

Mary Hewins

JOHN WILLIAMS,

OR THE

SAILOR BOY.

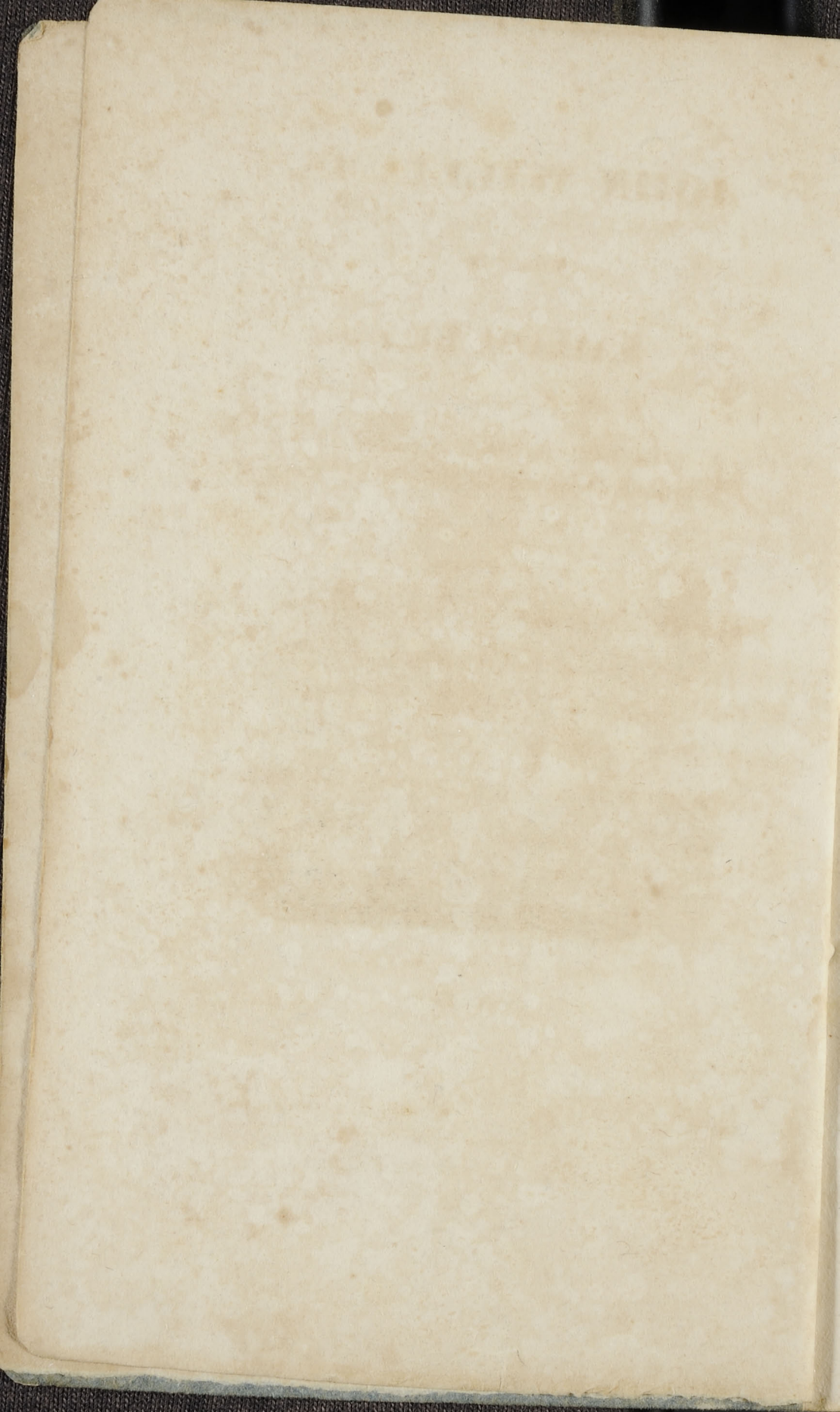


BOSTON,

BOWLES AND DEARBORN, 72 WASHINGTON STREET.

