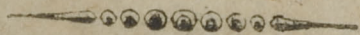


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THE
HISTORY OF
HESTER WILMOT,

OR THE
Second Part of the Sunday School.



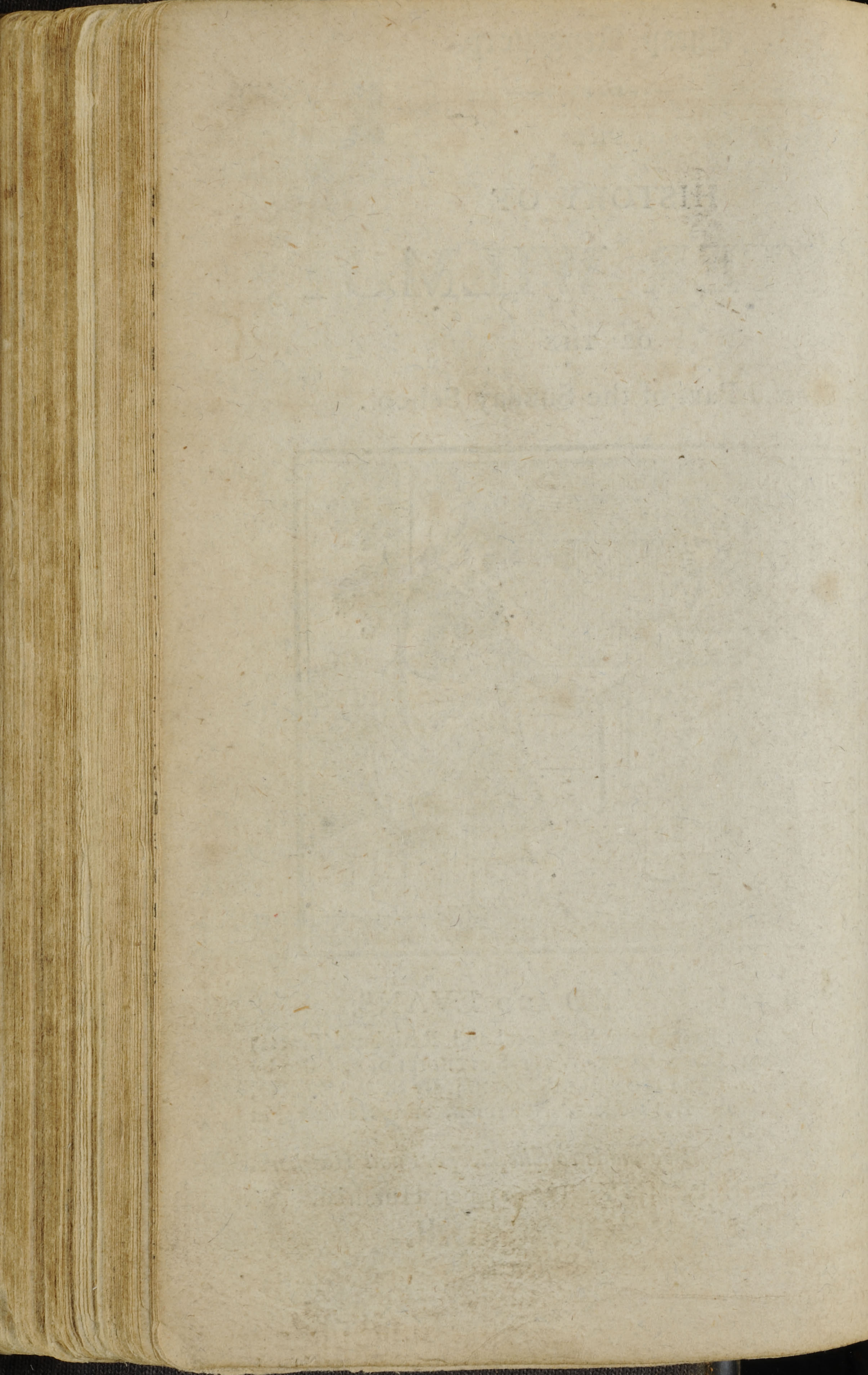
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THE HISTORY OF

HESTER WILMOT, &c.

