



MEMOIR
OF
SARAH MARIA STEARNS.

Written for the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, and
Revised by the Committee of Publication.

BOSTON:
MASSACHUSETTS SABBATH SCHOOL SOCIETY,
Depository No. 13 Cornhill.
1844.

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OF
SARAH MARIA STEARNS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A MOTHER'S TRIBUTE."

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"That life is long that answers life's great end."  
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P R E F A C E .

It was during a visit to the beautiful valley of Berkshire, in the summer of 1843, that I became acquainted with Mrs. Stearns, who is a member of the Congregational Church in North Adams, under the pastoral care of Rev. Robert Crawford. From her I received the following facts respecting her departed child, and obtained permission to present them to the public. If I can but succeed in conveying to other minds an impression similar to that made upon my own, I shall rejoice. That this simple record may be made greatly useful both to mothers and children, is the earnest prayer of

F. L. S.

Newark, March, 1844.

M E M O I R .

SARAH MARIA, the second child and only daughter of Mr. L. W. and Mrs. C. M. Stearns, was born at North Adams, Berkshire Co., Massachusetts, June 12, 1835. She was always a pleasant and quiet child, and at a very early age manifested a great desire to please. When but sixteen months old, she was taught by her mother the simple prayer,

“ Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,” &c.

and took much pleasure in repeating it. At nineteen months, a friend

taught her the Saviour's words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."* This precious invitation made a lodgment in her infant mind, and proved to be "good seed, sown on good ground;" yielding early and delightful fruit here, and giving promise of a more abundant harvest hereafter. She had an affectionate temper, and her morning salutation of each member of the family was usually accompanied by a kiss. Soon after she had learned the passage of Scripture already mentioned, she would often come and kneel by her mother's side and say, "Mother, prayer;" and after her wish had been complied with she would lie down quietly to sleep. At the age of two

* Mark 10: 14.

years she could speak plainly ; and about that time commenced attending punctually on the public worship of the Sabbath, of which she was very fond. She always appeared pleased to have the Sabbath come. When the weather prevented their going to church, Sarah's mother was accustomed to hold a little meeting with the children at home. She would read a few verses from the Bible, then sing and pray with them. She also read to them from " Todd's Lectures to children," and talked to them of the sufferings and the love of Jesus. She taught them that their prayers alone would not save them ; but that they needed " a new heart ;" and that this blessing must be sought of God. Feeling that prayer is the life of the Christian, Mrs. S. early taught her

children to pray in their own words. Little Sarah loved prayer. When but two and a half years old, she would seem to watch her mother while at her work, and when she saw that it was completed, she would come to her, and, with an expression not to be forgotten, would say, "Now, mother, we will pray together. Won't we?" Whenever Mrs. S. retired for secret prayer, and Sarah noticed it, although much engaged in play, she would leave it, and come and kneel by her mother's side. On one occasion she spent the night from home. There, in the presence of the lady whom she was visiting, she kneeled and prayed for the different members of that family, by name, in an affecting and discriminating manner. Since her death, her mother has been told by

children several years older than Sarah, that often when they were playing together she would ask them to be still, and then kneel down and pray with and for them.

That Sarah's memory was remarkably retentive may be inferred from the fact, that when a gentleman who had left the family before she was two years old, returned one year after, she knew him and called him by name. There is an interesting circumstance connected with his return, which illustrates the development of her moral as well as her intellectual perceptions. There had just before been a missionary contribution taken up in the family. Mrs. S. had given her son, who was three and a half years older than Sarah, a sum of money for this object; but passed her by, as too young to under-

stand its claims. Mr. G., the friend referred to, gave Sarah a few cents. She came running into the room where her mother was, her countenance beaming with delight, and, displaying her treasure, exclaimed, "Now I shall have something to give to the Missionaries!"

Sarah would listen attentively to the instruction given to her brother; and on one occasion when he thought the lesson was too difficult for him to remember, she surprised him by repeating it herself correctly.