Isaac R. Butts & Co. Printers.

1827.



William T. Hewins
JOHN WILLIAMS,

OR THE

SAILOR BOY.

“First purify the heart, then light the mind
With pure Religion’s lamp, so shalt thou blessings find.”



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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit*:

District Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twenty-third day of March, A. D. 1827, in the fifty-first year of the Independence of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, *Bowles & Dearborn* of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, *to wit*:

“JOHN WILLIAMS, OR THE SAILOR BOY.

‘First purify the heart, then light the mind,

With pure Religion’s lamp, so shalt thou blessings find.’”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to an act entitled “An act supplementary to an act, entitled, an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned; and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical and other prints.”

JNO. W. DAVIS, } *Clerk of the District
of Massachusetts.*

JOHN WILLIAMS,

OR THE

SAILOR BOY.

It was a severely cold morning in January, which succeeded a heavy fall of snow through the night, five winters ago, that I remarked from my parlour window, a child lingering round the gateway ; he was apparently ten or eleven years of age, and miserably clad in tattered garments, that seemed ill calculated to exclude the cold.

I beckoned him from the window to come in, but the moment he perceived me he shrunk aside, and directly ran away.

The circumstance soon passed from my mind, and I thought no more of the boy till the following day, when I saw him again by the gate.

I directly sent a domestic to bring him into the kitchen, but before he could effect his errand the child had fled.

This conduct appeared unaccountable, and the more so, when I learnt from my man James, that he had seen the same boy almost daily during the fortnight past about the same hour.

I directed him to watch the succeeding day, and by all means to detain him; his appearance being altogether so wretched and destitute, that I could not feel easy till something was done for its alleviation.

The third morning James succeeded in stopping him, and with much difficulty brought him into the house, and

was leading him to the fire, when he found that one of his feet was frozen, and his hands quite chilled. Proper restoratives were immediately applied, which soon had a good effect; yet it was long before the gentlest persuasions could induce him to speak. We gave him food, which he ate greedily, and asked for more. After some hours, when he had been left to sit quietly, he appeared to gain confidence, or rather to be restored to feeling. I asked his name, to which he replied, "John Williams, ma'am."

"And where is your home?"

"I hav'nt got any."

"Where did you last come from?"

"The glass-house."

"But you could not live there."

"No, I only hid myself when I could, behind the boxes, and warmed me when the men were not about the furnaces."

“And where did you get your food?”

“I went without when I could not beg any thing to eat.”

“Have you any parents?”

“No, they both died in the Alms-house, and I was put there with them for a time, but I got away.”

“And why did you run away? you were clothed, warmed, and fed there, as well as properly employed, no doubt.”

“I did not like it though: I did not like to learn: I did not like any body there. Before mother died she used to scold and beat me; and after that I did not care to mind any body; I don't want to work there.”

“And will you work any where if you can get employment?”

“I do'nt know; I want to go off in a ship.”

“But you are too young now, and you should first learn something; are you

not willing to learn reading and writing?"

"Perhaps I should like it if that would help me to go to sea."

"Have you no relations now your parents are dead, who can help to take care of you till you are older?"

"I don't know any: I don't want to be put under any body's care: I want to do as I please, and have enough to eat."

"That you cannot expect while you choose to run about the streets in this way;—where have you slept these few nights past?"

"In your wood-house, on an old blanket which covers a box; I crept under the things and tried to keep warm, for I did not dare to go any more to the glass-house, for the man threatened to beat me if he saw me about there again."

I found from the few facts thus related

by poor John, that he was much to be pitied for the forlorn state into which he was cast, and for his utter ignorance, and determined to ride over and inquire of the overseer of the Alms-house, something more particular concerning him. His appearance was that of a child who had been exposed to evil company and bad example; and I hoped as he was so very young, something might be done to eradicate the seeds of wickedness thus early sown in his heart, and in their place cultivate virtuous and religious principles.

