

## Chapter 1

### A Rebellious Son: A Mothers Love

“Don’t mention it again, I tell you - never again. I am tired of all this talk about Christianity, and I’m not going to stand it any longer. You may do as you please, but I insist that you stop making life here at home so unpleasant for me.”

“But, son, remember father. His dying request was for you. Just let me tell you of one thing he said about you in his last prayer. He called me to his bedside, and with choked voice - “

“Mother, you seem to think I don’t mean what I say, and so you will keep on. But I have my mind made up to end this whole business. I may as well tell you that one week from today I am going to sea. Now please let me live in peace the few days I am here with you, and I will be thankful.”

Mrs. Wilson had been a wise, tactful mother. For fifteen long years she had been alone in the world, battling with poverty, but always seeking faithfully to shield her child from the corrupting influence of the great city in which she had her home.

It was not true, however, that she had been given to much talk, as might be supposed from the son’s complaint. As a mother ought, she had wisely restrained him, and had insisted that her decisions be respected. But her words had been few, especially during recent years, when Harold’s age demanded that he begin to fulfill the responsibilities of manhood, and to act more fully the independent part of life.

When his father died, Harold was a boy of eight years. From his birth, he had been dedicated to God. It was the supreme ambition of both father and mother that he should be trained for the work of the gospel. They wanted him to devote his life to proclaiming the good news of Him who died to save from sin, and who would one day come again in glory to receive His people to Himself. Theirs was a “blessed hope,” and their child gave promise of reaching the end they sought. He was a handsome boy, and early gave evidence of a love for the things of God.

Then a change came. The kind and careful husband and father was stricken down with a fatal illness. For many months he lay ill, and the means he had been saving up for his boy’s education were taken for the payment of the ever-increasing bills. Finally all the money was gone.

When at last the end was in sight, he called his wife and son to his side, and together they prayed once more that God would remember the consecration they had made, and in His own good way and time bring little Harold to be a soul winner for Christ, as they had planned.

“Does God hear? Dow He answer?” These were the questions that had been presenting themselves to Mrs. Wilson’s mind for more than two years now. Notwithstanding all her pleadings, all her tears, all her struggles, the influence of worldly associations had gradually and surely alienated her son from God. More and more he had come to manifest a positive dislike for all that pertained to God and His word of truth.

At the time this story opens, Harold had become an alcoholic, a gambler, a thief. He seemed the exact reproduction, in his characteristics, of a great-grandfather whose life had been made notorious by atheism, blasphemy, drunkenness, and murder, and who had ended his life on the gallows. As Mrs. Wilson thought upon this fact, - that in her son was being fulfilled the scripture, “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation,” - her heart almost broke within her, and she began to despair.

She had been led to speak to her son once more because of crime recently committed in the neighborhood of her home, and suspicion rested upon him. In her heart she little doubted that he was involved, and the thought so cruelly hurt her that she could not remain silent. Hence she spoke.

But when she did so, there came the last crushing disappointment. She was told never again to mention the subject of a better life. In fact, she was to have slight opportunity, for Harold had declared his intention of going to sea, and only a few days intervened. Besides, he was going under a cloud, very probably to escape the clutches of the law.

“Oh, my boy, my boy! I have prayed and prayed that you might grow to be a noble, God-fearing man. I have asked God continually to take you for His service. I have done all I have known to do to keep you from the world. I have hoped and trusted that you would be kept. But today you are a criminal, a godless, wicked man. You hate religion. You turn from me as though I were one of your worst enemies. Oh, my Harold, my treasure, must I give you up?”

Thus spoke Mrs. Wilson to herself out of the agony of her heart after her son had so ruthlessly denied her the privilege of again speaking to him of the Christian hope.

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And while his mother mourned and wept, Harold caroused. With an almost fiendish enthusiasm, he joined with his associates in riotous pleasure, and more than once his voice was heard in denunciation of his parents' hopes. He drank and cursed, and even challenged the Almighty, if He existed, to come and strike him down if He dared. So far had he fallen!

Does God hear? Does God answer? Had a mother's prayers been unheeded? Had all those years of toil and sacrifice and devotion and trust been in vain? - No, thank God, No.

Think not, thou mother heart,  
That God hears not thy cry.  
Thine interests are His,  
And He is standing nigh.  
He listens, waits, and longs to prove  
That He is God, thy God, thy Love.

