

CHOICE LITERATURE.

MISTER HORN AND HIS FRIENDS; OR, GIVER'S AND GIVING.

BY MARK GUY PEARSE.

CHAPTER III.—SHOWS US SOMETHING MORE OF MISTER HORN.

Thus Mister Horn began. Little wonder the man prospered. He would at times tell, in his own peculiar manner, how he managed to get on:

"You see I said that I would give, somehow. Well, that brought me into a trick of giving both eyes open to see how I could pick up a shilling a week more wages, so I kept bettering myself all along. Mind you, I didn't do it for myself. I did it because I felt I couldn't anyhow do enough for Him who was so good to me. But I found the more I gave away the more I had to give. It's the same all through God's world. When the poor prodigal had lived to please himself he soon came to grief; he had spent all, and began to be in want. But when he'd come home, and had given up thinking about himself and wanted to serve his father and to please him, why, then he got the best robe and the fattest calf, and began to be merry—begin to be merry; ay, that's a right kind of merry-making that needn't ever have an ending, when a man lives to please his Father and to serve him. Let a man count that he's the Lord's hired servant, and he'll get good wages—enough and to spare. But let a man count that he's his own master, and that he'll do what he likes with his own, and that man'll have a discontented servant and a bad master all in one. I've spent money in a goodish many ways, and I reckon that there's only one way that I spent and never wished a farthing of it back again—that's what I've given to the Lord's work."

Mister Horn's greatest achievement in the way of giving was when the new chapel was built at Gippington, the circuit town.

He refused to make any promise. He would do what he could, he said. Folks knew that this was not a hypocritical way of doing nothing, such as it is very often; indeed they had already settled among themselves what he would do.

"He's good for five pounds," said Jim Niggardly.

"He's good for ten," said others with larger hearts, that measured him better.

But his old friend Chaffer shook his little head at both, and said, with husky, broken voice, "There's no knowin' what he's good for, if he only get it in his mind—he's a wonder is Mister Horn." Old friend Chaffer was right.

Mister Horn turned it over, prayed about it, and at length made up his mind as to what he would do.

The passage on which he had been preaching lately kept ringing in his head, like the music of a sweet song, "The Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me." It was as he walked home one Sunday evening with this text filling his heart and soul that it occurred to him. The clear frosty air made the November sky to sparkle brilliantly with the stars, forcing him to consider the heavens, as he came along in his lonely walk. He thought of their number—of their vastness. He thought how that, night after night, they had looked down upon the changeful, wearied world, the same as when Abraham had read in them the expression and seal of the promise; the same as when David had watched them from the midst of his flock and wondered at the Lord's mindfulness of man; the same as when they hung over Him who in the still evening passed up to the mountain-top, and with them as His only witness, spent the night in prayer. Then adoringly he thought of the Hand that made them. "He giveth the stars," said Mister Horn to himself. "Ah how He loves to give—He might have doled one here and another there. But that wouldn't be like Him." And he stood and looked overhead; then slowly around him: "Millions of them! millions," he cried. "O my God and Father, what a great giving Thine is! Right royal! Nay, never a king gave so, 'tis only like Thyself—Thou lovest to give, only giving such millions could satisfy Thee."

Then, with deepening emotion and intense adoration he thought how far away in the infinite space was the throne of that glorious Lord who is the light of sun, and moon, and star. With a new meaning that thrilled him came the text of the evening, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me. Himself for me!" he repeated aloud, "Himself for me!" And grateful love filled his soul, and overflowed in tears of adoring joy.

This emotion was yet lingering within him as he thought suddenly of the new chapel. What should he "render to the Lord for all His benefits?" He had saved some little money; should he give that? No, that would not do; he wanted to feel that he was somehow giving himself. He loved me, and gave Himself for me—this was the wonderful love by which his heart was prompted, and such a motive was not easily satisfied. He had walked some distance in perplexity, and now was coming near to his own house. At length it was evident that Mister Horn had "got it into his mind," as old Chaffer put it. The pause in the path by which he was crossing the field, the uplifted ash stick, the moment's suspense then the vigorous thrust and the rapid strides forward announced some great decision. Mister Horn would live on what he had saved, and for one year would give all that he could get to the Lord. "I'll be like giving myself," he cried, "body, soul, and spirit."

The resolution thus formed was bravely carried out. It was the hardest year of his hard-working life. "Neighbours heard him astir at earliest dawn; his friends wondered what made him so merrily of his time. He knew very well that he could keep no secret from his wife, so he told her straight out that night, and then went to sleep before she had sufficient time to object. But all the rest of the village was kept wondering until the end of the year. It was at a meeting for the new chapel that the pent-up secret came out. A subscription was placed in the minister's hand with a

paper worded thus: "One year's work, £100. 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' J. H."

