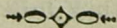


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PROPER SPIRIT.

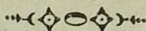
By MRS. CAMERON, Author of "Margaret Whyte," &c.



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PROPER SPIRIT.



THOSE persons who have heard the name of Mr. Spencer and his five teachers, may, perhaps, recollect that he ordered them to come to his house on the last Thursday in the old year, in order that he might make some remarks upon part of the second chapter of St. Luke, which they had learned by heart. These verses contained that beautiful description of the angels visiting the shepherds, which is pleasant and delightful to every child who has been taught any thing of a Saviour's love. I have seen the eyes of very little children become exceedingly bright, when they have heard these verses read at church on Christmas-Day; their attention having been drawn to them before by some kind brother or sister, who had been carefully teaching them the words by heart.

I never heard the whole of Mr. Spencer's explanation; but, I believe, he particularly dwelt upon two points:—first, that angels were the messengers of the good news to men; from which we learn the power and dignity, the glory and majesty, of Christ.—Secondly, that the shepherds found our blessed Lord lying in a manger; from which we learn his humility and condescension. We here see Jesus Christ as very God and very man; perfectly able, in his divine nature, to save fallen men, and shewing himself perfectly willing to save them, by taking upon himself the form of a man, even in its weakest and feeblest shape, that of a little helpless infant, and of an infant so poor and destitute, that he had no place wherein to lay his tender limbs but a manger. Thus the Lord of Glory was contented to rest amid horned oxen.

Mr. Spencer enlarged very much, in his discourse with the children, on these two points, and I have heard that what he said was very affecting; and then, after a short pause, he trod in the steps of his excellent minister, and begged his little hearers to apply to themselves what he had said.

The children had been exceedingly attentive to his discourse; but, when he gave them this direction, they looked

very hard at him, as if they did not at all understand him : and Thomas Wright said, " If you please, Sir, I do not know what you mean by that word, apply."

Mr. Spencer smiled. " Suppose, Thomas," he answered, " I were to spread a cloth on this table, and cover it with basons of bread and milk ; would the sight of the bread and milk satisfy your hunger ?"

Thomas. No, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. But if I were to call you round the table, and bid you each take your bason of milk and drink it up, then your hunger would be satisfied, would it not, providing that you obeyed my command, and really did eat and drink the bread and milk ? Now, I have been giving you a great deal of instruction, but if you do not each of you think to yourselves, What is this to teach *me* ? you will not be the better for what I have said.

James. I think I understand what you mean.

Mr. Spencer. Come, Thomas, we have been considering how able Jesus Christ is to save sinners : is he able to save you ?

Thomas. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. And has he not shewn that he is willing to save you ?

James. Yes, he has, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. Then, if you are not saved, whose fault will it be ?

The boys did not answer ; and Mr. Spencer said, " Surely it is your own fault if the cup of salvation is offered you, and you will not taste it. My dear boys," continued Mr. Spencer, after a short pause, " Jesus Christ is able and willing to wash away all your past sins, and to reconcile you to your heavenly Father, and to make you heirs of the kingdom of heaven ; so that when you die, instead of going to hell, where you deserve to go, you may go to heaven, to dwell in his presence for ever. Is not this plain to you ?"

James. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. And he will do all this for you, if you will come to him, confessing yourselves miserable sinners, lost in yourselves, and begging him, from your hearts, to forgive you. Do you not believe this ?

The boys answered they did.

Mr. Spencer. But you feel unwilling and disinclined to do this ; and that is because you have naughty, proud hearts : every day your hearts rise against prayer and a life of holy obedience. But Jesus Christ not only can forgive you

your past sins, but he can take away this unwillingness to come to him and do his will ; he can and will put his Spirit in your heart, if you ask him for it. Do you not know this to be true, my boys ?

“ Yes, we do,” replied James.