I therefore hastened to leave home, giving directions that he should be detained till my return.

I was not long in reaching that place which has witnessed so much misery, but where so great good has also been done, the Almshouse in Leveret street, (since pulled down). Mr. P*****, the

overseer gave me all the information I sought, briefly, in the following words ;

“ The boy of whom you inquire, has run away, and been returned to us a great many times, and has been the cause of much trouble here. His parents were once what the world calls likely people ; I knew them when they were both well off, and industrious ; but they lived without either the fear or the love of God before their eyes, and so they fell into temptation, and from that into vice.

“ It is about two years ago, that John Williams, the father of this poor miserable child, left his occupation on a wood wharf, and engaged in a distillery, one of those manufactories of slow poison for thousands of wretches who eagerly buy, drink, and perish, after laying the foundation, and too often effecting the ruin of their families.—John

Williams, as I say, engaged in a distillery, where the custom of tasting a little, and then a little more, gradually grew into a longing desire to taste much and often. In a few months he rendered himself, as others had done before him, useless to his employer, and worse than useless to his family. He was turned away and gave himself wholly up to idleness and drink. He neglected to provide for his wife and child, and at home did nothing but quarrel, and vent the ill humour he acquired abroad; and miserable to relate, in less than a year his wife became as useless and sinful as he. Their once quiet home was now the scene of perpetual strife and discord; mutual dislike succeeded to mutual reproach, and the unfortunate little John had the example of both parents to initiate him in those early lessons of vice;—and deeply have the seeds of

corruption been sown in his young heart. These beings had never studied their Bible; they had never sought that holiness, which fortifies against vice; they had first lived merely moral lives, and when the hour of temptation came, they possessed not that grace which alone can withstand its allurements or retreat from its wiles. Alas! they did not reflect that God is angry with the wicked every day; that they who sow in wickedness shall reap the same.

“One by one, this wretched family disposed of the articles of their household comforts for the miserable pittance of a dram. When all was gone, nothing remained for them but beggary, and the child was sent abroad to solicit charity, and beaten if he came back empty handed. The want of success, which sometimes attended his excur-

sions, and the fear of punishment at home, drove him to theft;* in fine, matters came to such a pass, that they were all sent here for reformation, but that was not so easily to be effected.

“They were lost to every feeling of shame, and religion had never influenced them. John had ruined his naturally strong and healthy constitution by his intemperance, and was fast sinking into the grave; his lost situation had no effect on his wife, except to increase her ill feelings. John died about three months since, and his wife four weeks after him, having cut short their lives by their sins, which, if properly spent, might have witnessed them in the enjoyment of a virtuous old age, blessed, perhaps, by the pious and filial cares of their only son. But now all is past, and the end of their doings has returned upon them.

* A fact—and we fear one of not rare occurrence.

“And this child who has been wandering round the streets, has he any good dispositions by which one might hope to make an honest man of him?”

“Not any that I could ever find out; the works of his hands were here evil continually; he was doing mischief unless closely watched from morning till night, and no punishment made him better; if you choose to take him off our hands we shall be glad to give him up to you, for here I do not see that there is any hope of amending him; he is young to be sure, only ten years old now, so perhaps he can be made something of; and if he can, why society may one day have an honest member more than I now fear it will.”

After a little consideration, I made up my mind, that unless some effectual means were immediately adopted, this poor orphan boy might come to a dis-

graceful death, and that it was my duty to do all that could be done to avert such an evil. Accordingly I gave my obligation to take the direction of him for one year, thinking that less time would not be giving him a fair trial, nor should we be likely to witness a change, unless it was wrought within that period.

On my return home, I found he had been silent, and quiet in one place, watching with curiosity the various employments of the domestics. I asked him if he would like to live in my family and learn to help James.

