

CHOICE LITERATURE.

MISTER HORN AND HIS FRIENDS; OR, GIVING AND GIVING.

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CHAPTER XI.—A HOMILY OF MISTER HORN'S.

He thought of it, he prayed about it, and he had for a long time almost determined to do it. At last, as though it could be no longer held back, the resolve leaped forth with a very decided "I'll do it," and the ash stuck came down with an equally vigorous Amen.

Mister Horn would preach a sermon all about giving.

How it came about was on this wise.

It was in the autumn as Mister Horn went through the woods of which he had the management. He had been marking trees for the woodman's axe—a work full of varied suggestion to his quick mind. The day was one of those October days, most beautiful of all the year, in which autumn, sinking beneath the touch of winter, arrays herself in her loveliness, and takes the last lingering look at her own beauty; days in which the fell destroyer seems stayed, and charmed and smitten with love to his victim. The sunshine lit up the red gold of the foliage, and crept between the scantier leaves upon the mossy branches, and down to briered nooks, while here and there a leaf came fluttering to the leafy path below. The robin tried with brave music to wake the dead summer, and stopped often, as if listening and wondering that there was no answer. The stillness, the loneliness, the "seriousness," of all about him found in Mister Horn a ready heart for the sermon they preached. At length he paused in front of a withered tree. The leafless branches rose up naked and black against the blue sky, the trunk ran down bare and black to the earth; no moss grew about it, no nests hung in it telling of generous shelter to the fowls of the air, no withered leaves lay heaped around it, a bank of golden blessings. Mister Horn took the chalk from his pocket, muttering, "Not that it's any good to anybody, but it'll be out o' the way." He stood for a moment looking up at it. Beyond these stretched branches of other trees, vigorous and beautiful; on every hand was life. He nodded his head and tightened his lips—"That's it," he said to himself, "That's it all the world over; keep all, lose all; give all, save all; trees and men—it's all one. The life that has gone out in doing good—look at it coming back here in these leaves, to lie with warmth and life around them through the winter; but you, old friend, who kept it all to yourself, will get nothing back. You've kept your life to yourself, and now you're no good as tree or as timber. Cut it down"—and the chalk lines doomed it to speedy destruction.

As Mister Horn went on his way the dead tree became a text out of which sprang a multitude of similes and illustrations—a swarm of thoughts came and lodged in the branches thereof, diverse and manifold, but all leading to one conclusion: "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

At last these feelings and thoughts and figures gathered themselves together in the resolution, "I'll do it." Then Mister Horn had pledged himself to a homily on giving.

One Sunday morning, about a fortnight after, the sermon was launched in Tattingham Chapel.

The text was a harder matter with Mister Horn than the sermon, for thoughts had been collected so long that a text was rather a centre of attraction about which they gathered than a seed out of which the thoughts grew, and it was difficult to find which they fitted best. It was, perhaps, rather because he must choose one, than that it was the best, that he took Ecclesiastes v. 13:

"There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt."

"Now, my dear friends, I am going to try and say something about money."

"Preach the Gospel and let money alone," does somebody say? Preach the Gospel I will, by the Lord's help, and because it is the Gospel it won't let money alone. The Gospel has a good deal more to do with our money than, perhaps, most of us would care to know.

"Now money, for all it's a very good thing in its place, is the most harmful of all things if a man don't see to it and manage it right. The Bible is full of how men have been hurt by money; and the only scene in which we hear a wretched creature crying in hell is in the story of a rich man whose one sin was that he had his good things in this life. Money may hurt men in three ways."

"First, it may hurt men in the way they try to get it."

"Everybody ought to begin there. Let them see to it that that is all right. I've known folks to go into some business for the sake of the money, and think they wouldn't get any hurt. They might as well step gently off the church tower and expect to come down all right. When I used to be sinkin' wells, I always lowered a candle before I went down myself; if the candle burned all steady, I knew I could go down; but if the candle flickered and went out, I knew that wouldn't do for me. Let a man let down the candle of the Lord first, and if that'll burn, the man won't hurt. But that candle as choked out is a man will keep a public house, and get all kinds o' company, and all sorts o' talk, and all sorts o' mischief brewin—that air will put out religion, and soul, and all. Or if people will go where they have to act lies, and to measure lies, and to shuffle and dodge and do underhand things, that will choke all that's good in them. They say they must live somehow. I heard tell once about a lot of hungry people in Germany, who, in a time o' want, were going to break into some corn-mills, when Luther met them and asked them what they were doing. Then up comes a stout fellow, and quoth he, 'Master Luther, we must live.' 'Live,' thundered Luther, 'why must ye live?' I only know one 'must.' I know that we must be honest."

