

A Girl Who Knew Her Bible

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Mrs. Leigh was the wife of a popular minister. She was a devoted Christian, and, so far as she had light, walked in it conscientiously. She had, when a girl, desired to be a missionary to foreign lands, but the Pastor, Mr. Leigh had persuaded her that he needed her help in his work, and so she fulfilled her mission by using her influence and means in home and foreign missionary work as much as possible. She was much interested in an Indian mission school, and one of her friends was a teacher there. One day she received a long and interesting letter from this friend, a part of which read as follows:

"Among our youngest girls is an orphan, who is a beauty. I mean it. Her father was a scout, and her mother a good-looking half-breed girl. Our pupil's Indian name means star, or brightness, and we called her Esther at once, telling her the Bible story, which greatly pleased her.

"Esther is very bright and winning. She has been here three years, and she is now nearly twelve years of age. Her father brought her here, and since his death there is no one who cares to claim her, and she is too superior to be returned to her tribe, unless she goes as a missionary when old enough.

"She reads well, and is quite well advanced in other studies. She sews neatly, and shows great taste for music and fancywork. She can also do most kinds of housework very nicely. To come to the point, do you know of any woman who would be willing to take this child and educate her into a Christian worker? Her help will be some return, but, of course, it is essentially a missionary undertaking. I could wish you might be able to take her; but I cannot urge you, not knowing your situation."

Mrs. Leigh at once consulted her husband, urging her own desire to take the child, and he gave his consent. So it was settled, and Esther was brought east by Miss Morton when she came home for vacation. Mrs. Leigh acknowledged the personal attractions of the little girl, and did all she could, in the way of tasteful dress, to enhance them. She introduced her to a Sunday school class where the girls were near her own age and whose teacher was considered the best in the school.

The summer passed, and when the schools opened, Esther was placed in her proper grade, and learned rapidly. She assisted in the housework and care of the baby, and practiced a little each day on the piano.

Mrs. Leigh noticed, with pleasure, that Esther was thoughtful, and loved to read her Bible. One Sunday afternoon Mrs. Leigh entered the sitting room, after having put baby to sleep, and found Esther curled up in a large chair, with her Bible in her lap. She was not reading, but sat with knitted brows, her cheek resting in her hand, while her elbow leaned on the arm of the chair. She did not stir as Mrs. Leigh entered, but kept her absorbed expression until the latter said gently, "What is it, Esther?"

The girl lifted her head, and a smile played around her mouth, but her large, dark eyes looked very earnest as she said, "Oh, Mrs. Leigh, I was just wishing for you! Things puzzle me so."

"What things, dear? In the Bible, do you mean?" "Yes'm," replied Esther, squaring around in her chair, and dropping her feet upon the rest by the window.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Leigh, "and I will help you, if I can."

"Well, it's this," began Esther, "the church does so differently from what the Bible says."

"Why, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Leigh, with a little horrified gasp, "what can you mean?"

"Yes'm," persisted Esther, "Didn't you say Jesus was to be our pattern and guide, and that we are to obey Him?"

"Certainly, my dear. All Christians believe that; and, if they are really Christians, they will do so."

"Then why doesn't the church baptize as Jesus was baptized? He said, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,' and He was baptized to show us how; but our minister doesn't do that way. He just sprinkles a little water on people. Jesus went down into the river, you know. Oughtn't Christians to do as He did?"

"Well, dear, baptism is only a sign, and the form does not mean so much as the spirit."

"Sign of what?" asked Esther.

"Oh, it is a sign of consecration to God."

"But doesn't it mean something?" interrupted Esther. "I saw in some book, I've forgotten where, a picture of two men in the water, and one was putting the other under the water; and I read, either there or somewhere, that baptism means dying to sin, and rising to a new life, and that it is also to make us remember Christ's death and resurrection. That way of baptizing could mean that; but sprinkling a little water couldn't be a sign of that. Anyway, I should think folks would do just as Jesus did. I mean to if ever I am baptized."

"Well, well, child, you may get wiser as you grow older. But is that all your trouble?"

"No, indeed; but I am afraid you haven't time to hear me. I want to understand things, but I don't or, at least, if I do, then other folks don't, and they are so many and so much older and wiser."

"Yes, that's it," interrupted Mrs. Leigh, "So many older, wiser people must know better than we."

"Well-oh! There are so many ideas, and they crowd so, I don't know how to say them; but I've been thinking, since I sat here, why don't the churches keep the Sabbath?"

"Keep the Sabbath!" echoed Mrs. Leigh in amazement. "Why, they do, child! All Christians do—some more conscientiously than others; but it is generally observed all over the country."

"Not the Sabbath!" persisted Esther. "The Sabbath is the seventh day. God blessed it, and said in the Ten Commandments, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;' but Sunday, the first day, is the one people keep. Now, why don't we obey God, and keep the seventh day?"

"God's people, before Christ came, did keep the seventh-day," returned Mrs. Leigh; "but under the new dispensation the Sabbath was changed."

"Oh, was it?" cried Esther, in a tone of relief. "Who changed it, please? I don't know what 'dispensation' means; but if God changed His mind and said so, it's all right. Where does it tell about it?" And Esther seized her Bible to turn to the place when given.

"I don't think the Bible says God changed the day," said Mrs. Leigh hesitatingly.

"Why, who else had a right to?" cried Esther, in dismay. "Perhaps," she added, "Christ did; but I thought He kept the Sabbath."

"No," said Mrs. Leigh, "I do not think Christ changed it, by command, at least."