Mr. Spencer. This, then, you must do—you must not only come once to Jesus Christ to ask him to forgive you for all your past sins, but you must come to him in the same manner every day afterwards, and you must ask to have every fresh sin forgiven that you fall into—you must ask to have the love of sin taken out of your hearts. This is the beginning of the life of faith—the only happy life a man can lead : this is the narrow way of holiness—the way in which the prophets walked—the way that leads to God. I am an old man, my children, and have seen much of different sorts of people ; and I can tell you, from experience, that, if a child will begin betimes to lead this life, he shall find the comfort and delight of it all his days, and when he comes to old age, he will find it a crown of glory round his grey hairs. Yes, my boys, an old man that leads a life of faith, has a heart as light and as gay as the youngest among you, even in the midst of his infirmities.

As Mr. Spencer said this, James looked earnestly at him, and perceived tears standing in his eyes, and a certain look of heavenly joy in his countenance, which he did not remember to have observed in him before. He remarked, too, that his hair was nearly white, and that he had a stoop in his shoulders, which is the sign of declining years. And the observation of this sunk deep into the mind of James, and he felt for Mr. Spencer, at the same time, a feeling of love and respect greater than he had ever done before.

In the conclusion of his discourse Mr. Spencer begged his children to take another view of their Saviour’s condescension in lying in a manger. “ Behold,” said he, “ the King of Glory began his life in a manger, and he finished it on a cross. Behold the wonderful sight, my boys, and while you see your Saviour thus humbled for your sakes, learn to imitate the example that he has set you ; for he has given you an example that ye should do as he has done. Pride is the first sin of man in his natural state ; humility is the first grace of the Christian. Nothing will hinder you from coming to Jesus Christ at first so much as pride ; nothing will hinder you from living a life of faith in him so much as pride. Think well of the hardships your Saviour

underwent for you, till you learn to be ashamed, heartily ashamed, of your own wicked pride.

“How much better thou’rt attended
Than the Son of God could be,
When from heaven he descended,
And became a child like thee!”

Mr. Spencer then entered into some particulars with the boys, and shewed them how they indulged themselves in habits of pride when at school and out of it; and seriously and affectionately assured them, that, while they allowed themselves in such habits, they were not in a state of mind to come to Jesus Christ, and that, though they might repeat prayers with their lips, yet they never could come to him with their hearts.—Without humility there can be no real faith.

But I do not intend to repeat any more of Mr. Spencer’s discourse; I am desirous to give my readers some account of those habits with which Mr. Spencer found so much fault: and I shall soon have an opportunity of doing so.

Among other customs in Mr. Spencer’s school, there was one which was not always agreeable to the children.—If by any accident all the children of any one class were absent, their teacher was obliged to stand up and read with the children of some other class, as assistant to its teacher. It was very seldom that this circumstance occurred: but the first Sunday in the new year it happened that all the children of Thomas Wright’s class were absent; upon which occasion the master bade him go and stand up in James Fowler’s class. Mr. Spencer was not arrived, and the master did not notice Thomas’s surly countenance, and that, when a Testament was offered to him by James, instead of receiving it willingly, he suffered it to be forced into his half closed hand. While the master stood near, he read in his turn, but with an inward voice, and far worse than the least boy in the class: but the master’s back was no sooner turned, than his passion broke out; and wilfully spelling a word wrong, and James requiring him to spell it over again, he dashed down his book, and threw himself down on the bench, muttering, that he would not come to school to be taught by James Fowler.

The colour came into James Fowler’s face, and he was going to say something very violent to Thomas—when certain recollections coming into his mind, he stopped. But how shall a weak child govern his strong rebellious spirit?

He can as easily say to the wind and waves, "Be still." But there is a Saviour above, who did once say to the waves, "*Be still;*" and there was a great calm. This Saviour is ready to hear the cry of the feeblest child. James remembered these things: he turned away from the boys, and walked to the door, and, instead of raging words against Thomas, he spoke a few soft words of secret prayer to his Father who seeth in secret, and then, returning back into the school, he went up to Thomas, and he said to him, "If you do not like to read to me, I have no objection to read to you: do you hear the class instead of me, and I will be your assistant."

Thomas looked at James as if he did not know what to make of his offer: but, while he was considering what answer to make, the master coming back, cried out, "What are you all doing here? nobody reading, and you teachers whispering together; come to your places directly."