He did not answer for some time, and then he said he did not like to work. I asked him if he had ever tried to do any thing. Not much, he replied, they made me do a little at the Almshouse, but my task was more than the other boys, and so I would not

do any thing if I could help it, and ran away whenever I could get a chance.

“But are you not willing, if I give you clothes, and food, and a comfortable bed to sleep on, to bring the bark and wood to make my fire of in the parlour, and sometimes go of errands for me?”

“I will, perhaps, if you do not beat me for every thing.”

“I hope you will behave well, and then you will not need punishment. You can do nothing till your frozen foot is healed; so I wish you to observe all that James does, and see if there is nothing you can do for him when you are well.”

With this proposal John seemed satisfied, and I left him to make some purchases for his more comfortable clothing.

I felt that great care was necessary,

in order to reclaim him, and resolved to proceed with caution.

In a week he could walk about, and appeared favourably impressed with the kind treatment which he constantly received. He attached himself to James, who was a religious, orderly man, and helped him whenever he could find opportunity for so doing.

It was not long before he found a pleasure in work, and executed my little errands faithfully. I gave him short lessons daily, in the form of advice and counsel, and was happy to find him become attracted by the Bible lessons, which James read after the day's work was ended. At prayers, too, he had learnt to fix his mind on what was passing, and it seemed he took great pleasure when the morning hymn was sung.

It was now time that he should learn

to read, and I thought a school would be the best place for him. There lived in our neighbourhood a worthy man who kept several boys of this class, a few hours daily; and as I knew John had as yet no fondness himself for books, I did not wish to disgust him entirely, by sending him all day to the public school.

Mr. Brown, the master, heard John's story with interest, and promised to exert his influence in teaching him whatever might be most important for him to learn.

When John heard that he was to go to school, he did not appear much pleased; he had been willing to work about the house, but the idea of books and a school, had the appearance of toil to him. At last his gratitude towards me prevailed; he was conscious that I had already done much for his

good, and would not send him to a master, if it were not for his advantage.

He still wished to go to sea; and I had promised him that if he learnt well and was a good boy, he should go in two or three years.

I was pleased to see that his early habits of theft and wickedness were gradually yielding to the influence of steady kindness and discipline. It was at this period that I thought direct religious instruction could be given with success. That a child of his age should suddenly reform, could not be expected in the course of things; but the great mercy of God could now impress him, and he began to pray himself, in language which I had taught him. First shame and then gratitude operated to subdue his sinful habits; and this state of mind, I felt, would be followed by better and higher motives.

Mr. Brown sent me word when John had been with him three months, that he was learning very fast, and that he had never caught him in an untruth; he also said that his honesty was genuine and sincere, as the following anecdote will prove.—Mr. Brown lost, as he thought, somewhere in, or about the school-room, a dollar bill. The boys looked for it a long time without finding it, and the search was given up as fruitless. After many days John, who knew well the value of the money, had the good fortune to find it, as he was sweeping the room in his turn, among some waste papers, which had been thrown from his master's desk. No one was with him; and he looked at the bill with a wish, as he afterwards owned, to keep it, and tell no one that it was found. He might have done this with security, for the bill had been

totally given up as lost, and would never again have been inquired for. As he stood with it in his hand, he all at once remembered the commandment which he that very week had learnt, and said to me, "Thou shalt not steal;" and his conscience told him it would be in one sort stealing, if he kept what he had found, when he knew to whom it had belonged.

His master too, had read that very morning from the scriptures, a lesson which now came in aid of his better feelings—"If we sin wilfully after that we have knowledge, then is there no more pardon for sins,"—"but a fearful looking for of punishment." He remembered that he had been told that God loved all who tried to subdue their bad propensities, and become good and honest. He knew that God was angry with the wicked, and that they

would not go to him, and be happy when they died, if they did not repent. He knew too, that God was pleased when any sinful thoughts of the heart were driven out.