About two months before her death, as she one day entered the room, she ran to her mother with extended arms, and addressed her thus: "Oh mother, how I love you. How I love every body. And every body loves me. If Jesus was here, would he not take me

in his arms and bless me, as he did those little children ?” Her mother replied, “If you love him.” “I do ;” she answered, “and I love to pray to him. I cannot see him, but he can see me.” Her mother had no doubt she had then been praying, for she often found her engaged in secret prayer.

It may be asked, Did Sarah never do any thing wrong ? It was very seldom. She once picked a few flowers from a neighbor’s garden, without permission. Her father, who saw her pick them, sent her back with them to the owner, telling her at the same time that she had done wrong. Though she had free access to this garden ever after, she was not known to pluck another flower.

Sarah always appeared happy. Her health was good ; indeed she had nev-

er had any sickness previous to that which caused her death. When company called, she would not be noisy, nor tease her mother for any thing. She has been known to sit an hour without speaking, unless some of the company spoke to her. When alone with her mother, she was very busy with her play, or trying to help her mother if she found she could. Young as she was, she could be trusted to pick beans from the garden, which she took great delight in doing ; and would then sit down and shell them. If they were not needed in the family, she would ask permission to carry them to her pastor's wife, or some other friend who was not supplied.

She was very fond of children, and would often ask for a piece of cake to give away. Once, when she was try-

ing to please a little boy, he struck her. She said to him mildly, "Oh don't strike me. I am afraid my mother won't let me play with you."

Sarah commenced going to school with her brother, a few doors from home, sometime in the summer of 1838. On the twentieth day of August, her mother, meeting her at the door on her return from school, found that her breathing was labored. On inquiring of her brother, it was ascertained that she had picked up a water-melon seed and swallowed it. Her father soon found that it was lodged in the wind-pipe. He took her up, saying "What *shall* we do? I am afraid it will kill her." To which Sarah calmly replied, "Oh father, if I die I shall go and see Jesus!" A physician was immediately called, who prescribed an emetic;

remarking that if this was not successful he doubted whether it *could* be taken out. "What!" asked Sarah, "can't God get it out?" After consulting several physicians, it was determined to take Sarah to the Medical Institution at Pittsfield, about twenty miles distant; where her parents were assured that the seed could be taken from her throat by a safe process, not exceeding fifteen minutes. She appeared well, and could eat and speak as well as ever; but her parents felt that she was in constant danger. When she saw her mother weep, she would say, "Don't cry. Oh mother, I shall be so happy if I die. I shall see Jesus, and all the good children. Oh don't cry." And then she would wipe the tears from her mother's eyes, and add, "Oh I shall be *so happy* when I get to heaven."

Though she appeared so sure of heaven, her mother could not but tremble lest she might be mistaken. She knew that her heart must be changed from what it was by nature, before she could be admitted to that holy world. She feared that all her apparent goodness *might* result from native loveliness and religious training. On the other hand, she knew that Sarah prayed daily to be made good ; and she *was* good ; she was lovely. What a crisis was this in the existence of a pious mother ! Here was an immortal being, who had been for a little season committed to her care, and whom she had endeavored to train for heaven, about to submit to a painful operation which might, notwithstanding their sanguine hopes, terminate fatally. Hope, *probability*, could not satisfy a heart weighed

down under a sense of such deep responsibility. She sought the *assurance* that her beloved child was indeed a lamb of the Saviour's fold.