James left his teacher's book in the hands of Thomas, and stood himself at the head of the class; and Thomas, in some confusion, began to hear the boys. The master's attention was soon called elsewhere, and he did not remark the change of teachers; and Thomas went on hearing the class, and James read among the scholars cheerfully and attentively.

In a little while Mr. Spencer arrived; and, after looking round the school, he came up to James Fowler's class. "Why, how is this?" said he: "where are all your boys, Thomas? and what's become of James Fowler?"

"Sir," answered Thomas, "there is not one of my class here."

"That is very sad: and James Fowler away too! This is not beginning the year as we ought to do."

"Sir, I am here," said James, stepping forwards.

"Well, I did not know you in the ranks," said Mr. Spencer, smiling. "But how came you and Thomas to change places?"

"Sir," replied James, "Thomas can hear the class as well as I can."

"That may be," answered Mr. Spencer; "but it is your place to hear this class, and it is his to be heard, when his own is away: and we never do so well as when we are all in our own places."

Thomas coloured, and, without waiting to be bid by Mr. Spencer, he nimbly stepped into James's place, and made a sign to him to go into his own. James quietly took his own

place again, and Thomas read with the other boys with great good-humour: so Mr. Spencer took no further notice of what had passed.

After morning service, as James was returning home with his mother in her new cloak, Thomas called after him, and said he wanted to speak with him: so, leading him back to the church-yard, he said to him, "James, are we friends?"

"To be sure we are," replied James; and he held out his hand to Thomas, and he shook it heartily.

"You are a brave boy," said Thomas; "for you have conquered me: and that's what I thought no lad in the town could have done."

James. What do you mean by that?

Thomas. I have heard mother say often, that it was a very unfit thing for Mr. Spencer to set a poor lad, like you, to teach creditable children. And I often said to myself, "We shall see if Mr. Spencer ever gets *me* to read to James, if such a thing should happen as all the boys in my class being away"—and, you know, it never did happen before. But, when you came and asked me to hear the class, I felt something come over me—I can't tell you what—and, while I was hearing them, I wished myself reading among the boys: and I was heartily glad, when Mr. Spencer came in and bade you hear the class again. Why, I expected, when I sat down at first, that you would have hit me a blow, and then I should have given you another.

James. And so I should, perhaps, if I had done what pleased myself.

Thomas. And why did you not?

James. It was God's grace that hindered me, and brought into my mind what Mr. Spencer said to us last Thursday.

Thomas. He said a great deal to us: but what do you mean in particular?

James. Don't you remember what he told us about our pride? and how unwilling we shewed ourselves to give up to one another? And he told us, that while we indulged ourselves in these habits, we could never come to Jesus Christ to be saved: and then he said that, if we hated our pride, and wished to be saved from it, Jesus Christ would send his Spirit into our hearts to make us humble.

Thomas. I recollect all this now; but I can't say that I have thought about it since.

James. Then you forget how Mr. Spencer explained that word "apply?"

Thomas repeated, "Apply? apply?" and then stood for

some minutes as in deep thought.—“Apply?—yes, I know now what that word means: but I did not see its meaning before. Aye, you have been considering over what Mr. Spencer said to us, and you have found out that you, for one, were proud. That’s applying, is it not?”

James. Yes, very right; and I have been talking it over with my mother too, and that has been a great help to me.

Thomas. I understand it plainly now. Yet still, James, if I had thought myself proud, I could not have done as you did; I am sure I should have been in too great a rage to humble myself.

James. And so should I, if I had trusted to myself; for I am sure I felt very hot, and something rose in me, when you sat down in the way you did. But I got by myself, and I prayed to God; and then my anger left me, and it came into my mind to go and ask you to hear the class—and you know the rest.

Thomas continued silent for a long time. “James,” he said, at last, “I have said many a prayer, and yet I never knew that it did me any good.”

James. Perhaps that was because you never prayed with your heart.

Thomas repeated again, “Apply! I believe, James, there lies my fault. I have been taught a great deal, and can answer questions as well as any boy in the school: but I never thought of what I had been taught afterwards; and, as you say, I don’t think I ever did say a prayer from my heart, or ever did think for two minutes whether I was good or bad, or whether I was going to hell or heaven.”

James. Well, it is a great thing to have found this out.

