



Pictures from
Mrs. Pierson's Life

Isabella Alden

PICTURES FROM MRS. PIERSON'S LIFE



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**PICTURES FROM
MRS. PIERSON'S LIFE**



CHAPTER 1

IN THE NURSERY

Occupants: Master Charlie Pierson, aged eight; Miss Lulu Pierson, aged five; Miss Henrietta Pierson, aged twelve; and Mamma Pierson, sewing busily on a blue summer silk dress.

“Mamma,” says Miss Henrietta, “the girls want me to join their missionary society. They are going to raise money for the missionary ship, and it is only ten cents a share. They meet once a week. I suppose I may join.”

“No,” said Mrs. Pierson, decidedly. “I don’t believe I care to have you. What is the use of a missionary ship? I am sure there are ships enough; just as though they couldn’t use the ships that there are already to carry their things. That is nothing but pride. Hand me the pinking-iron, Lulu. Take care, Charlie, don’t bring your sponge in this direction; this blue silk spots dreadfully. If I had thought of that I should never have bought it for such a girl as you are, Henrietta.”

“But, mamma, all the girls are going to join, and I feel real mean to be the only one.”

"Oh, well, you needn't. I guess I have influence enough to keep you from sinking, even if you don't belong to the children's society, and I really haven't money to use in any such direction. Your father contributes to Foreign Missions every year, and that ought to be enough. There is no sense in children dabbling in such matters; the money would only be wasted."

"Papa gave a five-dollar bill last Sunday for the missionaries," remarked Lulu, "and he said he gave as much as that every single year."

"Of course he does, and that is enough. We aren't made of money. It costs a great deal to support a family and dress you children. It is really enough to frighten one to see how expensive everything is. Here is Lulu's new white dress, which won't cost a cent less than thirteen dollars by the time I get it done. Just think of that!"

"Mrs. Harris said yesterday that the Hamburg of that dress was the nicest she ever saw," said Henrietta.

"It *is* nice," Mrs. Pierson answered, complacently. "I never buy cheap things; it is poor economy."

"Mamma, may I have a pair of truly kid gloves to wear with my new dress tomorrow?"

"Oh, you little mouse, only five years old and begging for 'truly' kid gloves. But I mean you to have a pair, child; they will look so cunning on your little hands that I can't help it. Henrietta *must* you have this skirt puffed? It is very trying work, and I'm afraid I shan't get it done for tomorrow."

"Oh, yes, mamma, I really must. You know what they puff everything nowadays, and a *silk* dress without puffs would look so funny. Oh, dear me! Don't you feel *sure* you can get it done? I do want it so dreadfully for tomorrow!"

"I mean to try," said Mrs. Pierson, resignedly, "for you really have nothing in which to appear. I was ashamed of you last Sunday."

The mention of tomorrow turned the current of Master Charlie's thoughts in that direction.

"Mamma, Lulu and I were ashamed last Sunday. We were the only ones in our great class who didn't have a penny to put in the box."

Mrs. Pierson sighed.

"Well, why didn't you go to your father and get one?"

"I did, but he said he hadn't any change, and we couldn't be always bothering about pennies Sunday morning."

"I think as much. It does seem a pity that even the Sabbath day can't be free from thoughts and plans about money. For my part I think it would be just as well to teach the children that it wasn't of so much importance. Every Sunday morning there is a frantic cry through this house for *pennies*! What is done with them, anyway?"

"They are for the heathen, mamma," explained little Miss Lulu, tipping over her box of costly building blocks as she spoke, thereby turning the elephant and the camel and several others of the wooden menagerie into limbless confusion.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Pierson. "What a racket you make with your playthings, Lulu. You have too many. The house is full of them. The idea of the children's pennies being gathered up for the heathen! As if that little bit of money would do *them* any good. It isn't money that they need, either; it is teaching."

"But, mother, money buys Bibles and such things and pays teachers." This from Charlie, in a thoughtful tone.

“Well,” sharply, “so it buys a good many other things—pants, for instance. Get off your knees immediately. Those you have on cost four dollars, and there is a thin place in the knee already. I don’t see why missionaries need so much pay. If they want to go and teach the heathen they should have a higher motive than money. Anyway, I don’t believe in putting the children up to think you are doing great things taking your pennies to church for the *heathen*. Might better save them for the poor children at home. There are plenty of *them*, I am sure. How this lace dazzles my eyes! I don’t believe there is going to be enough of it, either. Now I think of it, Henrietta, you had better run right down to Mrs. Burgess and have her save the piece. Tell her to let you bring it up, and I will use off of it what I need, and send it back before midnight. I shall have to sew until about that time to get this dress done. It is the piece that is seventy-five cents a yard, you know.”



