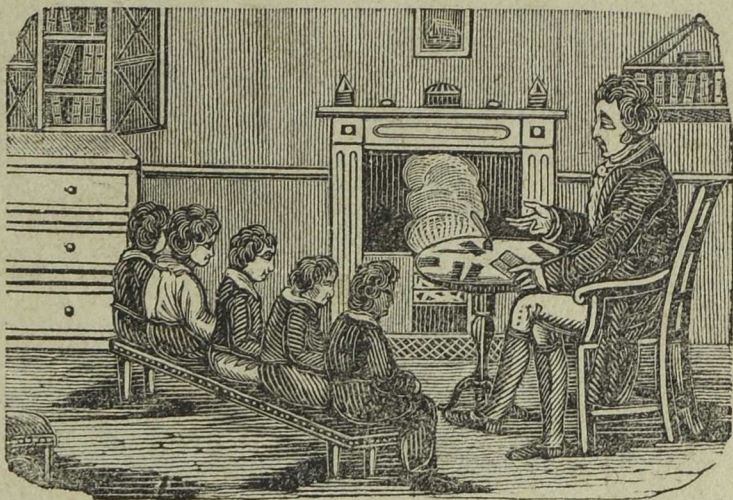


No. 6
OF
HOULSTON'S SERIES
OF
TRACTS.

Written by Mrs. Sherwood and Others.

[Entered at Stationers' Hall.]

THE
Sunday-School Teachers.



WELLINGTON, SALOP:

PRINTED BY AND FOR F. HOULSTON AND SON.

And sold by Scatcherd and Letterman, Ave-Maria Lane, London.

Price 1*d.* or 7*s.* per 100.

[Tract Societies supplied with large quantities at a lower rate.]

THE

SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

IN a certain little town, the minister of which, through bad health, was often obliged to leave his home for many weeks together, there was a Sunday-school opened for the benefit of forty poor boys.

As the vicar was so often absent, and in his absence the church was served by a clergyman who had another curacy, the chief care of the school, at least as a visitor, rested upon a Mr. Spencer, an elderly gentleman of good fortune, who had retired from business.

Mr. Spencer took very great pains with this school. He went to it soon after eight o'clock on the Sunday morning, and he hardly allowed himself time to eat his dinner, so anxious was he to go to it again in the afternoon. He sat among the children during the service; and, in short, he gave up all his time and thoughts to them on Sunday, except when he was engaged in the actual worship of God. No one, therefore, will be surprised to hear that the boys who attended the school were remarkably orderly and well behaved, and that they were very forward in their reading and spelling. The school indeed was in such credit, that many persons came several miles on a Sunday, to hear the children read and spell, and answer questions out of the Bible and Church Catechism.

The school had been opened about two years, when the vicar returned to spend the Christmas at home, after a longer absence than usual. The very first Sunday after he came home, Mr. Spencer, who was exceedingly anxious that he should see the school, called upon him and asked him to step over with him and hear the children read.

The clergyman, who had before been intending to go to the school, readily went with him.

The children were divided into five classes, and each class had a teacher chosen from among the most orderly boys. Mr. Spencer brought up the classes, in their turns, to read

and spell. The children and the teachers were all very attentive; and Mr. Spencer walked backwards and forwards much pleased, from time to time looking at the clergyman, to see if he could find out from his countenance what was his opinion of the children. Towards the close of the day, he asked him, what he thought of the state of the school?

"Your scholars," replied the clergyman, "are orderly, and clean, and neat, and are certainly very good readers: as to any thing further, I must defer giving my opinion, till I have spent at least another Sunday in the school."

Mr. Spencer was rather at a loss to know what further opinion could be given respecting boys who only met once in a week, than had been already done, and he waited with some impatience and curiosity for the following Sunday. Contrary to his usual custom, which was to stay at home and read to his family on a Sunday evening, he walked to the vicarage to drink tea, and to hear what the clergyman would have to say to him.

The conversation during the whole evening was upon the subject of the school. But I do not mean here to repeat it, as the nature of it may afterwards appear from some discourse which passed between Mr. Spencer and his scholars.

The following Sunday evening, Mr. Spencer gave orders for all the children who had attended regularly at the school during the last half-year, to meet at his house the next Thursday, which would be Christmas-eve, at four o'clock, in order to receive some little rewards for their past good conduct.

These children, I am happy to say, were not, on the whole, covetous, nor did their parents send them to school for the sake of what they could get, as the disciples followed Christ for the loaves and fishes; yet they were, of course, pleased to find that their behaviour had given satisfaction, and that they were to be rewarded for it: and they took care to be at Mr. Spencer's house in good time on Thursday.

