

**SARAH MARTIN, THE PRISON
VISITOR, OF GREAT YARMOUTH.
WITH EXTRACTS FROM HER
WRITINGS AND PRISON
JOURNALS**

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Sarah Martin, the Prison Visitor, of Great Yarmouth. With Extracts from Her Writings and
Prison Journals by Sarah Martin

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The Prison Visitor,

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EXTRACTS FROM HER WRITINGS AND
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A NEW EDITION, WITH ADDITIONS.

LONDON:

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;

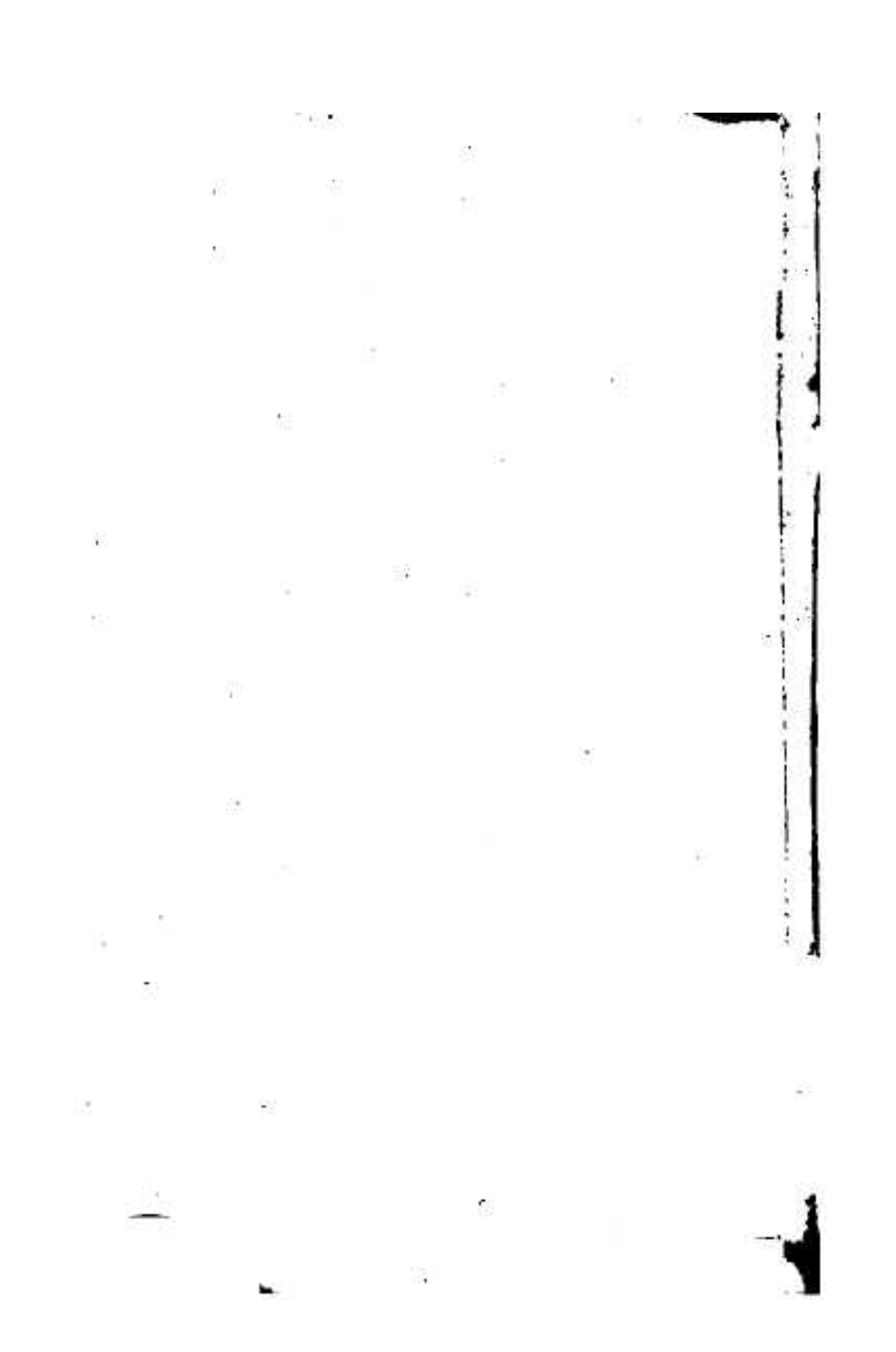
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THE LIFE
OF
SARAH MARTIN.

