathen *yet*. Emma gave her penny a week, and felt happy in giving it; while Louisa only talked of doing so by and by. If Louisa had loved her Saviour and her Bible, she would have felt it a delight to assist in sending the glad tidings of the gospel to heathen lands; but when the heart has not been changed by the Holy Spirit, we feel but little concern for our own souls, and do not care for the salvation of others.

Emma was not led away by the example of her sister; but as she grew older she seemed to grow in grace, and in the knowledge and love of Christ. This will always be the case with those who believe the promises of God, and seek for divine assistance to enable them to obey his word. We can do nothing of ourselves, for we are poor, guilty,

helpless sinners: but God, who has given his only Son to die for our sins, has also promised to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it. Therefore, though we feel ourselves ever so weak and sinful, we need not despair of growing better, if we also feel our need of Christ, and go to him for help and pardon.



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Louisa and Emma had often heard that life is short and uncertain; but it is not easy for young people to feel the truth of this while they are healthy and strong. When Emma was about twelve years old she was taken very ill, so that there was from the first but little hope that she would recover. Then she felt that it is an awful thing to die; and the thought of the soul, which cannot die, and of heaven and hell, were far more solemn than they had ever seemed to her before. At first she was greatly afraid of death, for she knew she was a sinner, and deserving of the anger of God; but by degrees, as she lay on her sick bed, there came into her mind many sweet verses of the Bible, which she had learned in her days of health, and which gave her comfort, by telling her of the love of Jesus the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. Do you think she was sorry, now, that she had spent so many hours in reading that holy and blessed book? No; for the promises of mercy and salvation which it held out to her was her only support through many hours of pain and suffering, when death seemed near, and eternity close at hand. Though too ill to read, or even to listen to the words of life, she could remember many of them in her heart, and think of them to her comfort in this season of trial. Sometimes she was able to talk to her mother for a few minutes, when it was plain that her mind was chiefly filled with thoughts of Christ and things divine. And she often said that, if it should be the will of God to restore her to health, she hoped for grace to devote herself to his service, and to live more to his glory than she had ever done before. She also spoke oftener to her sister, begging her to think of her soul, to read her Bible more, and to seek for the pardon of her sins; and Louisa, who was in great distress at the thought of losing her, was ready to promise anything that she asked. But it did not appear that she was under any concern for her own state; and this was a great trouble to poor Emma, who now felt more than ever the need of preparing for the world to come.

It pleased God to spare her life, though she grew better very slowly, and it was many weeks before she could leave her room. When her long and painful illness was over, she was again able to share with Louisa in her lessons and her pleasures, so that in time those weeks of grief and suffering seemed to be forgotten; but they were not forgotten by Emma: she did not forget the mercies she had received, and the resolve which she had made of leading a holy life: she daily prayed for an humble and watchful mind, and for grace to keep her from falling into sin; and, as you may suppose, she loved her Bible more and more for the comfort which it had given her in the time of trouble. She still took pleasure in reading it alone, and prayed that she might have grace to obey its commands, so that it might be a lamp unto her feet and a light unto her path. Psa. cxix, 105.



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CHAPTER IX.

AUNT HARDING'S RETURN.

And now two more years had passed away, and the time when their aunt Harding's return was looked for had come. They had talked of it all through the winter; and when spring was over, and summer begun, the happy tidings came that the ship had arrived in safety, and their uncle and aunt Harding were on their way to visit them once more. I will leave you to guess the joy that was felt by all; and you must picture to yourself the pleasure of their meeting soon afterward: how thankful all were that they were spared to behold each other again; with uncle Harding's surprise at seeing two great girls instead of little Louisa and Emma; and aunt Harding's smiles, and her hopes that there would be found an equal improvement in matters of more importance.

The morning after she came, when Mrs. Harding began to unpack her boxes, Louisa and Emma caught sight of many pretty and curious things which she told them were intended as presents for themselves. "But before we proceed any further," said she, as the girls were beginning to express their thanks and pleasure, "I wish to inquire about the parting keepsake which I gave to you; and I should be glad to see how each book has been treated, that I may know the real value which you set upon the gift."

Louisa and Emma both ran to fulfill their aunt's desire. To speak the truth, Louisa was now in hopes of having all the praise. She quickly brought in her handsome Bible, still wrapped in the soft white paper, and in all the gloss of newness: not a mark upon the rich purple binding, not a speck upon the bright gilt leaves. Emma, too, brought hers, but with a more timid look; the neat brown silk cover was faded and worn—she had thought of making a new one only the day before—and the brightness was gone from the leaves, and the binding seemed rather loose, for the book opened easily, and there were some pages, less white than others, which looked as if they had been often read. To Louisa's surprise, Mrs. Harding laid down her book without saying a word, while, as soon as she took Emma's Bible into her hand, she smiled with pleasure, although tears came into her eyes. "*This* book has been valued as it ought to be," said she; "it has been used with care, but often used, so that I trust it has been found a guide and a help to heaven. But yours, Louisa"—and she pointed to the beautiful Bible which lay upon the table—"yours has been laid aside, like the talent which was buried in the earth. It has been of no benefit to your soul, for you seem hardly ever to have looked to it for instruction; as if its real worth consisted in outside ornament, you have been careful to keep that from injury, but have never sought or cared for the treasure that is within. But dry your tears, my dear Louisa," added aunt Harding kindly. "I am not angry, for I know that your mistaken care was in some measure caused by your love for me."



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I am only sorry that my parting present has not been of the use which I intended. But it is not yet too late for you to learn that, while your Bible should be kept with proper care—for it is the word of God—yet it was given for our daily study, that we might read it, pray over it, and practice it; and thus, by the divine blessing, become ‘wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.’” 2 Tim. iii, 15.

“I trust,” said the kind aunt, looking at her two nieces with much affection; “I trust that my dear Emma knows and loves her Saviour, and takes delight in the Scriptures, because they testify of him. May you both have grace to love him above all things, to do his will, and to put your trust in him for evermore; and then the heartfelt desire of your aunt Harding will be fulfilled.”

Reader, beware how you neglect the word of God. But remember it is not by merely reading it that you are to look for a blessing to your soul. You must pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who alone can open your understanding, and incline your heart to heavenly wisdom, that you may not read in vain.

* * * * *

Prayer for divine guidance.

O that the Lord would guide my ways
To keep his statutes still!
O that my God would grant me grace
To know and do his will!

O send thy Spirit down to write
Thy law upon my heart!
Nor let my tongue indulge deceit,
Nor act the liar’s part.

From vanity turn off mine eyes;
Let no corrupt design,
Nor covetous desires, arise
Within this soul of mine.

Order my footsteps by thy word,
And make my heart sincere:
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.

My soul hath gone too far astray,
My feet too often slip;



Yet, since I've not forgot thy way,
Restore thy wand'ring sheep.

Make me to walk in thy commands,
'Tis a delightful road;
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
Offend against my God.

* * * * *

VALUE OF THE SCRIPTURES TO THE YOUNG

How shall the young secure their hearts,
And guard their lives from sin?
Thy word the choicest rules imparts
To keep the conscience clean.

When once it enters to the mind,
It spreads such light abroad,
The meanest souls instruction find,
And raise their thoughts to God.

'Tis like the sun, a heavenly light
That guides us all the day;
And through the dangers of the night,
A lamp to lead our way.

Thy precepts make me truly wise;
I hate the sinner's road:
I hate my own vain thoughts that rise,
But love thy law, my God.

Thy word is everlasting truth;
How pure is every page!
That holy book shall guide our youth,
And well support our age.



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THE END.

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