Just then one of his school fellows came back after a book. Moses Wild was not a good boy, and when he saw the money, and heard John say he should carry it to Mr. Brown as soon as he had done his work, he told him he was a fool for his pains; that if the bill was in his hands, he should keep it, and buy nuts, and oranges, and cake with it. But John's mind was now fixed; he positively said the money should go to his master; and Moses, finding that his evil counsel was unheeded, walked off sneering at what he called John's religious scruples, and disappointed that he had not been able to get the victory and share the spoil.

Now it happened that Mr. Brown had heard all that passed from an adjoining room, where he was writing; John very soon finished his task, and then went to seek his master. He returned the bill, and a gleam of joy thrilled through his heart, when he was commended for his good deeds and the practice he had already made upon the lessons of piety which were given him at school, and those which he also received at home. And happier yet was he when he was told his mistress should be informed of his trustworthy and good behaviour.

That night John attended prayers with more earnestness, and repeated his own lesson with more seriousness, than had been remarked for a long time. He went on day by day making himself more useful and active about the house, and at school doing his best to get forward in his learning.

He could now read fluently, and spent all his leisure in reading those good little books for children, of which there are so many. He tried to imitate James his fellow-servant, in all his good habits, and at the end of two years, one would never have recognised the half starved and wicked Alms-house Orphan.

John was twelve years old ; he could read, write, and cypher well, very well, for the time he had been learning, and though he felt attached to my family by gratitude and affection, he still retained a strong desire to go to sea. I told him, as he one day respectfully reminded me of my promise to let him go, that a child like him could know little of the hardships of a seafaring life, but that I had heard of a good Captain, under whose care I would put him to serve as a cabin boy for six months, and

at that time he should return to my family if he found his way of life too hard. The tears rolled down his cheeks as he thanked me, and promised to do as well as he could. I sent for Captain Munson, who agreed to take John, and desired that he might be ready to sail for South America, in a week.

He was young, he said, as he looked at the boy, but stout, and appeared as if he might perform a cabin boy's duty.

John, when told he was to go in a week, appeared to feel that it would be more difficult to leave the family and his fellow-servants than he had hitherto thought it would be.

He made himself perpetually busy, early and late; any little thing which he could find to do for any one was carefully performed. He discovered some ingenuity in mending locks and

hinges, and other little things, which in a house, are often getting out of order. Every room was looked into; if perchance a nail might be loosened, the putty falling from a pane of glass or a button off—in truth, there was nothing of this sort which escaped his care.

The week soon passed away,—his sea clothes were all made, and sent on board the vessel. John went to take leave of his faithful teacher, Mr. Brown, who gave him several good books and his blessing at parting.

He appeared to delay leaving us till the last hour. It was a fine day, the wind was fair, and all things prosperous, when a summons came for him to go on board. I will not attempt to describe his parting; he had interested every member of the household during the time he had been among them, and

now that he was going away, all felt the interest increased.

I gave him his Bible after my last advice, with the injunction to read it daily, and to let nothing deter him from the faithful performance of his religious duties. He promised with tears that he would do as I desired, and try never to forget that great Being who had mercifully reclaimed his soul from sin, and early depravity.

He went from us with a heavier heart than he had expected, but the novelty of his situation soon engaged him, and he was not suffered to remain idle while all were busy around him.

Some months elapsed, and the vessel which sailed with John was expected daily into port. We were impatient to learn how he had conducted himself, and whether he had been happy and serviceable to his master.

One morning, an unusual bustle in the kitchen induced me to inquire the cause personally, when who should I find there, but our young sailor boy. He seemed wholly beside himself with joy, at seeing all his friends, and it was long before he could give any account of his voyage.

He had brought some gift for every member of the family—giving to each such things as were most likely to be valued by them. His Captain had been kind to him, and his love of a seaman's life was nothing lessened. He was glad to get back, glad to see all who had ever befriended him, but he thought he should still keep with Captain Munson. He delighted to talk of the past; to ask a thousand questions concerning the progress of things during his absence, and appeared rejoiced that all was well. He did not forget

his schoolmaster, but carried him an offering the first day of his arrival.