My father was a village tradesman. I was born in June, 1791; an only child, deprived of my parents at an early age, and brought up under the care of a widowed grandmother, who had from her youth been a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, a meek and lowly Christian, bending to the grave after a long life of much affliction, desiring to depart, yet, as it were, lingering for my sake.

I have heard her say, and I myself retain an indistinct recollection, that when a child I felt interest in her instructions, and heard her speak of my Saviour with pleasure. These impressions, however, soon disappeared, and at twelve years old, I discovered an indescribable aversion to the Bible, and a bitter prejudice against spiritual truth, and the gospel of Christ, in every form that met me.

At this period, I learned from a school-girl the way of obtaining novels and romances at a cheap rate, from an old circulating library, and, for about two years, I read much trash of this sort with uncommon avidity; when, on becoming

sickened, I gave them up, without care or thought about their immoral tendency.

Then, turning to a change of books, with eagerness I read Shakspeare's Plays, and other dramatic works; Addison's Spectator, the Guardian, etc.; the works of Johnson, and others; and the British Poets. Still, however, when a ray of gospel light came across my mind in any way, I turned from it as from a reptile.

When between fourteen and fifteen years of age, my dearest grandmother sent me to learn to be a dress-maker, which occupation I followed for myself the year after, and diligently devoted to it the time required; whilst all times of relaxation were still given to books for self-gratification alone, for I was in my sin, dead to God; and even my active industry in earning my living, right as it was, and my bounden duty before him, was polluted in its motive, because in all my thoughts he was out, and the idol, self, reigned.

The daily sight of the Bible in the hands of my beloved grandmother brought reproof and a sting, which I could not conquer. On one occasion she was reading aloud, and I left the room unable to bear it. In a happier period afterwards, when asking if she ever despaired of my salvation, she told me she did not, but was ever enabled to hope in God and pray. Two Bibles, which had been my dear mother's, I removed from their place and hid, that they might not even meet my view; studiously avoiding whatever might bring God to my thoughts, in the idea, that should the Bible, after all, prove to be true, the less I knew of it, the better it would be for me.

There lived in our neighbourhood an old gentleman and his wife: the affectionate regard of the latter to me from my childhood, was met on my part with attachment and respect; but by the former my own prejudice and hatred to Divine truths were much strengthened and confirmed. I frequently conversed with him, and borrowed his books. He was a man of no ordinary ability, and used to apply passages of the Holy Scriptures profanely, and read different translations of the Holy Bible, for the purpose of discovering what he called "contradictions," and whilst scorning the Bible, would adopt an opinion of Voltaire, Shaftesbury, or Bolingbroke, as a standard of decision on truth or error.

In my nineteenth year I heard a sermon preached, which powerfully met my attention, from, "We persuade men," 2 Cor. v. 11. It was then that the Spirit of God sent a ray of light upon my guilty soul, slave of Satan, "fast bound in misery and iron." Stranger as I was to my Divine Teacher, this first lesson was distinctly impressed, that the religion of the Bible was a grand reality, and that I had been wrong. It was a fine summer Sunday: I had walked to the next town, Great Yarmouth, for mere pleasure, and entered the place of worship, where I heard the sermon, from common curiosity. In my walk home, reflecting on what I had heard, my mind was expanded with a sense of the Divine Majesty, and I spoke to my poor friend, the old gentleman before mentioned, as well as to others, with astonishment and admiration of what I had heard. He said, the novelty pleased me

and would wear off; whilst the answer of my heart was, I hope not; be it novelty or delusion, it is so precious I cannot part with it. However, for as long as six months after, I did not go to hear the preacher again, nor seek the Lord, nor give up the world in any way whatever; for, with my judgment convinced in a measure, my heart was untouched. In the autumn of 1810, I was led by my most merciful God to examine the great subject in earnest; and I became convinced, not only of the truth of Divine revelation, but also that my own crime in having rejected it, embodied guilt capable of every possible manifestation, when not held back by God himself. By the light of the Divine Majesty, and by his law, I saw myself condemned, and I felt the justice of my condemnation; for not only had I violated that righteous and holy law, but I had added to it contempt of the blessed gospel, and rejection of the Son of God. And yet such was the pity of my God, and such his tenderness to me, that in the immediate disclosure of these my circumstances, he showed to me, as in the same glance, the Mediator Jesus Christ, my Saviour, and forgiveness through him.

For twelve months after this, my satisfaction was incomplete, and my happiness was held back, not knowing the extent of the promise, "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up," Job xxii. 23; therefore with strong confidence in my own imaginary power, and supposing all the while that God required it of me, I sought to advance, less by receiving from the fulness of Jesus, than by providing something to bring.