HESTER WILMOT was born in the parish of Weston, of parents who maintained themselves by their labor; they were both of them ungodly, it is no wonder therefore they were unhappy. They lived badly together, and how could they do otherwise, for their tempers were very different, and they had no religion to smooth down this difference, or to teach them that they ought to bear with each other's faults. Rebecca Wilmot was a proof that people may have some right qualities, and yet be but bad characters, and utterly destitute of religion. She was clean, notable, and industrious. Now I know some folks fancy that the poor who have these qualities need have no other, but this is a sad mistake, as I am sure every page in the Bible would shew; and it is a pity people do not consult oftener. They direct their plowing and sowing by the Almanack, why will they not consult the Bible for the direction of their hearts and lives? Rebecca was of a violent ungovernable temper; and that very neatness which is in itself so pleasing, to her became a sin, for her affection to her husband

and children was quite lost in an over-anxious desire to have her house reckoned the nicest in the parish. Rebecca was also a proof that a poor woman may be as vain as a rich one, for it was not so much the comfort of neatness, as the praise of neatness which she coveted. A spot on her hearth, or a bit of rust on a brass candlestick, would throw her into a violent passion. Now it is very right to keep the hearth clean and the candlesticks bright, but it is very wrong so to set one's affections on a heart, or a candlestick, as to make one's self unhappy if any trifling accident happens to them: and if Rebecca had been as careful to keep her heart without spot, or her life without blemish, as she was to keep her fire irons free from either, she would have been held up in this history, not a warning, but a pattern, and in that case her nicety would have come in for part of her praise. It was no fault in Rebecca, but a merit, that her oak table was so bright you could almost see to put your cap on it; but it was no merit but a fault, that when John, her husband, laid down his cup of beer upon it, as to leave a mark, she would fly out into so terrible a passion, that, all the children were forced to run to corners; now poor John, having no corner to run to, ran to the ale-house, till that which was first a refuge too soon became a pleasure.

Rebecca never wished her children to learn to read, because, she said, it would only serve to make them lazy, and she herself had done very well without it. She would keep poor Hester from church and stone the space under the chairs in fine patterns and whim-whams. I don't pretend to say there is any harm in this little decoration; it looks pretty enough, and it is better to let the children do the

than do nothing. But still these are not things to set one's heart upon; and besides Rebecca only did it as a trap for praise: for she was sulky and disappointed if any ladies happened to call in and did not seem delighted with the flowers which she used to draw with a burnt stick on the white wash of the chimney corners. Besides, all this finery was often done on a Sunday, and there is a great deal of harm in doing right things at a wrong time, or in wasting much time on things which are of no real use, or in doing any thing at all out of vanity. Now I beg that no lazy slattern of a wife will go and take any comfort in her dirt from what is here said against Rebecca's nicety; for, I believe, that for one who makes her husband unhappy through neatness, twenty do so by dirt and laziness. All excesses are wrong, but the excess of a good quality is not so common as the excess of a bad one.

John Wilmot was not an ill-natured man, but he had no fixed principle. Instead of setting himself to cure his wife's faults by mild reproof and a good example, he was driven by them into still greater faults himself. It is a common case with people who have no religion, when any cross accident befalls them, instead of trying to make the best of a bad matter, instead of considering their trouble as a trial sent by God to purify them, or instead of considering the faults of others as a punishment for their own sins, what do they do but either sink down at once into despair, or else run for comfort into evil courses. Drinking is the common remedy for sorrow, if that can be called a remedy, the end of which is to destroy soul and body. John now began to spend all his leisure hours at the Bell. He used to be fond of his children; but when he could

not come home in quiet and play with the little ones, while his wife dressed him a bit of hot supper. He grew in time not to come home at all. He who has once taken to drink can seldom be said to be guilty of one sin only; John's heart became hardened. His affection for his family was lost in self-indulgence. Patience and submission, on the part of his wife, might have won much upon a man of John's temper; but instead of trying to reclaim him, his wife seemed rather to delight in putting him as much in the wrong as she could, that she might be justified in her constant abuse of him. I doubt whether she would have been as much pleased with his reformation as she was with always talking of his faults; though, I know it was the opinion of the neighbours, that if she had taken as much pains to reform her husband by reforming her own temper, as she did to abuse him and expose him, her endeavours might have been blessed with success. Good Christians who are trying to subdue their own faults, can hardly believe that the ungodly have a sort of savage satisfaction in trying, by indulgence of their own evil tempers, to lessen the happiness of those with whom they have to do. Need we look any farther for a proof of our corrupt nature when we see mankind delight in sins which have neither the temptation of profit or pleasure, such as plaguing, vexing, or abusing each other.