Thomas. Indeed you have taught me a lesson to-day that I think I sha’n’t easily forget. I see that I am proud, James; and I see that God will make me humble, if I ask him to do it; and I see that I never did pray from my heart: for I never thought there was much harm in me, or that there was much to pray for.

James felt very much pleased at what Thomas had said, and very thankful too; and he wished to have stayed and walked a great while longer in the church-yard with him: but it was getting late, and he knew his mother was waiting for him. So he said, “If you like it, Thomas, we can talk more about these things another time, for it makes me very happy to hear you speak as you do; but we must be going home now.”

Thomas said, in return, that he hoped that whenever they

could meet, they should have some more discourse together. So they parted, and each went home. Thomas wished he could have asked James to call at his house sometimes; but he knew that his mother did not like to see him in company with poor boys out of school-hours. James knew this too, for Mrs. Wright had the character of being very proud; but neither of the boys, I am happy to say, mentioned the subject to each other: for it is a very wrong thing for children to reflect upon the faults of their parents, (though sometimes they cannot help seeing them.) Those who do so are breaking the fifth commandment, which bids us honour our father and mother. But, however, what Thomas wished in his heart was brought about by accident, or rather, I may say, by the providence of God.

It happened, in the course of a few days, that Mr. Spencer's man-servant going out, James was sent for to run on errands, and do other little jobs at Mr. Spencer's house; and, among other errands, he was directed to take a coat of Mr. Spencer's, which wanted a little repair, to Mr. Wright the tailor, the father of his friend Thomas; and he was ordered to wait while the work was doing, and to bring the coat back. James was always clean and neat, though his clothes were patched, and threadbare in places, and the cleanest persons need not have feared inviting him to sit down by their fire-side; and when he arrived at the tailor's house, he felt very cold, for it snowed fast, and there was a very keen wind. As soon as the door was opened for him he made a low bow; and he was going to walk up to the tailor, who was working upon a table by the window, to give him the coat—when Mrs. Wright, who was sitting by the fire, jumped up, and pushing him back, said to him, "Stay there by the door, if you please, and give me the coat—you may leave it." So saying, she opened the door again for him to go out.

"If you please," said James again, with a low bow, "I was to wait here while the coat was mended."

"Wait here! why, whose coat is it?"

"Mr. Spencer's," replied James.

"Mr. Spencer's!" repeated Mrs. Wright, in a civiller voice: "why, you are not Mr. Spencer's servant?" Then she looked him up and down, as she took the coat in her hand.

"No, Ma'am," answered James.

"What's your name?"

"James Fowler, Ma'am."

“O!” said she, in the same rude voice as she had spoken with at first, and slamming the door to: “well, if you are to wait for the coat, you may stand there till it’s done.” She never noticed how blue his poor hands and face looked. So James stood by the door, and Mrs. Wright, taking the coat to her husband, bade him make haste. “Do see,” said she, “how the snow melts off that boy’s shoes! It is of no use cleaning one’s house, if one is to have it wet in this way.” The tailor set about mending the coat, and Mrs. Wright sat down by the fire again, and drew a little table towards her, upon which lay her thimble and scissars, and a child’s frock she was making: but from time to time, she called to her husband to make haste, and muttered to herself about the water which ran from poor James’s shoes.

While this was going on, James was looking round at the house, which was furnished with a handsome dresser and clock, and every thing suitable. The fire was bright, and the hearth was clean; a tea-kettle was boiling, and a girl about twelve years of age was toasting muffins. “All this looks very nice and comfortable,” said James to himself; “yet I don’t think Mrs. Wright looks so happy as my poor dear mother, who has only a chair and a table and a stool in her room, and very often only a bit of dry bread to eat.” While all this was passing in James’s mind, there was a noise of a sudden crash:—a row of green flower-pots, containing myrtles and geraniums, were standing in the window, and a little child, who was sitting on the table by its father, had reached out its hand to pull the leaves off the plants; and, while Mrs. Wright was looking at James’s shoes, the child slipped and tumbled off the table, and threw down, at the same time, the flower-pot which held the finest plant. Mrs. Wright jumped from her seat, and lifted up the child, who was happily not at all hurt; and then she picked up the broken flower-pot, and found that her favourite plant was quite destroyed by the child, who had crushed it in its hand. “You little naughty thing!” she said to the child, “you have killed my favourite geranium!” She then gave it a very violent slap, though she had not before forbidden it to touch the plants, and the child had not been in fault for tumbling down. How apt are parents to punish children for doing what is inconvenient to themselves, without considering whether the children have really been in fault or not!