What the rewards were which he gave them I never exactly heard: but when he had distributed them, he dismissed the children to their several homes, excepting the five teachers, whom he ordered to follow him into his little study. Here he bade them sit down on a low bench covered with green baize, which stood on one side of the fire; while he placed himself in his arm-chair opposite them, and

drew before him a small round table, on which lay a blank paper book, a pen and ink, and five small new Prayer-Books.

As soon as all were seated, and Mr. Spencer had stirred the bright fire, he thus addressed himself to the children:—"I have been giving to you all some rewards for your past good conduct, and I wish further to give you some little encouragement as teachers, because I think you have taken great pains with the children placed under your care: here is a new Prayer-Book for each of you." He then called up the boys in their turn to receive the book, according to the rank their classes bore in the school; and the name of each boy was written in his Prayer-Book.

The name of the first teacher was James Fowler. He was about twelve years old, had a gentle and serious countenance, and was very well mannered. His well-mended clothes shewed that his parents were both industrious and poor, and therefore proper objects for relief. Mr. Spencer had just before given him a hat, and had observed the boy, after fitting it on his head several times, carefully fasten round it a piece of black crape which he had taken off his other hat.

The teacher of the second class was Thomas Wright. He was nearly as old as James Fowler, and his parents were in pretty good circumstances. He was a clever boy; but he was one of those children who value themselves upon never letting any one put upon them.

William Miller, John Davies, and Samuel Williams, were the three other teachers. They were none of them more than ten, and Samuel was not turned nine: he was a good-natured little boy, and generally came and went with James Fowler.

When they had received their books, and had made their bows, and thanked Mr. Spencer, and were seated again on their bench, he thus proceeded with his discourse:—"The rewards I have been giving you are to encourage you to be regular in your attendance at school, and industrious and orderly in your behaviour when you are there. And now that you have learned something of the outer part of religion, it is time that we should go a little further. Tell me, James Fowler, how many parts is every man made of?"

James. Two, Sir, I suppose; a soul and a body.

Mr. Spencer. And did God give him both?

James. To be sure, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. And should he not serve God with both?

James. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. You have learned at school to serve God with your bodies, that is, outwardly; your feet tread the courts of God's house, and your lips speak his praises; with your eyes you read his word, and with your outward ears you hear it;—and yet you may do all this, and many more outward acts of religion, and not be Christians, such Christians, I mean, as are walking in the narrow way, and are going to heaven. This is serving God with the body only, this is the outer part of religion; for we can see the body, and we can tell what it is doing by our senses—but can we see the soul, Thomas?

Thomas. No, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. But the soul must serve God. Tell me, then, any of you who can, how you must serve God with your soul?

Nobody could answer for some time, till Mr. Spencer said, "How do you know you have got a soul?"

James. Because it can think, which my body cannot do.

Mr. Spencer. Well, then, now tell me how you must serve God with your soul?

After some consideration, James said, "I suppose I am serving God with my soul, when I think of him, and love him in my heart."

Mr. Spencer. Very well answered. And now, my boys, here is something for you to consider of, and to question yourselves about for some time to come. May be, you have been thinking yourselves very good boys, because you have been outwardly regular and orderly; for it is an easy thing to wash the outside of the platter. But look a little into your hearts, and see how they have been serving God, and you will find things very different there: you will find, perhaps, that, while you have seemed outwardly good, you have been sinning grievously against God in your hearts. But, my boys, I cannot be content with your being half Christians: I must have religion in your hearts, as well as in your outward behaviour; you must walk by faith, as well as by sight; religion must govern your thoughts, and your affections, and your tempers. It was so in old time, when even children were converted to Christianity: they walked worthy of their heavenly calling; their hearts and lives were changed; they were filled with holy joy; and they loved their Saviour who had died for them so much, that they

gave up their lives to cruel deaths, rather than deny him. Since that time, too, there has always been a generation of holy children, who have led a life of faith; and I hope I shall see you leading the same life, looking up to Jesus Christ for pardon and strength, obeying his commands, and waiting for his glorious appearance with holy hope and joy. Now, do you think, my boys, that this is the case with you?

After some minutes' silence, James answered, "No, Sir."

Mr. Spencer. Though you are outwardly orderly and regular, I am sorry to say that there is a great deal of behaviour going on among you which is not suited to Christian children—a great deal of pride and contention, and self-will, nobody willing to give up a tittle to another—a great deal of selfishness. And then, during the service of God, though you join loud in the responses, and appear, to common observers, to be serious and attentive, yet there is too much of listlessness and sleepiness in your behaviour, besides staring about you and often whispering. There are a great many other things, too, in the school, as well as out of it, which I do not like, and which I know come from a want of religion in the heart. But we have entered into particulars enough for the present: to-morrow you will have some verses in the first part of the second chapter of St. Luke set you to learn by heart; and next Thursday, you five shall come to my house at six o'clock, and we will talk over these verses again by ourselves, and I will try to explain to you in what way Jesus Christ, who, as at this time, was born in Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, is to be a Saviour to each of you. And this I shall do in such a way as to try to shew you how it is that you must live a life of faith in him. Do you think that you can come to me every Thursday at the time I have mentioned?