Hester was the eldest of their five children; she was a sharp, sensible girl; but at fourteen years of age she could not tell a letter, nor had she ever been taught to bend her knee to him who made her; for John's, or rather Rebecca's house, had seldom the name of God pronounced in it, except to be blasphemed.

It was just about this time, if I mistake not, that Mrs. Jones set up her Sunday School, of which Mrs. Betty Crew was appointed Mistress, as related in 'The Sunday School.' Mrs. Jones finding that none of the Wilmots were sent to School, took a walk to Rebecca's house, and civilly told her she called to let her know that a school was opened, to which she desired her to send her children on the Sunday following, especially her eldest daughter Hester. "Well," said Rebecca, "and what will you give her if I do?"—"Give her!" replied Mrs. Jones, "that is rather a rude question, and asked in a rude manner; however as a soft answer turneth away wrath, I assure you that I will give her the best of learning; I will teach her to *fear God, and keep his commandments.*"—"I would rather you would teach her to fear me, and to keep my house clean," said this wicked woman. "She shan't come, however, unless you will pay her for it,"—"Pay her for it!" said the lady, "will it not be reward enough that she will be taught to read the word of God, without any expence to you? For, though many gifts, both of books and clothing, will be given the children, yet you are not to consider these gifts so much in the light of payment, as an expression of good will in your benefactors."—"I say," interrupted Rebecca, "that Hester shan't go to school. Religion is of no use that I know of but to make people hate their own flesh and blood; and I see no good in learning but to make folks proud, and lazy, and dirty. I cannot tell a letter myself; and though I say it, that should not say it, there is not a notabler woman in this parish."—"Pray," said Mrs. Jones mildly, "do you think that young people will disobey their parents the more for being taught

to fear God?"—"I don't think any thing about it," said Rebecca. "I shan't let her come, and there's the long and short of the matter. Hester has other fish to fry; but you may have some of these little ones if you will."—"No," said Mrs. Jones, "I will not I have not, set up a nursery but a school. I am not at all this expence to take crying babes out of the mother's way, but to instruct reasonable beings in the way to eternal life; and it ought to be a rule in all schools not to take the troublesome young children unless the mother will try to spare the elder ones, who are capable of learning." "But," said Rebecca, "I have a young child which Hester must nurse while I dress dinner. And she must iron the rags, and scour the irons, and dig the potatoes, and fetch the water to boil them."—"As to nursing the child that indeed is a necessary duty, and Hester ought to stay at home part of the day to enable you to go to church; and families should relieve each other in this way; but as to all the rest, they are no reasons at all, for the irons need not be scoured so often, and the rags should be ironed, and the potatoes dug, and the water fetched, on the Saturday; and I can tell you, that neither your minister here, nor your judge hereafter, will accept of any such excuses."

All this while Hester staid behind, pale and trembling lest her unkind mother should carry her point. She looked up at Mrs. Jones with so much love and gratitude as to win her affection; and this good lady went on trying to soften this harsh mother. At last Rebecca condescended to say, "well I don't know but I may let her come now and then when I can spare her, provided I find you make it worth her while." All this time she had never asked Mrs. Jones to sit down, nor had once bid her young

children be quiet though they were crying and squalling the whole time. Rebecca fancied this rudeness was the only way she had of shewing she thought herself as good as her guest, but Mrs. Jones never lost her temper. The moment she went out of the house, Rebecca called out loud enough for her to hear, and ordered Hester to get the stone and a bit of sand to scrub out the prints of that dirty woman's shoes. Hester, in high spirits, cheerfully obeyed, and rubbed out the stains so neatly, that her mother could not help lamenting that so handy a girl was going to be spoiled by being taught godliness, and learning, and such nonsense.