James was very sorry to hear the poor little child cry,

and he forgot how cold he was himself. The child was still crying, and the mother lamenting over her geranium, when the tailor finished his job and dismissed him. When James had taken the coat back, and had done some other little jobs at Mr. Spencer's house, he was sent away; and, as soon as he got home, he told his mother where he had been, and what he had seen, and then he said, "Mother, you know we have got a geranium in our window; the one, I mean, which I reared from the little slip Mr. Spencer's gardener gave me; it is just the same sort as that which the poor little child broke: dear mother, will you let me take it to Mrs. Wright's, and give it her, that she may be reconciled to the child?"

"With all my heart," answered Mrs. Fowler.

"It has but just struck six, and it has done snowing, and the moon is shining.—May I go now, mother?"

James had so sooner gained permission, than he put his little plant carefully in a basket, and away he ran to Mrs. Wright's house. The door was opened by Thomas, who was now within. As he opened the door, Mrs. Wright called out, "Who's there, Tom?"

"James Fowler," answered Thomas, holding the door in his hand, not knowing whether he might ask him in.

"James Fowler!" repeated Mrs. Wright, in a very cross voice; "what, has he brought another coat to be mended?"

"No, Ma'am," answered James, "I have brought you another little geranium, instead of the one your little girl had the misfortune to throw down, if you will please to accept it."

"What does the child say?" cried Mrs. Wright, getting up and going towards the door.

James held his flower-pot up to her, "If you please, Ma'am, it is the very same sort as yours was, and it is just going to flower; only the flower-pot is very shabby."

Mrs. Wright remembered how cross and rude she had been to James, and she was quite astonished that he should make such a return for her unkindness. She looked at him for a minute surprised and confused: then, taking the pot in her hands, she said, "Well, I am very much obliged to you, I am sure; come to the fire and warm yourself. There—never mind your shoes"—for James stood stamping and shaking off the snow as well as he could—"Thomas, set him the stool."

So James sat down: and Mrs. Wright, reaching an empty green flower-pot from the shelf, said to Thomas, "It will just go into this pot, and you shall move it to-morrow."

Well, it was very kind of you, James, indeed, to think of my poor broken flower. It's exactly the same plant, I see, and going to flower too, and mine had just done flowering. I am sure I am much obliged to you;—and how's your mother?"

Mrs. Wright did not wait for an answer, but, having put her new flower in a safe place, she opened her cupboard, and brought out a pork pie upon a plate with a knife; and she was going to cut it through, when, recollecting herself, she stopped, and said, "I dare say, James, you had rather divide a whole pie with your mother at home than eat half a one here." So saying, she put the pie in his basket.

James rose up, and made a low bow, and thanked her; and then, having warmed his hands, he took up his hat, and, wishing all the family good night very civilly, he went home, overjoyed to take such a nice supper to his mother.

When he was gone, Mrs. Wright sat silent for some minutes: though she was a proud woman, she had some kind feelings, and James's behaviour had quite overcome her pride. "That's a fine lad," said she to Thomas; "and the mother I believe is a very honest woman: they did well enough when the father was alive, but they are very poor now. I don't care, Thomas, if you do sometimes bring him home with you to have a mouthful of supper."

Thus was the desire of Thomas fulfilled, and thus did the humility of James procure him honour.

James often spent an hour in Mrs. Wright's house when his work was done, and she was never angry to see him in company with her son: she also frequently sent small presents of food or old clothes to Mrs. Fowler. Meanwhile Thomas reaped lasting good from his intimacy with James: especially he learned from his discourse, that the first step to the kingdom of heaven is to be poor in spirit; and he learned from his example what that spirit is which alone has a right to be called *proper spirit*.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. ii. 5—8.)

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