“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

CHAPTER 2

IN THE PARLOR

Occupants: Mrs. Pierson, with her new pattern for lace-work in her hand; Miss Henrietta, aged eighteen, in all the glory of a perfected summer toilet, and two young ladies—callers. Listen:

“Oh, dear,” said Mrs. Pierson, “I don’t see how you ladies get time to do so much. I really haven’t a spare hour now to read the books and papers that the house is full of. We couldn’t think of taking anything more. What is the use?”

“But the *Foreign Missionary*, Mrs. Pierson—you surely ought to make an exception to that! It is only one dollar a year, and is one of the regular channels for gaining missionary intelligence. Of course you want to know what our missionaries are doing.”

“Well, I don’t know. I suppose they understand their business, and can attend to it without my taking the trouble to keep watch of them. At least I’m sure I haven’t time for it. It does seem to me that the world grows busier every day. Have you seen any of this new lace-work, Mrs. Belden? It is rather trying on the eyes, but when it is

done it really looks wonderfully like old point. My Lulu is crazy to have some for her neck and sleeves. Children have so many notions in regard to dress nowadays that it really takes a mother most of the time to keep up with them. I can't remember that I thought so much about it when I was a girl."

"Then you really will not help us by subscribing for a copy of the magazine?"

"Oh, dear, no. It would be of no sort of use. Just another book to lie around in the way. I haven't time to read, and I'm sure Mr. Pierson hasn't. He says he gives as much as he can afford for Foreign Missions, and it wouldn't help them any if he were to read all the missionary news in the world. Mrs. Belden, don't you really think there must be something wrong somewhere? What *do* they want of such a fearful amount of money? Why, the collections in our own church are very large, I am sure; and just think how many churches are giving all the time. And here Dr. Powers spent almost an hour last Sunday in telling about the enormous debt of the Foreign Board. Mr. Pierson says he doesn't think it is honest for people to run in debt in this way. Somebody must spend the money. Now, the missionaries do not have to dress to keep up with the times, nor to keep their houses furnished handsomely, nor give parties, and all that sort of thing, to introduce their children into society. Such things tell ruinously on the purse. But what on *earth* can be done with all the money that the Missionary Board gets hold of is more than I can imagine."

The faintest suspicion of a smile hovered over Mrs. Belden's face.

"I think you said you had not read what had been done in China, and Japan, and Africa, and India during the past year?" she said, meaningly.

"Why, no; as I tell you, I haven't time to read much. Henrietta always has some scheme on hand that takes time and money, and needs mother to help her out."

Whereupon the younger of the two callers turned suddenly to the fair daughter.

"Your name reminds me that we have also an errand for you. The young ladies, you know, have formed a sewing circle to assist in fitting out Miss Bremer for her home in China. I am commissioned to ask if you will join them?"

"Why," said Miss Henrietta, blushing and laughing, "I don't know how it is that mamma and I seem to have so much less time at our disposal than other people. I really don't see how I can do another thing. I superintend my own sewing and Lulu's dressmaking, and it keeps me running to the dressmaker's or the stores about half the time. And then the demands of society are so great nowadays. As mamma says, there is always something. I am bankrupt, too," with another sparkling laugh. "Papa declared yesterday that if I did not make my monthly allowance hold out better he would foreclose on me. I provide my own gloves and such things, and you know Alexandre's kids are ruinous in price. And, besides, they wear such light colors that one has to have a new pair every month. I always buy the best; mamma brought us up to that; but they certainly cost dreadfully. I really don't see how I can do anything, do you, mamma?"

"Mercy, no, child! You are driven to death now. She has to go with Lulu to dancing-school twice a week. Some mothers are willing to have their children go alone to

such places, but I never could bring myself to it. And then, as she says, she superintends Lulu's dressmaking and they have made such ridiculous rules as to how children in dancing-school shall be dressed at their publicals that it is quite a study to get around in time with a new toilet. Absurd! I feel like quarreling with it. But Lulu's heart is set on it. I don't know what makes the child so fond of dress. I don't remember that I was when a child."

"I never could understand why ladies, as soon as they were going on a mission, had to have their clothes made for them." This from Miss Henrietta, with another of her silvery little laughs. "Miss Bremer has always done her own sewing. Does becoming a missionary unfit one for such work?"

"It isn't a necessity," the caller said, coldly. "She has a great deal to do, of course; but this is a labor of love."

"Of course," said Mrs. Pearson, "we all have great respect for her."

"Well," said Miss Henrietta, "I'm willing to *respect* her with all my might; but as for sewing for her, that is another thing. I told mamma only yesterday that I wished I could get up a bee to help me with my fall suits. And Charlie said he would like to have a paper circulated to help him get the gold watch his heart is set on. He thought it would do him as much good as Mr. Stuart away out in China. You know the boys have been asked to help with that fund. Charlie can't; he is worse off about pocket-money than I am. Boys have such expensive tastes. When I was a little girl I had quite an idea of joining a missionary society to get the little ship, you know; but mamma didn't approve, and I didn't. They got the ship, I think, didn't they?"