"But it's so hard to keep money from hurtin' us that even in good and lawful callings men very often hurt themselves. When a man will work so hard and so long that he can on ly

yawn over his Bible for a few moments, and then fall asleep on his knees and call it his 'prayers,' that man is sufferin' from a deadly hurt. Woe, woe to them who have in business set their hearts upon money, and make haste to be rich! It's the week-night service, or the man's class-night: 'Ho, friend, are you coming with us?' Bless you, no! he's off—so very busy, so much to do—he must make haste to be rich. Ah! if he could stay long enough he might see the sorrowful eyes of Jesus following him with a tender pity; he might hear the words sadly spoken of him: 'Alas! how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!'

"Ay, and there is worse hurt than this, though this is bad enough. When a man gets it by grinding down them that work for him—that's a gain that will hurt the owner thereof for ever and ever. The profit that's got by beating down the fair price of things, and by warring hard bargains—why the miserable priests and scribes who had egged on Judas, and prompted him to his accursed work, wouldn't touch blood money—the pieces might perish with him! Touch it! I wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs a mile long. I saw one day by the roadside a well where, in old times, when that parish had the plague, the people put the money for the provisions that were brought to them—the water cleansed the coins. But there is money—gold and silver and pence—that has the curse of shortened lives upon it, the curse of ruined health, of poor little starved children, of injured women, of wronged widows, and, worst of all, of lost souls—the sinner himself couldn't wash it clean! Like the foolish stories we heard when we were little, about how wise magicians could rub a coin and call up all sorts of visions, there are coins to-day that when you touch them ought to conjure up a crowd of folks under- and overworked. Folks all hollow-eyed, with white, hungry faces, and long bony fingers that point at men and curse them. They shall have their turn some day. God is slow, but sure, and His Book says: 'Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.' Take good heed how ye get money."

"SECONDLY, Money may hurt men by the way they spend it."

"If the owner thereof spends it all in luxury and self-indulgence, that is a hurt that he may perhaps never get over."

"Nothing in God's Book is more dreadful or more startling than the story of the man who had got enough to buy all dainty dishes and unheard-of wines. Plenty to eat and nothing to do—why, what more could anybody want? Ah! he found out what more a man wants before the next day dawned. For the sentence had gone out, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' He was dead and left his barns to some third cousin of whom he knew nothing—dead, and could not take a farthing of it with him—dead and buried, and the Lord wrote the epitaph: 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'"

"And see ye, my friends, ye don't need burstin' barns and much goods laid up before you get hurt, this way. In the woods I've come across the adders, and I know that if the big ones want most kulin' the little ones carry poisoned tongues. A man can let ten shillin' a-week bite him like a serpent. I'd rather that you should find this old frame of mine in the rags of a tramp, starved to death in a ditch, than have money hurt me as some in this parish let a week's wages hurt 'em. In all the world's hurts and harms the worst is to see a man staggering home drunk, cursing his Maker, going home mad enough to do anything that's cruel and devilish."

"Then there's the hurt o' spending money too fast—quite a plague in these times. The men must be counted gentle-folks, and the women must look never so smart—till somebody must go short. When the money's done the bills come in, and then—"Preach the Gospel!" Ay, my friends, it's about time somebody did, for the Gospel says, 'Owe no man anything. It says, 'Provide things honest.' It says, 'Do to others as ye would be done by.' The Gospel! It's the Gospel for the day and the Epistle too—Pay your twenty shillings in the pound."

"There was a good prayer I knew a man to offer once—a very good prayer. A brother was praying with much noise for faith—soul-saving faith, sin-killing faith, devil-driving faith. There was a quiet friend near him to whom the noisy brother owed a long bill. 'Amen,' said the quiet friend; 'Amen, and give us debt-paying faith too.' My friends, we want that faith nowadays. People don't believe in a religion that doesn't do that. And they may well not believe in it, for he that doesn't do his duty to his brother, whom he hath seen, how will he do his duty to his God, whom he hath not seen? Take good heed how ye spend money."

"The third way that money may hurt the owners thereof is the way they keep it."

"The rich fool is better one way than the miser. He did get something out of his money. The miser turns everything into money, and gets nothing out of it. The rich man fared sumptuously every day, and was clothed in purple and fine linen; as Father Abraham told him, he had his good things in his lifetime. But the miser, who grudges himself the mouldy crust that he eats, is a Lazarus in this world and a Dives in the next; he has his evil things both ways. However, there isn't much to choose between them, the spendthrift and the miser—they both keep all their money for their own selves, and that is keeping it to their hurt. Hurt indeed! No poor slave ever had such a hard time as money will lead a man if once it gets the upper hand of anybody. To see a man that God made in His own image and likeness sink down lean, shrivelled, and yellow, careless of hunger and cold, of darkness and filth, if his old withered hand can but clutch the money-bag—goodness and heaven, his God and his neighbour, his body and soul, all bargained away for a little bit more of his darling money—that's money kept to the hurt of the owner thereof. Yet it is almost as bad to see one who has been a

simple, godly fellow getting rich, and as the money comes, to see him growing careless and dead, slowly swelling himself with conceit until he is too full of himself to hold anything else, and money is more to him than all besides—God or neighbour, heaven or hell. Then, too, the miser does hide himself in his dingy corner, buried, earth to earth; but the rich fools come swaggering into sunshine, putting 'the old man' into everybody by their high and mighty manners. There isn't much to choose between 'em, the miser and the fool. In both cases money thus kept is kept to the hurt of the owners thereof."