"Did His disciples say anywhere that Christ wanted the day changed?" asked Esther.

"I don't remember that they did," responded Mrs. Leigh; "But the early church fathers certainly kept Sunday for Sabbath. It was to commemorate Christ's resurrection, you see."

"Who were the early fathers?" queried Esther. "Who gave them the right to change God's day? He was very particular it should be kept; and, if He wished to have another day kept, I think He or Christ would have said so. It's very queer."

"Esther, really you must not get into the habit of questioning established customs. There is always a good reason at the bottom."

"I should think the best reason would be God's command," said Esther, as she turned the leaves of her Bible, and added: "Well, there is another thing. They taught us at the mission school that if we are good, when we die we shall go straight to heaven—our spirits will, I mean." She looked inquiringly at Mrs. Leigh.

"Certainly that is what we are taught."

"But the Bible says that the dead know not anything; and if our spirits are awake, of course they'll know. Our bodies never know anything, anyway."

"Oh, well, child, have Mr. Leigh explain that to you, if you must think about such things! For my part, I am willing to accept church doctrines, founded on the best understanding of a great many wise men."

"Well," replied Esther meekly, "I want to understand the Bible. Does it mean what it says, or does it have to be explained some queer way every time? I don't see how folks ever found out what the Bible did mean, if it doesn't mean what it says."

Mrs. Leigh smiled, and said: "You are only a child yet. But come out with the rest of your worries, and then we'll ask Mr. Leigh to settle things for you."

"Oh, there are ever so many puzzles; but why do Christians say the wicked will burn in hell forever?"

"Because they will," replied Mrs. Leigh hastily. "Are you a Universalist?"

"I don't know what that is," said Esther curiously.

"Universalists are persons who believe everybody is going to be saved."

"Is that so? How queer! Why should God want sin in heaven? No, I don't believe that, because the Bible doesn't teach it anywhere; but it does say the wicked shall be burned up and destroyed. It says so in many places."

"But, then, what becomes of their immortal souls?" asked Mrs. Leigh.

"Why, do souls live forever? I thought it was only souls of those who trust in Jesus that live forever. I am sure the Bible says so."

"Oh, you are mistaken!" exclaimed Mrs. Leigh.

"Well, what does this mean in the third verse of the seventeenth chapter of John, 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent'? Jesus said that in a prayer."

"Oh, I don't know what you are driving at!" said poor Mrs. Leigh wearily. "Is that the end of your troubles?"

"There is only one thing more I'll bother you with today," said Esther despondently.

"The minister spoke last Sunday—you know, the one who preached in Mr. Leigh's place. He said something about a good time coming; I forget what he called it, when everybody would be good and happy, sometime before the end of the world, isn't it?"

"You mean the millennium, I suppose," said Mrs. Leigh, "a thousand years when Christ reigns spiritually."

"Yes, that's it. Well, if there is to be such a time, what did Jesus mean when He told that story to His disciples about the wheat and the tares? You know He said the wheat meant His children, and the tares were Satan's children; the reapers were the angels, and the harvest was the end of the world. He said the tares wouldn't be gathered first, but that all would grow together to the harvest, and then the tares would be burned, and the wheat would be saved. Now, if the wicked folks are going to live till the end of the world, as Jesus said, I don't see how there can be any thousand years so good and happy. Besides, I saw in a paper somewhere that it must be near the end of the world now, for the gospel has been sent all over the world. And you know. . . why, there's baby crying."

"Yes, let me take your Bible while you go and get him, won't you?" said Mrs. Leigh, in a tone of relief.

As Esther disappeared into the hall, a footstep was heard in the adjoining room, and Mr. Leigh stepped in from behind the half-closed folding door.

"How you startled me!" cried Mrs. Leigh. "Where have you been?"

"On the lounge in the dining room," was the reply.

"Then you heard Esther?"

"Yes, I was just going to sleep when you came in, and I had the benefit of your conversation instead of my nap."

"Edward, what shall we do with her?" asked Mrs. Leigh in perplexity.

"Don't know, I am sure, my dear," returned the minister. "I'm not sure but the Catholics are in the right of it in suppressing Bibles, if the reading plunges one into such a sea of difficulties. But don't you send Esther to me until I get straightened out a little myself. It's strange, but she's started my thoughts in a new channel. I am going to my study. Don't let me be disturbed until the first bell rings."

Mr. Leigh dropped on his knees in his study, and asked God to direct him in the reading of His word. He then took the Bible and concordance, and studied until the church bell rang.

That evening he did not preach the doctrinal discourse he had prepared, but gave an impromptu talk from the words, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." People said it was a most practical sermon.

Mr. Leigh studied closely, with earnest prayer, the next few weeks. One evening he said, "Esther, I agree with you that the Bible means what it says; and if I preach any more, it shall be Bible truth instead of church doctrine."

Esther smiled in content, but Mrs. Leigh asked fearfully, "Where will that lead, Edward?"

"To the approbation of my Lord and Master, I hope and believe," he replied cheerfully.

"But the church?" she continued.

"Oh, well, I'll give them a few sermons of pure, unadulterated truth, and then resign when they give evidence of having had all they can bear. There must be some souls in our church who will respond to true doctrine. When I have borne the message here, there will surely be a place where the truth of God is welcome. God will care for us. I'll not fear for the future."

Mr. Leigh kept his word. He astounded that fashionable church with naked truth; and when he had preached his last sermon there, he said, "I can never thank God enough that I overheard how Esther read her Bible."