Mrs. Jones, who knew the world, told her agent, Mrs. Crew, that her grand difficulty would arise not so much from the children as the parents. "These said she, "are apt to fall into that sad mistake, that because their children are poor, and have little of this world's goods, the mothers must make it up to them in false indulgence. The children of the gentry are much more reprov'd and corrected for their faults, and bred up in far stricter discipline. He was a King who said, *chasten thy son, and let not thy rod spare for his crying.* But do not lose your patience; the more vicious the children are, you must remember the more they stand in need of your instruction. When they are bad comfort yourself with thinking, how much worse they would have been but for you; and what a burthen they would become to society if these evil tempers were to receive no check." The great thing which enabled Mrs. Crew to teach well, was, the deep insight she had got into the corruption of human nature. And I doubt if any one can make a thoroughly good teacher of religion and morals who wants this mas-

ter-key to the heart. Others indeed may teach knowledge, decency, and good manners; but those, however valuable, are not Christianity. Mrs. Crew, who knew that out of the heart proceed lying, theft, and all that train of evils which begin to break out even in young children, applied her labours to correct this root of evil. But though a diligent she was an humble teacher. well knowing that unless the grace of God blessed her labours she should but labour in vain.

Hester Wilmot never failed to attend the school whenever her perverse mother would give her leave, and her delight in learning was so great, that she would work early and late to gain a little time for her book. As she had a quick capacity, she learned soon to spell and read, and Mrs. Crew observing her diligence used to lend her a book to carry home, that she might pick up a little at odd times. It would be well if teachers would make this distinction. To give, or lend books to those who take no delight in them is a useless expence; while it is kind and right to assist well disposed young people with every help of this sort. Those who love books seldom hurt them, while the slothful, who hate learning, will wear out a book more in a week than the diligent will do in a year. Hester's way was to read over one question in her catechism, or one verse in her hymn book, by fire light before she went to bed; this she thought over in the night, and when she was dressing herself in the morning, she was glad to find she always knew a little more than she had done the morning before. It is not to be believed how much those people will be found to have gained at the end of the year, who are accustomed to work up all the little odd ends and

remnants of leisure; who value time even more than money; and who are convinced that minutes are no more to be wasted than pence. Nay, he who finds he has wasted a shilling may by diligence hope to fetch it up again; but no repentance or industry can ever bring back one wasted hour. My good young reader if ever you are tempted to waste an hour, go and ask a dying man what he would give for that hour which you are throwing away, and according as he answers so do you act.

As her mother hated the sight of a book, Hester was forced to learn out of sight: it was no disobedience to do this, as long as she wasted no part of that time which it was her duty to spend in useful labor. She would have thought it a sin to have left her work for her book; but she did not think it wrong to steal time from her sleep, and to be learning an hour before the rest of the family were awake. Hester would not neglect the washing-tub, or the spinning-wheel, even to get on with her catechism; but she thought it fair to think over her questions while she was washing and spinning. In a few months she was able to read fluently in St. John's Gospel, which is the easiest. But Mrs. Crew did not think it enough that her children could read a chapter, she would make them understand it also. It is in a great degree owing to the want of religious knowledge in teachers, that there is so little religion in the world. Unless the bible is laid open to the understanding, children may read from Genesis to the Revelations, without any other improvement, than barely learning how to pronounce the words. Mrs. Crew found there was but one way to compel their attention, this was by obliging them to return back again to hear the sense of what she had read to

them, and this they might do in their own words, if they could not remember the words of scripture. Those who had weak capacities would to be sure, do this very imperfectly; but even the weakest, if they were willing, would retain something.— She so managed, that saying the catechism was not merely an act of the memory, but of the understanding; for she had observed formerly that those who had learned the catechism in the common formal way when they were children, had never understood it when they became men and women, and it remained in the memory without having made any impression on the mind. Thus this fine summary of the christian religion is considered as little more than a form of words, the being able to repeat which is a qualification for being confirmed by the bishop, instead of being considered as really containing those grounds of christian faith and practice, by which they are to be confirmed christians.