The boys all thought they could.

Mr. Spencer. I shall put down your names in this blank book, and shall notice in it whether you come regularly, and perhaps some other things about you. And if you do come regularly, I may, perhaps, take you, in the course of a few months, into the country, to spend a day at a certain little cottage I know of, where there are cherry trees, and bee-hives, and many flowers, and other things, which will be very pleasant in the summer-time.

Mr. Spencer then told the boys that they might go home; and they all rose up and bade him a good night. James was the last to go out of the room; and just as he was going

out, Mr. Spencer drew him back, and said, "I have a word to say to you."

James returned, and, by Mr. Spencer's order, shut the door.

Mr. Spencer. You have not been in the school above eight months, and I don't know any thing of your history: tell me, have you lost any near friend?

"My father," answered the boy, looking down.

Mr. Spencer. Aye, that's a great loss: and he was a good father, I dare say.

James. Yes, that he was, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. He used to give you much good instruction, perhaps?

James. Yes, Sir, he was always teaching me one thing or another, while he was well; and when he was on his death-bed, he used to talk to me as you have done to-night, Sir, about living by faith, and a great deal about our Saviour Jesus Christ and secret prayer.

Mr. Spencer. And I hope you bear in mind what your poor father taught you?

James. Not so much as I ought, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. Well, James, you must pray to God for grace to bear these things in mind for the time to come; for, you know, where much is given, much will be required; and you and I will talk about your father sometimes, and what he taught you: and you must help me too, at least among the younger scholars, to put in a word or two for the cause of God. Young people may do a great deal one among another. And now tell me, is your mother alive?

James. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Spencer. And I hope she puts her trust in God under her troubles.

James. Yes, Sir, she says that's all her comfort now; and she makes me read the Bible to her every night, and pray along with her. And she goes to church every Sunday, and takes my little sister with her, though the woman of the house does abuse her so.

Mr. Spencer. And what does she abuse her for?

James. Because, while my father was ill so long, and my two brothers who died, my mother sold, one by one, all her best clothes; and the woman of the house where we lodge makes game of her, and abuses her for going to church in her old clothes, and says it is a shame to go to church so shabby.

Mr. Spencer. And what does your mother say in return?

James. I said to her one day, "Mother, I wonder you go to church to be made game of in that way!" And she made for answer—"Son, God's blessing will do me more good than any body's bad word can do me harm." And when the woman of the house laughs at her, she still makes for answer, "If we would have God's blessing, Sarah, we must serve him." It was but last Sunday, that the woman said to her again, "I don't see how God's blessing is with you; for I am sure you are poor enough."

Mr. Spencer. And what answer did she make to that?

James. Why, she answered, "If we can but have God's blessing on our souls, it signifies but little for our bodies."

Mr. Spencer. But she will have it on both—*Did ever any trust in the Lord, and was forsaken?*—You see, my boy, you have a pattern in your parents of what it is to live a life of faith, and serve God with the heart. Few children have such advantages at home and at school too; and it becomes you to consider well what use you are making of them. Time passes quickly away; eternity will soon be here: and if we do not use the day of grace aright, it will soon have set upon us for ever. Pray to God, my boy, (said Mr. Spencer, earnestly, as he laid his hand on the boy's head,) pray to God for grace to "cast away the works of darkness, and put upon you the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life."

Mr. Spencer, before he took his leave of James, desired that he would shew him, the next day, where his mother sat at church. This James accordingly did: and, before I return to my account of the little boys, I shall just relate that Mr. Spencer was much pleased with the appearance of this good woman; and before the first Sunday in the new year, having made many satisfactory enquiries about her, he called upon her one afternoon, and his two daughters accompanied him, and took with them, as presents to her, a warm grey cloak and a neat bonnet of black glazed calico. The poor woman received them with tears of gratitude; and before he took his leave, Mr. Spencer took care to say to her, before the mistress of the house, "If it had not been for your regular attendance at church, my daughters would not have brought you these things. It was God who put it into their hearts to do so. I hope you will always continue to remember where it is said—*Seek ye first the kingdom of*

God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

And now to return to James Fowler and his companions. It was the custom in the school for the teachers to meet in a morning a short time before the other children, in order to receive their books from the master, and be quite in readiness to set their scholars to work as they came in.