Before Mrs. Wells could answer this fair searcher after missionary intelligence her mother chimed in:

"No, I didn't want her to join a child's missionary society. I dislike to see children aping their elders. Let them be young while they can, and enjoy their place and their dancing and their fun. The cares of life come early enough at best." And she took another stitch in her fascinating lace-work and sighed.

The callers rose to go.

"I am sorry you cannot help us in any way," said the indefatigable Mrs. Belden.

"Well," smiling brightly, and brushing a stray rose-leaf from her summer silk, "of course I would be glad to if I could. But this is such a busy world; so many things to take up one's attention. Have you been to Madame's opening? Her fall hats are too lovely for anything!"



"Out at the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh!"

CHAPTER 3

AT THE BREAKFAST-TABLE

Present: Mrs. Henrietta Harper, matron; Mr. Harper, merchant; Master Charlie Pierson, student; Miss Lulu Pierson, lady of leisure.

“Women’s Missionary Society. What *is* that institution, pray? I thought the men managed these affairs.” This Mr. Harper asked, after musing over his third cup of coffee.

His wife: “Oh, well, it is some new notion. The world is full of restless women, you know, who have no home cares nor society cares, and who like to manage so well that they must find vent in some way. There seems to be a special *furore* just now about the Woman’s Branch as they call themselves. I suppose it will blow over in time just, just as the Woman’s Crusade did, and a hundred other things that they have meddled with. Lulu, what did they want of you yesterday?”

“To join the Young Ladies Circle,” laughed Miss Lulu. “What are they trying to do, anyway? Are there more heathen than there used to be? How have they managed all these years without us girls?”

"The idea of *your* being a member of a Mission Circle!" exclaimed Mr. Charlie Pierson, bursting into a loud laugh that subsided in a succession of amused giggles. "I should like to have seen your face when they asked you. Why didn't you tell them that ten-button kids consumed all your money, and most of your leisure in getting them on and off."

"And then, if they had asked for a contribution from my big brother, I could have said that cigars and horses where the joy of his life and the end of his ambition," retorted Miss Lulu, with spirit.

"Oh, well, now," said Mrs. Henrietta, "of course you neither of you mean that. We all belong to the Church, accept Charlie, and we are all of course interested in missions. To be sure we may differ somewhat as to the best methods of promoting the cause. Mother believed in giving money through proper channels. Father always contributed to Foreign Missions, and I am sure you do, Mr. Harper, every year; don't you?"

"Oh, I give something," that gentleman answered, carelessly. "Have to, to get rid of the collector—they manage that thing with so much method now days. I can't say I do it from principal. In my opinion the Foreign Mission cause is a failure. There has been money enough sunken in that way to have made this country over. And what has it accomplished? The so-called conversion of a few heathen, who will not do anything for themselves or anybody else, now that they are converted. If I were at the head of affairs I would keep the money at home."

"A good deal of it *is* kept at home, I presume," said Mrs. Harper, significantly. "As long ago as when I was a girl of eighteen or so, I remember hearing mother wonder what on earth could be done with all the money, and the

mission boards always in debt. That opened my eyes, and I have believed ever since that a good deal of the money which we think we are sending to the heathen pays enormous salaries, and builds fine offices, and all that sort of thing, for people who like to manage such lucrative affairs."

"What a nice thing it must be to belong to such a church!" Charlie said this, with something very like a sneer on his gay and handsome face. "Select your men of trust from the very heart of a great church, and not have than even the degree of confidence in and them that a man has in his confidential clerk, who makes no pretensions or professions. I think I should like to belong! Lovely institution, that! Still, I don't see why you should be so bitter, Sis; very little of your money has been wasted in that way, I should say."

A flush of vexation mounted to Mrs. Harper's handsome forehead, as she answered:

"What do you mean, Charlie? I hope you are not growing skeptical with all the rest."

"*Growing* skeptical! That is a good one. I can assure you, my good sister, that I have already grown as far as it is at all necessary in that. My education is quite complete in some branches. It was begun early. There is one verse in the Bible, among others, in which I am a firm believer, and that is: 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' I am going in the exact way in which I was trained, for that matter; so are the rest of you. I began to get my eyes open in regard to this question when I was hardly eight years old. When I saw my worthy father pay out money freely for cigars and fruits, or anything that took his fancy, and sent me frequently to my Sabbath-school class in a state of

mortification because he wouldn't have me bothering around on Sunday morning teasing for pennies, I asked myself which was the most important in his mind, cigars or heathen? When I discovered, a little later, that he paid five hundred dollars for a favorite horse, and the next Sunday gave five dollars to the heathen, I said to myself, horse or heathen, which? How long do you suppose it took me to decide which he placed the highest? When I found my respected mother paying thirteen dollars for one white dress for Lulu, when she was almost a baby, and objecting, on the score of economy, to our taking shares at ten cents in the missionary ship, what was the reasonable conclusion to which a boy of common sense would have come? When I found her spending fifty dollars for one lace set, and objecting, on the score of economy, to subscribing for the *Missionary Herald* at fifty cents a year, why, wasn't it the old question of *heathen* or *horses*, which? When my oldest sister spent day after day in an eternal round of shopping and millinering to get ready for the party or the opera, and refused, on the score of lack of time, to attend the missionary sewing-circle, and gave the ruinous price of Alexandre kids as a reason why she could not contribute to the cause, could I help deciding which was the most important?"