During a day of intense anxiety on Sarah's behalf, Mrs. S. had occasion to reprove her son; and, after conversing with him, she took both her children into her room, and having prayed with them, she requested each of them to pray. But what a difference did she see! Both had been taught alike by her; but while the son, of nearly seven, seemed scarcely to know what to say, the infant of three years *poured forth* her prayer—for her parents, for her pastor and his wife, and for a gentleman who had been in her father's employ for a short time, several months previous; and after asking God to make her brother

good, she added with much earnestness, "Oh my Heavenly Father, make him to obey his parents!" This prayer seemed to come from her heart. It reached her mother's heart. She felt as she had never done before, that her child had been taught by the Spirit of God. And while with gratitude she received the blessing which she had so earnestly sought, she longed to cast herself in the dust and to give God all the glory; feeling that she was indeed unworthy to be the mother of a sanctified child. About this time she attended a mother's prayer meeting; and though there were but "three gathered together," she found that there were enough to claim the promise. "There," said she, "I obtained consolation and help to bear me through this trial; and grace to give

my lovely daughter into the hands of the blessed Jesus, saying, 'Oh take her, keep her ; whether she lives or dies, *thy will be done!*'" None but a mother who has herself passed through these "deep waters" can appreciate the blessedness of such an hour as this. Theories may fail; but such an *experience* of the Saviour's faithfulness is written, as "with the point of a diamond," upon the heart forever.

With trembling, yet hoping hearts, these parents left home with their beloved child the week succeeding the accident.

The operation was performed by Dr. W., a surgeon of high reputation; but lasted, instead of fifteen minutes, more than two hours; and after all, proved unsuccessful. This was attributed to the fullness of her neck and

veins, which caused profuse bleeding, and made it necessary to proceed with great caution. Dr. W. afterwards said to her mother, "I never saw a child so young that could be reasoned with and understand as she did. Had she made the least resistance when I commenced it would have nerved me; but her perfect submission was almost overwhelming." She was not confined, but in no instance refused to lay her head back when requested to do so. The medical students around her could not refrain from tears. She frequently asked for water during the operation. One gentleman's hand trembled so from emotion that he spilled some upon her dress. Seeing him about to hand it again, she said, pleasantly, "Not you, but the other gentleman; I am afraid you will spill

it upon me." Though her dress was covered with blood yet her habitual carefulness manifested itself even then. At another time, this dear babe said to the surgeon, "I want to whisper to you. If you hurt me so again I will certainly tell my mother." When told that the seed would be out in a minute she would say, "Oh it is so far back you can't get it." She did not cry or make any noise except when they were cutting or taking up a vein. That night they thought her dying; but the next morning she revived. When she saw her mother she said in an uncomplaining tone, "Oh mother, the doctor could not get it out." That afternoon a second attempt was made to remove the seed; but the bleeding became so profuse that it was relinquished as impossible. The next day

the doctor told her he would not cut her any more, but wished to dress her neck. Seeing a knife in his hand similar to the one he had used in operating, she said, "I thought you was not going to cut me any more." He assured her he was about to use it in spreading a plaster. She never afterwards manifested any fear, for she did not think it possible for any one to tell a falsehood.

From that time she was very ill, and obliged to take medicine every few hours, yet never but once hesitated; and then, when her mother told her it was necessary, she took it without a murmur.

A relative brought her a doll one day while she was asleep. When she awoke and found it she was delighted, for she had been very fond of

playing with a doll. On Saturday evening her mother laid it upon the bureau. Her relative coming in on Sabbath morning, took it and showed it to her, asking, "Is this pretty, Sarah?" "Yes Sir," she answered. "Do you want it?" he again inquired. "No Sir," said she, "IT IS THE SABBATH DAY."

One day Mrs. S. found a sugar plum in her bag and gave it to Sarah. She divided it, and asked her mother to save half for her absent brother. Her father afterwards coming in and seeing the reserved portion, handed it to her. Said she, "That is Alfred's." This was a trifle; but it shewed a temper unallied to the selfishness of earth.

One morning Sarah looked at her mother and said, "Mother, you will die sometime, won't you? Then I

can see you." Her mother replied, "Yes, I shall. Do you think you shall die?" "Yes." "Are you afraid to die?" "No, I SHALL SEE JESUS." "What shall I tell your brother if you never see him again?" "Oh tell him to be a good boy and love God, so that when he dies he can come and see me."