Nor doubt, then, nor despair;  
Trust on through dark, through light;  
Fear not to bide His time;  
He'll surely do the right.  
He knows the secrets of thy soul.  
Thy son shall one day be made whole.

It was a terribly dark hour to the dear mother; and worn out with the heavy burden, and not seeing as yet the welcome approach of a brighter day, she lay down and fell asleep.

She dreamed!

It was the morning of eternity. The world was new. All marks of the curse were gone. Sin and all its consequences had been removed forever. She saw the Saviour. She saw the saints of all the ages, the innumerable multitudes with the palms and the harps. And ere she could have a moment of disappointment, there stood by her side her companion of early years. He looked into her face, radiant with life; and then, out of the fullness of his supreme joy, he said, "And here is Harold!"

"Yes, here I am, father," came the musical answer of him who had been precious in their eyes; and then he stood before them - their son, made over into the image of the blessed Christ.

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“Harold, O Harold! Bless God! My Father did hear and He did answer. Ah, I thought you would not come! And how did the Master find and redeem you?”

“Mother, do you remember the marked Bible you hid among my things the day I left you and went to sea? The message you wrote in the Book, and the message of the Book itself, broke my hardened spirit, and I could not find rest until I laid my weary self at His feet. He lifted me up, He taught me of the right way, He guided my soul to this better land.”

How long she slept, Mrs. Wilson knew not; but when she awoke, it was long past midnight, and she heard Harold stumbling up to his room.

But why did his heavy, uncertain step this time fail to trouble her as it had before? Why could she resign herself to what seemed a veritable tragedy, which was wrecking her home?

She was not a believer in dreams. She did not regard the beautiful picture that had been projected upon the screen of her mind as being necessarily divine. There had come to her, however, in the experience, a suggestion of a new work of love. She had found also a new basis for hope, a new vision of possibilities; and with a mother’s loyal quickness, her plans were immediately formulated for putting the suggestion into practice.

What a blessed mission was that of the new day, when with her widow’s mite - the savings of many a long, weary day - she found her way to the heart of the city, and there invested that mite in a Bible for Harold! She bought the best that was possible, leaving nothing remaining for the coming “rainy day.” Was not her son’s life more precious to her than her own?

What a really wonderful Bible that was when Mrs. Wilson had completed in it her beautiful design! From Genesis to Revelation she marked, with great care, those passages which she believed would one day appeal to the heart of her boy. Just what texts and just what markings entered into the plan may not be told here; suffice it to say that only a wise, loving, praying mother could ever have thought out and executed so splendid a soul-winning idea.

Without doing violence to the sacredness of a mother’s secret, it may be stated that two great principles were emphasized - faith in Jesus as a complete Saviour, and obedience to all His commandments. Mrs. Wilson had learned that Jesus is the only Messiah of the Scriptures; that it was He who created the world; who spoke through prophets; who

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conversed with patriarchs; who gave the law on Sinai; who led Israel into the Promised Land; who walked and talked with Adam, with Enoch, with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with David. She understood that He was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” and that therefore before the time of Calvary as well as after, men were saved through Him. To her, the whole Bible was a Jesus book, one story of the Friend of sinners.

When Harold should open the Book, she wanted him to find Christ everywhere throughout the story, to hear His voice, to know His love, and then to render Him service.

It was only natural, in view of this, that she made particularly prominent the claims of the Ten Commandments. If Christ had spoken them, and then had died that they might be written in mans heart, were they not vital to salvation?

Her own message, written on the flyleaf, and accidentally stained with a tear that fell as she wrote, was this:

“My Darling Boy:

“I love you. I shall always love you. But there is One who loves you infinitely more than I, and that One is Jesus. You do not love Him now; but I am praying that you may be brought to see how good He is, and be led to yield yourself to Him. This Book is from Him and from me. Please read it for His sake and for mine. Its promises are all sure; and as you take them into your heart, they will make you new and clean and strong and victorious.

“Lovingly,

“Mother.”

The marked Bible waited in secret until almost the last moment before Harold’s leave-taking; and then, when he was absent on an errand, it was quickly tucked away out of sight in one corner of his box.

“Good-by, mother!”

“Good-by, my dearest,” she said; and putting her arms around Harold’s neck, she gave him a long farewell embrace. The tears wanted to come; but she had determined on another course, and a smile of peace wreathed her face instead.