Captain Munson himself called, in a few days, to tell me personally how John had deported himself, and it was with true pleasure I learnt that the habits of devotion which had been taught him on land, were not forgotten or neglected at sea.

“His conduct, was,” said the Captain, “always worthy of praise ; we had two new hands when we put out of port, who had lived disorderly lives in other vessels, and who scrupled not to swear, and abuse their messmates, who had sailed with me a long time, and had been brought to sober thought. These two sailors liked especially to vex and teaze John, or as they called him, “pious Jack.” Their taunts produced no other effect on the boy, except to make him more serious and forbearing.

“After a time, they became ashamed of their folly in attempting to provoke one who always returned them good for evil, and who was ready at all hours to oblige them. These men became affected, rough as they were, by the influence of this young cabin boy. He persuaded them, after a time, to hear him read some tracts as they sat unemployed, as they often were for some hours together. They were particularly interested in the story of “George Gordon,” and ever after hearing that, listened to John when he offered to read. He carried them his Bible, and they confessed they could not read themselves. He said he would teach them, and I assure you, Madam, continued the Captain, I never saw more patience exemplified than in this humble work of love, and christian charity.

“The sailors were soon in a fair way

to profit from his lessons, and began to study the scriptures for themselves. I gave each of them a Testament, and now, instead of wasting their time in idle conversation, they filled up every spare moment with study and usefulness. In them the text of scripture was reversed ;—‘ Good communication had reformed their manners,’—and they became the most valuable hands on board.

“ While off the coast we encountered a heavy gale, and then John’s religion was put to the most certain test : for some hours we expected the ship would go to pieces ; the night was dark and terrific ; we were in danger of being driven on the shoals, and losing life with the cargo.

“ We all knew that a moment might end our lives. John was fearless ; he ran whichever way he was called, now

up the shrouds, then to the pumps below ; in fine, he laboured silently and incessantly, and as soon as the tempest had passed, he was the first to fall on his knees and offer up thanks for the preservation of our lives. I believe he sincerely felt that the care of God was over all who served him with sincere purposes, and that he listened to the prayer of the humble and contrite.

“No day passed without some expression of thankfulness to you, who had done so much for him, and I think his constant petitions were for your happiness. He said, that though God was high, yet he had respect to the lowly ; that he was a God who heard and accepted prayers, and he would bless and reward his benefactress, and listen even to him, a poor little cabin boy.”

I willingly consented now to relinquish John, as it was his wish to con-

tinue a sailor. The vessel was soon fit for a second voyage, and he bade us again farewell. Months passed on, and the ship was not heard from; we began to fear that she was lost, and these fears were realized by accounts of destructive tempests in that part of the ocean where Captain Munson had been sailing, and from whence several vessels had arrived much injured.

We could hardly suppress our grief when this sad news arrived, but reflection convinced us, that if it were the will of God thus to take the orphan boy from the world, we had no right to doubt its justice, or its mercy.

