

nobody knowed owt about it—'twere plain as a pikestaff." Mrs. Catchpole paused a moment to catch her breath. "Plain as a pikestaff," solemnly observed Widow Hunt, in the tones of a parish clerk.

"An' his children rags and tatters," continued the gossip, before the breath was fairly caught.

"Rags and tatters," came in like an echo.

"But now—" and Mrs. Catchpole nodded her head and raised her hands, as if words were far too weak to express all she knew.

Widow Hunt gave a prolonged and solemn shake of the frilled cap that did duty at once for 'tself and the echo too.

This silence of the two old ladies fairly expressed the opinions of the village as to Bill Smith. "He must be a-makin' money," was the summary objection by which Mr. Horn was always defeated when he referred to Bill as an instance of thinking about giving. Yet it was so obviously impossible for him to be getting rich, or really saving much, that words generally gave way to the convenient vagueness of a nod or a look.

There could be no manner of doubt about it that Bill Smith was a prosperous fellow. Anybody must have been blind if they hadn't noticed a strange improvement in the look of the man and of all about him. Even a blind man would have heard it. For many a day together the smithy used to be still, but now early dawn seemed to wake the ringing anvil as well as the music of the birds. And to wake the smith himself as well as the smithy. You used to hear him cursing and growling; now six days out of seven you'd hear Bill Smith singing away with his bass voice. For smiths always sing—blacksmiths I mean—it's part of their work. Some ingenious person has pointed out how that the father of such as handle the harp and the organ, and the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron, went hand in hand. What more likely, he asks, than that thoughtful Jubal stood in the smithy of his half-brother, Tubal-cain, listening to the ringing anvil, and the double bass of the bellows, as he reduced the many sounds to the first laws of harmony, and designed his harp and organ? This at least is certain, that every Tubal-cain has been half-brother to Jubal ever since. It certainly was worth getting up early to hear Bill sing the Morning Hymn, to the old tune with its twists and trills.

"Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise,
To pay thy morning's sacrifice."

And then to hear him whistle the air as he thrust the iron into the fire, and taking the handle of the bellows, woke up the sleepy fire into a quivering flame that leaped half up the chimney. And when the iron was glowing white, it was good to see the sparks fly as the merry ringing kept tune to the vigour of the second verse:

"Redeem thy misspent moments past,
And live this day as if thy last;
Thy talents to improve take care;
For the great day thyself prepare."

Then came the hissing from the trough, and the steam half hid the singer as he held the hot iron in the water, steadily singing the next verse:

"Let all thy converse be sincere,
Thy conscience as the noon-day clear;
For God's all-seeing eye surveys
Thy secret thoughts, thy words, and ways."

This solo that proclaimed Bill's prosperity in the smithy, had quite a chorus of its own outside. There were airy little hummings of prosperity in the branches of the apple-tree, that bent down to the ground with the weight of fruit. The vine leaves that peeped in at the windows rustled all day long, gossiping of the good things they saw within. The four grafted rose-trees that stood in the corners of the grass-plot grew up stately and flourishing, as if conscious that they were of the establishment, and prospered accordingly. The tidy little woman that flitted past the open door and the cheery song that came from within, completed a vision of prosperity. The children, too, that came down the shady lane from school, with rosy cheeks and glad voices, kept up the impression; and the baby—the youngest mother in Tattingham agreed that there never had been so prosperous a child in the place.

No wonder, then, that people talked of Bill Smith as "a-making money."

Moreover, Bill thought himself as prosperous as any man need be; but then he used the word in his own sense.

"You see with most folks prosperin' means getting money, but I know that it means using money. Five or ten shillin' a week, or twenty or thirty for that matter, don't make a man prosperous if he can't use it when he's got it. I can remember the time when the more I had the less I prospered—when more money on'y meant more drink and more want." This was Bill's explanation. The fact was, that ever since his conversion Bill had been a favourite pupil of Mister Horn's.

It was at the close of a long evening talk with Mister Horn that Bill first began to carry out his master's teaching.

"Good advice isn't a thing to be kept on the shelf, and on'y looked at like the doctor's medicine when a man's gettin' better," he said to his wife as he sat down with pencil and paper to see how he could "match it."

They had been talking of the scriptural rule—to lay by on the first day of the week, as God prospered one. "Not that what was best for some folks in other times is always best for everybody in these, but that if a man can get scripture to build upon it's the best and most comfortable foundation we can have," was Mister Horn's comment on the text.

So Bill sat with a neat little money-box before him, turning over the first principles of prosperity—using money.

The Bible lay open before him at the sixteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Bill's finger had gone slowly over the second verse as he whispered the words to himself; then he sat up and looked at the fire, turning it over for some time. The thoughts very slowly shaped themselves into Bill's principles of giving.