"There's many a man who has got his money by honest, hard work, and had as much right to it as anybody could have, and who has spent it harmlessly enough, yet his money 'as become an eternal curse. He didn't manage it right when he got it. It is like that story in Paul's travels where the barbarians shewed them no little kindness. The shivering, drenched company gathered round the fire, but out o' the same ruddy flame crept a viper that fastened on Paul's arm, a 'venomous beast.' Ah! out o' men's luxuries and comforts creeps the old serpent—indolence, forgetfulness of God, self-indulgence, pride; and it has coiled round and round till you see them fall down dead in soul and spirit, unless they have the pluck to shake it off into the fire by the Lord's help, and to stand forth among the heathen as men of God."

"Now the first thing is for a man to think about managing it."

"Money is like everything else; it don't do to be left to itself. 'A child left to itself bringeth its mother to shame,' saith the wise man. A garden left to itself bringeth its owner to weeds, and a colt left to itself bringeth its master to the ground. Everything must be taken hold of the right way, and managed. And the right way to manage money is to give rightly. But how many of us ever thought about giving—how much we ought to give away in the year, and what we ought to give to? We think about getting—that's very certain. And we think about spending too; but as to giving—well, when you've had to give you've given; when the box has come round, and you didn't like to give a nod, you've put something in, you didn't think of it beforehand or after. If you want to keep money from hurting you, you must think as much about givin' as gettin'. That's a very plain direction in Paul's letter to the Corinthians: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.' That was before the collection. They weren't to come to the service and give anything that they might happen to have about them (if it were only little enough), nor to nudge their neighbour and trouble him for the loan of a three-penny bit, nor to bow to the plate as if politeness would build a chapel or pay for a missionary. They were once a week to think, 'how much ought I to give?' and they were to put that by. What a blessing it would be to us here in Tattingham if we tried that plan! We shouldn't have the devil trippin' up souls with that straw—for most of us are little babes in Christ, easily upset—which keeps you away from class for weeks together: 'You haven't paid your class-money' and it's so many weeks that you're ashamed to go and not pay. Stay home to-night.' And so the devil has made many a poor backslider just out of that. There would be the money put by for that, ready and waitin', if people would do as their Bible says. Think about it, and arrange for it as the Lord has prospered you; and if you want to know how much the Lord has prospered you, ask yourself how much you've got that God could take away. So then, if you don't want money to hurt you, think about giving, and arrange for it."

"There is a good old saying: 'Riches take to themselves wings and fly away, and he who would keep 'em must clip their wings by givin';' but that is only half the truth. Money is like the fiery little Bantam cocks that fly at everybody with spur and bill: men must clip their wings, not only that they ma'n't fly away, but also that they ma'n't fly at them. People make a great mistake who think of charity in a one-sided way. It isn't only to relieve the poor, but to keep money from hurtin' the owners thereof, and the greatest curse that could come upon men would be to have all rich and no poor. It's a blessing for the rich, that truth of our Saviour's, 'The poor ye have always with you.' Folks often excuse themselves, saying they can't afford to give; but if they saw things in a truer light they'd say that they couldn't afford to keep. Look at that story of the good Samaritan, of whom Jesus says to us, 'Go thou and do likewise.' Excuses! why that Samaritan might have made them by the score. He might have thought, as you do when you see any wretched object, 'Ah, if this fellow had been sober and industrious, depend upon it he wouldn't have come to this. Besides, he has no claim upon me, and why should he expect me to trouble myself about him? Then, again, these fellows are so ungrateful, one may kill one's self over 'em, and never get a single thank-ye. And if I begin to help there's no knowing where it'll end—he'll want oil and wine, and they're expensive things, and I shall have a me for myself. I shall have to lift him up on my mule and trudge alongside—roads are rough, and I'm a bad walker. If I take him to the inn there's twopence gone at once! And what with my staying about minding him, my day will be wasted and night will overtake me, and that's not a pleasant thing in a place that swarms with robbers.' So he might have said. And comin' nearer, still undecided, he catches sight of the Jewish features. That might have crowned the excuses, and the Samaritan might have gone off muttering something about riding to the next village and telling them of it, and they might do as they would."

"But he got off and gave the poor fellow oil and wine, and tore strips off his own robes to dress the wounds; he led him gently on the mule, he paid his bill at the inn, he rode home along the dangerous road. Yet I tell you that poor man who had fallen among thieves gave back as much as he got. Self-denial is a more heavenly thing than a little oil and wine, the blessed sense of having done one's duty is cheaply bought for twopence and a lift on the mule; that joy (like heaven in its depth and all-unselfish purity) that springs from a good deed well done is a bargain if a man sells all that he has to buy it. To think about giving and to fairly arrange to do it is the first thing."