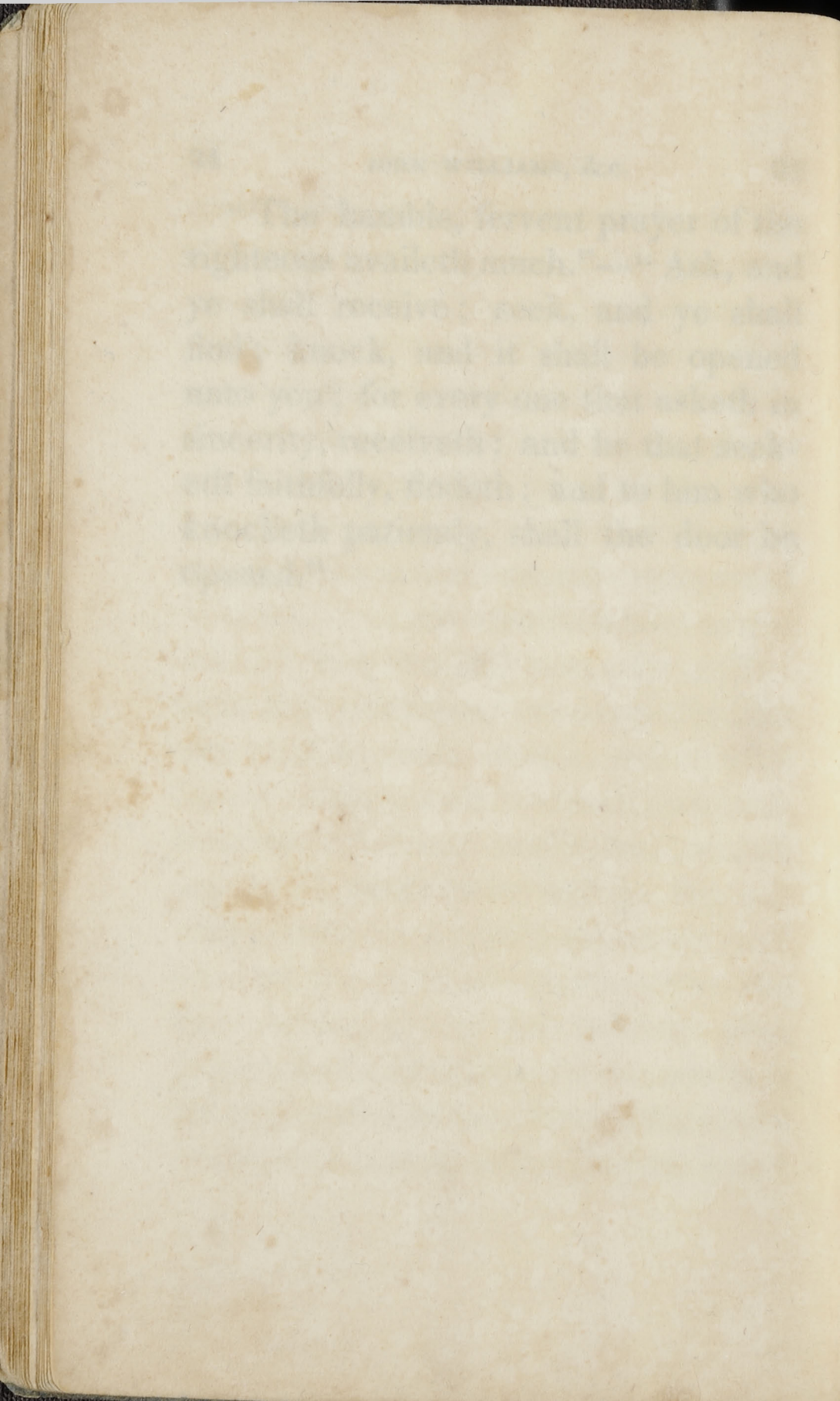
We knew that John was prepared to die, and we could not feel regret that he had been indulged in pursuing that course of life for which he had such a decided preference. We rejoiced that the lessons of piety which it had been

our happiness to impart, had taken root and produced the fruits of righteousness.

We believed that he was removed, perhaps in great mercy, from the evil to come, and that he was now entered upon a state of existence where the good receive their reward; and that, having here learnt the fear of the Lord, it was now well with him.

You, who read this story, if you are wicked, go now, and delay not that reformation which alone will insure your forgiveness of that great and good Being, from whom you have received the gift of life with many blessings. Pray earnestly that grace may be given you to resist temptation; pray for holiness, and not only pray, but practise that course of life which will alone aid your endeavours, and be likely to merit that your prayers be answered.

“The humble, fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much.”—“Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh in sincerity, receiveth; and he that seeketh faithfully, findeth; and to him who knocketh patiently, shall the door be opened.”



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