Mrs. Crew used to say to Mrs. Jones, “ Those who teach the poor must need give line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, as they can receive it. So that teaching must be a great grievance to those who do not really make it a labor of love. I see so much levity, obstinacy, and ignorance, that it keeps my own forbearance in continual exercise so that I trust that I am getting good myself while I am doing good to others. No one, Madam, can know till they try, and after they have asked a poor untaught child the same question nineteen times, they must not lose their temper but go on and ask it the twentieth. Now and then when I am tempted to be impatient, I correct myself, by thinking over that active proof which our blessed Saviour requires of our love to him when he says, ‘ Feed my lambs.’ ”

Hester Wilmot had never been bred to go to church, for her father and mother had never thought of going themselves, unless at a christening in their own family, or a funeral of their neighbours, both of which they considered merely as opportunities for good eating and drinking, and not as offices of religion.

As poor Hester had no comfort at home, it was the less wonder she delighted in her school, her Bible, and church; for so great is God's goodness, that he is pleased to make religion a peculiar comfort to those who have no other comfort. The God whose name she had seldom heard but when it was *taken in vain*, was now revealed to her as a God of infinite power, justice, and holiness. What she read in her Bible, and what she felt in her own heart convinced her she was a sinner; and her catechism said the same. She was much distressed one day on thinking over this promise which she had just made, in answer to the question which fell to her lot, "to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." I say she was distressed on finding that these were not merely certain words which she was bound to repeat; but certain conditions which she was bound to perform. She was sadly puzzled to know how this was to be done, till she met with these words in her Bible; "My grace is sufficient for thee." But still she was at a loss to know how this grace was to be obtained. Happily Mr. Simpson preached on the next Sunday from the text, "Ask and ye shall have," &c. In this sermon was explained to her the nature, the duty, and the efficacy of prayer. After this she opened her heart to Mrs. Crew, who taught her the great doctrines

of scripture, in a serious but plain way, Hester's own heart led her to assent to that humbling doctrine of the catechism, that *We are by nature born in sin*; and truly glad was she to be relieved by hearing of *that spiritual grace by which we have a new birth unto righteousness*. Thus her mind was no sooner humbled by one part than it gained comfort from another. On the other hand, while she was rejoicing in a *lively hope of God's mercy through Christ*, her mistress put her in mind that that was the only *true repentance by which we forsake sin*. Thus the catechism explained by a pious teacher was found to contain *all the articles of the christian faith*.

Mrs. Jones greatly disapproved the practice of turning away the scholars because they were grown up. "Young people," said she, "want to be warned at sixteen more than they did at six, and they are commonly turned adrift at the very age when they want most instruction; when dangers and temptations most beset them. They are exposed to more evil by the leisure of a Sunday evening than by the business of a whole week; but then religion must be made pleasant, and instruction must be carried on in a kind and agreeable, and familiar way. If they once dislike the teacher they will soon get to dislike what is taught, so that a master or mistress is in some measure answerable for the future piety of young persons, inasmuch as that piety depends on their manner of making religion pleasant as well as profitable." To attend Mrs. Jones's evening instructions was soon thought not a task but a holiday. In a few months it was reckoned a disadvantage to the character of any young person in the parish to know they did not attend the evening school. At first, indeed, many of them came only with a view to

learn to sing psalms; but, by the blessing of God, they grew fond of instruction, and some of them became truly pious. Mrs. Jones spoke to them one Sunday evening as follows:—"My dear young women, I rejoice at your improvement; but rejoice with trembling. I have known young people set out well, who afterwards fell off. The heart is deceitful. Many like religious knowledge who do not like the strictness of a religious life. I must therefore watch whether those who are diligent at church and school are diligent in their daily walk. Whether those who say they believe in God, really obey him. Whether they who profess to love Christ keep his commandments. Those who hear themselves commended for early piety, may learn to rest satisfied with the praise of men. People may get a knack at religious phrase without being religious; they may even get to frequent places of worship as an amusement, in order to meet their friends, and may learn to delight in a sort of spiritual gossip, while religion has no power in their hearts. But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation though I thus speak."

What became of Hester Wilmot, with some account of Mrs. Jones's May-day feast for her school, may be seen in the Second Part of this History.

Z.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

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