Her parents had hoped that she was recovering; but from that time she grew worse, though her physicians watched her by night and by day. She had the lung fever. Her brother was sent for. She was very glad to see him. "Oh brother," said she, "ain't you sorry I got this seed in my throat?" She made no reference to all that she had suffered; nor was she ever known to cast a word of blame on her physicians, or lose for a mo-

ment her confidence in them. The Monday night preceding her death, she lay choking almost all the time. The doctors said she could not live; and that it would be so distressing to see her choke to death, they would, if her parents were willing, make another attempt to get the seed out. They consented. A kind lady took Sarah in her arms, telling her what they were going to do. She said not a word nor made the least resistance.

The wind-pipe was opened, and the seed flew out in less than five minutes, as they had expected it to do in the first place. When her mother entered the room, Sarah told her that *God had got the seed out*. She at first appeared much better; but her lungs had become so diseased that the next day mortification took place. She seemed

to suffer a great deal ; yet all without a murmur. At length she sweetly fell asleep in Jesus' arms, on Thursday morning, Sept. 13, 1838, aged three years and three months.

Surely, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise!"

To Christian mothers the foregoing narrative is replete both with admonition and encouragement. The mother of little Sarah makes no pretensions to uncommon skill in imparting instruction. Ministering with her own hands to the wants of her household, she has had little leisure to avail herself of the help of books. Living in a retired New England village, she has enjoyed but few opportunities of mingling with the mass of mind, and gathering knowl-

edge from those wiser and more experienced than herself. But she has been taught to understand and to love her Bible. She has learned the story of the manger and the cross, and having had her own heart deeply affected thereby, she has "out of the abundance of the heart," spoken of it to her children; "as they rose up and as they lay down; in the house and by the way." Having received the command "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good," she has, in humble faith, obeyed. Mrs. S. seems to have understood, far more perfectly than Christians ordinarily do, the *value of prayer*. She considered it not merely a morning and evening

task ; but availed herself of it as a precious privilege. When the active duties of the day were over, she *refreshed her spirit* at the mercy seat, ere she sat down to impart instruction ; and here, no doubt, she obtained that “wisdom which is profitable to direct.” Nor did she wait upon the Lord in vain. Surely with an overflowing heart she may now repeat the promise that has sustained so many fainting hopes, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

Mrs. S. has for many years loved the circle of *social* prayer ; and since a Maternal Association has been formed in the village where she resides, has been one of its most devoted members. “Oh,” said she, “could mothers re-

alize the advantage of such a meeting, I think no trifling excuse would keep them at home."

There are those who, because they have little leisure, and still less experience, feel that they can do but little for their children; and many a conscientious mother sits down discouraged in view of her own incompetency. It is to comfort such that these pages have been written. What though you may resemble Cowper's cottager, who

"Just knew, and knew no more, her Bible true?"

If you have become acquainted with the God of the Bible; if your heart has been warmed with the love of Jesus; if you live under the daily guidance of the Spirit of truth, you are fitted to impart instruction such as the wisest unsanctified philosopher could not give.

It is the simple truth, taught in simplicity, in love, and with prayer, that is made "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." (2 Cor. 10: 4.) He delights in using the simplest means, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor. 4: 7.) If you have learned the value of prayer, you know "the blood-bought Mercy Seat" is ever accessible. If you wish to enlist the sympathies and prayers of other mothers on your behalf, in almost every village of our favored land we trust you will soon find a company of mothers, banded together for this very purpose, who will gladly admit you to their number. But allow me to say that if you would enjoy the full benefit of such a union, you must be prepared to impart as well as to receive good.

“ There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.” I consider it a master-piece of Satan’s policy to make and keep Christians afraid to pray together. Throw an hundred strangers into a circle of fashion, and presently there shall be such a babel of sounds as shall make your very ears to tingle; but let a company of mothers assemble in an upper chamber for prayer, and you might almost *see* the Arch Enemy going his mischievous round, and sealing every lip as with the silence of death. And this is a “ device ” of which the church, alas, remains but too ignorant. When the privilege of united prayer shall be appreciated and improved, and not till then, will “ the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ,” and “ all know him, from the least to the greatest.”