On Christmas-day it chanced that they all met earlier than usual; and being prepared for their scholars, they were all five standing together warming themselves at the fire, the master being busy at the other end of the room in his desk. "I have been thinking a great deal," said James, "of what Mr. Spencer talked to us about last night; and now we are going to begin, as it were, a new year, I do hope we shall begin to lead quite a new life."

"What has been the matter?" said Thomas.

James. Why, now, as Mr. Spencer told us, we have not behaved at all as we ought at church: I am sure it is seldom that any of us know the text; and I do not think any one of us ever join in the prayers with our hearts, at least, it is very seldom, if we do at all.

Thomas. Well, speak for yourself, if you please.

James. Why, now, Tom, you know it is *true of yourself*. If I was but to remind you of last Sunday.—You know very well that we have none of us behaved as we ought, and, with God's grace, we ought to begin to lead a new life. Perhaps this may be the last Christmas-day we shall ever see.

Thomas. What do you preach to me for? I don't want you to learn of me, and why need I learn of you?

James. And why should not we learn of each other, if we can get any good? and I am sure for this once you think me right. And you and I, Tom, are two of the oldest boys in the school, and we ought to set a pattern to the rest. Come, now, let us begin to-day.

Thomas. Well, I sha'n't begin to please you: when I do, it shall be to please myself.

So saying, he turned off from the fire-side, and stamping his feet as he went along, walked to the door to see if any of the boys were coming. Then James turned to William and John, and he said, "What do you think of what I have been saying?"

John. I don't know.

William. I did not mind what you were talking about.

Samuel. You ask me last, and I wish you had asked me first.

James. I ask you last, because you are the youngest. But why do you wish I had asked you first?

Samuel. Because I would not have answered you like the others. I think you are very right, James, and I will try to mind what you say.

James looked pleased. "You know, Samuel, I was only repeating what Mr. Spencer said to us last night."

Just then the boys came in, and there was no more discourse at that time between James and Samuel. Mr. Spencer arrived before the boys were all in their places, and soon after the vicar came in; and before morning service began, all the classes were instructed, according to their different degree of religious knowledge, in the meaning of the day, and the reasons for which they were come together.

Now, though John and William had seemed to pay but little attention to Mr. Spencer and James, and Thomas had appeared so much offended at what James had said, yet, in spite of all this, they behaved at church with much more reverence and seriousness than they had ever done before. And this might be guessed by any person who watched them closely. Their eyes wandered less, and they appeared to attend more to the sermon and the prayers; but especially this was the case with James and Samuel.

When morning service was over, and the children were dismissed, Samuel, who lived about a quarter of a mile up the lane which led from the church-yard into the country, asked James to walk home with him. So the day being fine, James went with him. The air was fresh and frosty, and here and there a robin sat on a bough and sung. The hedge was powdered and fringed with the hoar frost, and the trees looked as thickly covered as they do in summer. The sunshine in many places gave the look of bright diamonds to the white boughs; and among these, fine bunches of crimson holly berries pushed their way, and reminded the passenger of the season.

Just as the boys got into the lane, the bells struck up. "This is very pleasant," said James; "it reminds me of the verses Mr. Spencer explained to-day, about the angels telling the shepherds of the birth of our Saviour, and of a multitude of the heavenly host praising God."

"I like being a good boy very much," said little Samuel, "I feel so happy."

James. But, Samuel, if you serve God, you must not expect things to go smooth always.

Samuel. No, I know that, by you this morning. But there is one thing puzzles me: I don't know that I ever tried so much to attend at church as I did to-day, and I am sure I never found it so pleasant all the time of the singing and every thing; and yet I never had so many foolish thoughts come into my mind as did to-day, though I tried to drive them away.

James. No, Samuel, you had not more foolish thoughts, but you wished to keep them away, and that made you find them out. Our hearts are wicked, Samuel, very wicked, and while we take no heed to them, we don't know how bad they are; but when we come to fight with them, then we find how strong sin is in us. I remember my dear father telling me these very words; but I never saw their meaning so plain as I do now.

Samuel. But what must we do, then?

James. Why, we must have patience, and pray for grace to conquer the sin that is in us: we cannot conquer it of ourselves.

Samuel. But I don't know how to pray, except the prayer I say night and morning.

James. Well, Samuel, you and I will try to get together sometimes, and talk about prayer, and a great many other good things. I hope we shall both get to be good boys; and what we don't understand, we will get Mr. Spencer to teach us.

Samuel. O! I shall like that very much!

Just then they reached the door of Samuel's house; so James wished him a good morning, and away he ran home.

And now I am warned to conclude, for the present, my account of Mr. Spencer and his scholars; hoping that hereafter it may be my chance to hear what progress they made in the ascent of the hill Difficulty, and whether they paid their visit to the Bee-Hive Cottage.

L.

FINIS.