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Henrietta, with a curling lip, "what an observing boy you were!"

"Oh, yes, indeed I was. Very few things escaped my eyes or ears; few things do escape a boy of eight, and from that age on. My young sister here contributed her mite toward my education. Do you remember a certain occasion on which you cried for an hour because mother had not finished the lace ruffles in time for the regular Sunday show? And when she told you she should have

had them done if she hadn't been almost forced to go in and help sew buttons on Miss Bremer's traveling suit, you said you hated Miss Bremer and her traveling suit, and she was nothing but a missionary anyway, and you hoped she would drown on her way to China?"

"Just a child's silly fit of rage," interrupted Mrs. Henrietta. "You showed your good sense in letting that influence you!"

"Oh, but the trouble was she lived up to her principles during all the following years, and does yet, and so do you. You like frankness, my good sister; I heard you tell Professor Maynard so yesterday. It isn't often I trouble you with any, but since you are shocked at my skeptical principles I am anxious that you should see they were fairly secured. Pretty early in life I came across this *questioning* dodge—this attempt to call to account the use of the funds for missions—and to hint at wastefulness, inexcusable extravagance, if nothing worse. I caught at it. I don't believe I was by nature intended for a scoffer. I set out on the study of the whole question, with an earnest desire to make my father and mother and sisters into consistent Christians if I could. Now what did I find? First, that ministers in all denominations, and of all degrees of age and learning, had almost universal respect for and confidence in the public officers of the churches. Pretty soon I found that honesty was so much the rule, and so fully expected, that when once in a score of years a defalcation occurred, and the man was a Christian, straightway there was a hue and cry made over the country—made, too, by some of these very people who had been whispering about the question, 'What becomes of all the money?' as proved conclusively that whatever became of it they had full and unwavering confidence in the man

who had it in charge. Said I to myself, 'That excuse was humbug;' and once my eyes were opened nothing was clearer than that fact. Then I said, 'What about the money? What is it doing?' And I took to studying up our country. I sought after and devoured statistics. What did I find? Why, that the field was so broad—so awfully, incomprehensibly broad—that my mind lost itself in the vastness, and I said: 'Why, surely, there is not money enough in the world to reach all these places, as, if people believed in the Bible, they ought to be reached. What about the five-hundred dollar horses, and the thousand-dollar rings, and the lace curtains and the Brussels carpets, and the ten-button kids *then*?

"'The field is the world.' I read that in my mother's Bible. And standing side-by-side with it, the call, 'Go ye into all the *world* and preach the gospel to every creature.' And sounding along with it the solemn complaint: 'The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few.' And I found my mother and sisters, readers of this Bible, professedly guided by its pages, telling the monthly missionary collectors that the demands of society were so great that their time and their purses were pre-empted. What was a man, who wasn't a fool, to think but that this whole question of religion, as it is practiced before our eyes, is a humbug of the most ignorant sort!"

During this harangue, the like of which had never been heard from Charlie Pierson before, the family had disposed at themselves variously. Lulu, feeling unable to stem the tide of words, and being desirous of knowing whether the hat which had just come home exactly matched the suit with which it was to be worn, slid from the room. Mrs. Henrietta took up the morning paper and

pretended to read, but *heard* every word. The brother-in-law stood leaning against the mantle, hat in hand, listening and enjoying, as a man without a very high-toned nature can enjoy home thrusts, even when aimed at him or his.

“Upon my word,” he said, when the roused young man paused for breath, “you ought to have been a preacher instead of a lawyer.”

“Humph,” said Charlie, let down from his height and turning contemptuously away. “If I were a preacher I’d go and preach to the Caffres or the South Sea Islanders; anywhere, in preference to staying among people who have sold themselves to summer silks and velvets and vanity. Come on, Ford, let’s get downtown.”



Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

This people draweth nigh unto me with their *mouth*, but
with their *hearts* they are far from me.

There is that *withholdeth* more than is meet, and it
tendeth to poverty.

They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the
whirlwind.

He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap
corruption.

Picture from Mrs. Pierson's Life

Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for *whatsoever* a man soweth, that *shall he also reap*.



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