"Seems to me there's one thing as plain as a pikestaff,

for all I'm no scholar—a man ought to manage about givin'. He is to lay by for it, just like he does for his house rent, and for half a score o' things besides—for everything a'most except for givin'. There's very many folks can't give anything 'pon the spur o' the moment, and they sink that 'tis all right if they don't. But seems to me 'tis all wrong. They couldn't pay their rent 'pon the spur o' the moment either, but for all that the landlord expects to get his money. A man is to lay by and arrange for it; whether folks hold with doing it on the first day o' the week or the last, they are in a bad way who don't do it at all. So that's the first head, as the preachers say." And Bill nodded his own head with considerable satisfaction, as if that point were settled.

"Now the next thing is how much to lay by," he went on, taking up his paper, and biting the end of his pencil as he turned over this question. "I can make thirty shillin' a week, takin' one week with another," Bill muttered slowly; and he paused again, gnawing at the pencil. "Well, s'pose I say three shilling a week," and he figured a large three at the top of the paper. He held it out at arm's length, put his head on one side, and looked at his handiwork with an air of satisfaction. "That's the second head—three. I don't see how it can anyhow be less than that, as Mister Horn says that the Jew gave a tenth, and I'm not givin' to be behind the Jew. No, no, they didn't know anything about what Paul said," and Bill turned over three or four pages of his Bible. "Ye know, [ye know] the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." No, I can't give less than a tenth, and I'm a'most thinkin' that I ought to give more. Well, let that stand to begin with—the more I get, the more I'll give of it.

And as if to confirm what was done, Bill stretched himself on the table, put his head on one side, and thrust out his tongue, and having wetted his pencil he went over the large three again.

Then he raised himself and bit the pencil vigorously, with the air of a man who felt himself getting through a difficulty. "The next thing is what must I lay by for. First of all, there's the Lord's work, o' course. I ought to begin with that, I'm sure, for religion saved me more than the whole of it. Three shillings! why it wasn't half enough sometimes to pay for the week's beer. And then religion made me sober and steady, and that brought me in three times as much. Besides, what else is there that's so well worth paying for? House rent and doctor's bills 'nt to be mentioned in the same breath along with it. And butcher's meat and bread isn't such good cheer as I get out o' religion. Folks pay for them as a duty; but think what religion costs isn't a duty at all—that's only a charity, something that isn't meant for any but rich folks who can afford it—and folks must be very rich indeed before they can see their way to afford that. And besides that," Bill went on to himself, "somehow I don't like to think about it all as payin' debts. I want to feel like Mister Horn puts it, as all I've got belongs to my blessed Lord, and I'm put in for a kind of a steward, who has got to look after the estate and manage to make so much of it as ever he can for his master. And for a Master like mine—bless His holy name!—how can I ever do enough?" And Bill's whole soul woke up in a moment into a song of praise—plaintively and tenderly came the words:

"See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

And then loudly and heartily came the next verse:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life my all."

"But come, Bill Smith; good feelin's and singin' hymns won't settle the matter;" and once more the teeth worked at the pencil, as Bill looked at the large figure three.

"To begin with, there's class money—wife and myself. Without inagin' I could give a penny a week, let's double that and see how it looks." So that was figured—C. M. a quarter—wife and myself; four shillin' and four pence. "Then there's the tucket—we'll double that and see how it looks." And that came in an uneven line. Ticket M. ditto, a quarter, four shillin'. "That looks very pretty, anyhow," cried Bill as he held it out admiringly. "Well, but I ha'n't done yet by a long way. There's the collections, and the poor folk in the place; it will be good to have a bit for them, so say five shillin' more."

"But stop," cried Bill, somewhat alarmed, "I'm goin' too fast," and he added it all up and found that it came to thirteen shillings and four pence a quarter. "That'll never do, never," and Bill scratched his head as if by way of waking up the sleeping brains inside. Then he figured three times thirteen, and stared with blank astonishment to see it come to thirty-nine shillings a quarter.

"It can't be right," said Bill, going over it again; and yet it seemed to be. Then, to his great relief, he heard his wife moving up stairs. "Missis," he cried to his spouse, "I'm in a muddle;" and he was most thoroughly bewildered. "If I spend three shillin' a week what'll that come to in a quarter?"

"Why, thirty-nine shillings, to be sure, Bill, won't it?" said the wife from the top of the stairs in an undertone, for Tattingham's most prosperous baby had just dropped off into infantile snore that was much too musical to be harshly disturbed.

"So it is," said Bill, putting thirty-nine beside the large three, "and there's more than five and twenty shillin' left now. Why, I sha'n't be able to find things enough to give to." Bill was really embarrassed with his riches. What should he put down next. As he looked about in wonder his eye fell on his little maiden's missionary-box, and at once another line filled up the paper—missions, one penny a week—one shilling and one penny. This at once suggested home missions—"Can't give to one without the other," said Bill, as he pencilled a fifth entry, and arranged for another shilling and penny.