If the remembrance of little Sarah shall but kindle up a more fervent spirit of prayer in the heart of a single mother, her name, though it will soon fade from the marble that marks her grave, may be "like ointment poured forth," treasured up in the grateful recollection of ages yet unborn.

To the dear children who have read of little Sarah, I would like to say a few words more. You have, no doubt often felt that you would like to be a Christian if you knew how. Let this dear babe be your teacher. I would remind you that in many respects she was just like other children. Let me point out some of them.

1. In her sweet simplicity, which led her to appeal to her mother's sympathy when she thought the surgeons were inflicting needless pain.

2. In her love of play, which made her enjoy her doll as much as any other little girl of three years old.

3. In her dread of suffering, which discovered itself in her alarm when she thought she had mistaken her physician's promise.

4. In her love of self-gratification, as when she took the flowers of which she was very fond, not knowing that it was wrong.

I will now remind you in what respects Sarah was *unlike* most children of her age.

1. She was attentive to instruction; even to that which was not addressed directly to herself. She listened because she loved to learn.

2. She was an obedient child; never repeating a second time what she had once been told not to do.

3. Her temper was always pleasant, and her manner affectionate.

4. She did not return evil for evil, but plead kindly with those who injured her.

5. She loved the Sabbath; and even when very sick remembered it TO KEEP IT HOLY.

6. She loved to make herself useful to her mother and other friends.

7. She had a Missionary spirit, which led her joyfully to yield up her *little all*.

8. She regarded the truth so sacredly that she did not think it possible for ANY ONE to tell a falsehood.

9. She exhibited a tender sympathy in her mother's sorrows.

10. She LOVED THE SAVIOUR. This was the ruling passion of her heart. She was not ashamed of Jesus. She loved to speak of him. She loved to

hear of him ; and if she had been old enough she would have loved to read of him. Her mother had but little leisure to instruct her, but Sarah remembered what she heard of Jesus and of heaven. She thought of these things because she loved them.

11. She was not afraid to die. Though she loved her parents and brother and this beautiful world, yet she felt that it would be *better* “to depart and be with Christ.” She had never known sickness nor sorrow when she said to her father cheerfully, “Oh father, if I die I shall go and see Jesus.”

12. When sickness and pain were sent upon her she bore them with exemplary patience.

13. She recognized the hand of God in all that befell her, and looked to him for help.

14. Sarah LOVED TO PRAY. You

may wonder that I did not mention this before, since it must have struck you as being a prominent trait in her character. But I have placed this last, that I might especially hold her up to you, *as an example*, in the attitude of prayer. If I should ask you to be as mild, or as obedient, or as benevolent as she was, you might perhaps tell me that you could not be. But if I should ask you to go away as often as little Sarah did, and pray to your Father who is in secret, what excuse would you have to offer? If I could but prevail on you, dear children, to pray as Sarah prayed, I should hope that you would become like her in other respects. It was prayer that brought the Holy Spirit down into her heart; it was the Spirit that taught her how to pray, and what to pray for; that made her what she was, and prepared her to

be, what she now is, *spotless before the throne*. Oh if you would but learn from these pages to feel more deeply your need of his influences ; and how freely they would be granted if you ask aright ; if you would but learn to pray *as Sarah prayed*, I shall not have written, nor you have read in vain.

THE MERCY SEAT.

“Ah, whither could we flee for aid,
When tempted, desolate, dismayed ?
Or how the hosts of hell defeat,
Had suffering saints no Mercy Seat ?

“There, there on eagles’ wings we soar,
And sin and sense seem all no more ;
And heaven comes down our souls to greet,
And glory crowns the Mercy Seat.

“There is a place where Jesus sheds
The oil of gladness on our heads ;
A place than all besides more sweet,—
It is the blood-bought Mercy Seat.”

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