There followed a more prolonged pause than ever, and the pencil could scarcely bear the more vigorous application of the teeth, when Bill remembered that the parson at Tattingham collected for the Bible Society, and called now and then for a trifle. So down went another penny a week, and at the end of another crooked line there appeared another one shilling and one penny a quarter. Four and four pence a year. Perhaps, if Bill had known it, he would scarcely have been so "owdacious," for the squire who owned the parish could only afford five shillings a year.

And now what else was there? The pencil wouldn't stand the much more severe attack from those sharp teeth—and yet here he could think of nothing more, and had a good deal over a pound to get rid of every quarter. Then came a resolution to take a pew in Tattingham Chapel, thinking that he could afford to be comfortable. It was with a positive relief that he wrote down that "four shillin' a quarter."

Then adding it up once more, Bill was annoyed, almost angry, to find that it only came to twenty shillings and sevenpence. Then the good wife came to his relief.

"I am fairly muddled, and can't match it no how," said Bill, scratching his head with one hand, and holding out the paper.

"Can't you see your way to save as much as you wanted?" she said, looking over his shoulder at the figures.

"Nay—it's just the other way about that beats me—I can't find things enough to give to. We're too rich, too rich, missis."

"Ah! you've forgotten the children," said the wife, as she ran quickly over Bill's figures—"three of them for schooling, that's twopence a week, that's six shillings and sixpence a quarter."

Bill shook his head doubtfully—"Nay, dear, I don't think that'll do. You see it's a tenth for the Lord, and I might as well put down their clothin' and food to His account as their education."

"Well, but there's the club, can't you put that in?" said the wife, anxious to help her husband.

"Nay, wife, that won't do either," said Bill. "You see if I begin to bring myself in at all, I might come in for it all."

At last husband and wife gave in. "There it is," said Bill, "eighteen shillin' and five pence for the Lord whenever He wants it. He knows it's there, and He'll send somebody to fetch it, for He knows a good many who need it."

So Bill put up his pencil and paper. "I'll never believe anybody again as long as I live, when they say they can't afford to give. They can afford sixpence a day in beer and tobacco very often, and they can go foolin' away their money in a score of ways. There's only one reason why folks can't afford to give, and that is, because they afford so much for everything else. Why, if a man would put by sixpence a week, he'd very likely be able to give six times as much as he does—and he'd be able to do it, as the Book says, not grudgingly or of necessity, but like a cheerful giver that the Lord loves."

(To be continued.)

HIS SECOND CHOICE.

"Hester!" exclaimed Aunt Susan, ceasing her rocking and knitting, and sitting upright, "Do you know what your husband will do when you are dead?"

"What do you mean?" was the startled reply.

"He will go and marry the sweetest-tempered girl he can find."

"O, auntie!" Hester began.

"Don't interrupt me till I have finished," said Aunt Susan, leaning back and taking up her knitting. "She may not be as pretty as you are, but she will be good natured. She may not be as bright as you are, but she will be good natured. She may not be as good a housekeeper as you are, in fact I think she will not, but she will be good natured. She may not even love him as well as you do, but she will be more good natured."

"Why, auntie?"

"That isn't all," continued Aunt Susan. "Every day you live you are making your husband more and more in love with that good-natured woman who may take your place some day. After Mr. and Mrs. Harrison left you the other evening the only remark made about them was, 'She is a sweet woman.'"

"Ah, auntie?"

"That isn't all," composedly resumed Aunt Susan. "To-day your husband was half across the kitchen floor bringing you the first ripe peaches, and all you did was to look up and say, 'There, Will, just see your muddy tracks on my clean floor. I won't have my clean floor all tracked up.' Some men would have thrown the peaches out of the window. One day you screwed up your face when he kissed you because his moustache was damp, and said, 'I never want you to kiss me again.' When he empties anything you tell him not to spill it, when he lifts anything you tell him not to break it. From morning till night your sharp voice is heard complaining and fault-finding. And last winter, when you were so sick, you scolded him for allowing the pump to freeze, and took no notice when he said, 'I was so anxious about you that I could not think of the pump.'"

"But, auntie?"

"Hearken, child. The strongest, most intellectual man of them all cares more for a woman's tenderness than for anything else in this world, and without this the cleverest woman and the most perfect housekeeper is sure to lose her husband's affection in time. There may be a few more men like your Will, as gentle, and loving, and chivalrous, as forgetful of self, and so satisfied with loving that their affection will die a long, struggling death; but, in most cases it takes but a few years of fretfulness and fault-finding to turn a husband's love into irritated indifference."

"Well auntie?"

"Yes, well! You are not dead yet, and that sweet-tempered woman has not yet been found; so you have time to become so serene and sweet that your husband can never imagine that there is a better tempered woman in existence."—*Advocate and Guardian.*