"That was the happiest year of my life," Mister Horn said whenever he told of it. "You reckon Sunday a good day, because in it you do no manner of work. But there's something better than Sundays, and that's where they rest not day or night from their labours. And I never felt so much like being one of them as I did then. I was sinking a well a good part of the time, and very often I used to think about it down in the still, damp darkness, hearing nothing but the gloomy echoes of my own tools, and now and then a bit o' clay that went splashing into the water sixty feet below, sounding like 'ashes to ashes,' as I stood on the shaking plank. I used to think that they up in their glory and me down in my well were both doing the same thing, for all that we were such a long way off; we were both working for the same Lord and we both wanted to do as much as ever we could. That was a happy year."

CHAPTER IV.—INTRODUCE US TO JAMES NIGGARDLY.

Mister Horn had one sore trouble. He thought of it, talked of it, prayed about it, and with all his heart set himself to remedy it, if possible; it was concerning the Jim Niggardly before, and so sadly mentioned.

"James Niggardly, Esquire, Stukeville," was the address on his letters, but with Mister Horn he was never anything else than plain Jim. He was by no means what his name led one to expect in appearance—nothing of the traditional Mr. Grippeman or Mr. Money-love; his were not the pinched features, the half-starved, withered frame, the threadbare coat. Somewhat about the middle height, stout, and rather good-looking, the head thrown back and the hair brushed up to make the most of himself, a gold chain spanning the rounded expanse of waistcoat, the thumbs thrust into the arm-holes—such was James Niggardly's portrait. A large man with a gold chain was the impression he generally made at first. The impression was confirmed when he began to speak. There was a tick of hesitancy and repetition at the commencement of his sentences, and as each sentence began with "I," it came out thus:—

"I, em, I—I—I—eh."

So that one came to think of him as if these five or six, "I's" had been rolled into one big man with a gold chain. His signature was "I. Niggardly." There it was in imposing letters on the office door. It stood prominent on the coal-carts, and the railway trucks carried it to and fro in important letters. In fact, the "I" ran through everything from the big man himself down to the brass seal that lay on the office desk.

He had commenced life in a very humble way, so humble indeed, that the "I" had not appeared, and he was only plain Jim, who went selling small quantities of coal from house to house. But the railway came, and then he opened a coal store, to which he kept grafting other branches that all bore some crop of golden fruit, until it was no secret that he was worth five or six hundred a year.

Worth, I have said; well, yes. And yet what did it mean? Of all the truths that men accidentally utter in the phrases of every day, and of all the untruths, there is none more suggestive than this—What is a man worth? James Niggardly was worth five or six hundred pounds a year! Well, there was a time when he was worth a good deal more than all that—when he was worth more than all the ciphers that you could tack on to it. It was when he was a happy man on thirty shillings a week, and worked hard with his own hands to get it—then James Niggardly was worth more, body, soul, and spirit. It was when, after the hard day's work, the old horse was made comfortable in the stable, and the somewhat rickety cart was set up under the shed, and Jim had gone through a process of splashing and blowing, and then, all radiant and happy, came to fill the kettle, and to look after the dear old mother, who could do little else than sit crooning by the fire all day long. It was when he sat down to tell all that he could think of that would interest her, sitting there carefully toasting a bit of bread as a relish for the old lady's tea, afterward removing the crust for his own more active jaws, while the old lady's face gladdened into a pleasant pride at the kindly ways of her Jim. It was when he gathered with the little company at the prayer-meeting, and Heaven honoured him, and men felt that he had power with God and prevailed; it was when he sat in the midst of the Sunday-school class and told them of the loving Saviour until their hearts were moved, and they went home strangely thoughtful and impressed; it was when godly old men and women brightened as Jim dropped in for a bit of prayer, and they pressed him with their bony hands and blessed him with their dying lips—then he was worth more, tenfold more, a hundred-fold more, worth more to God, worth more to himself. What is a man worth? Worth miserably little if he is only worth what he has in his pocket, or what he sets down in his income tax paper. You are right to count a man's worth by his gold and robes and luxuries, but let it be by the gold of pure love, by the white robes of truth and meekness, by the delicious luxury of a blameless conscience, of doing good, of blessing others; so only should you count what a God-made man is worth.

But thus estimated, James Niggardly, with his five hundred a year, was a pauper. The very appearance of the man betrayed his bankruptcy. The old look of quiet contentment was gone, and in its place was an anxious and somewhat crafty expression; the kindly ways had changed into an irritable, almost angry, tone and manner. His wife could tell that the humble Jim who courted her some twenty years before, and this James Niggardly, Esquire, were two different men. Sometimes people thought that she sighed for the dear old Jim who used to be—whose face was often black with coal-dust, and whose cheery voice had gladdened her into many a blush as it sounded through the little village street with its cry of "Coal, ho! coal, coal, ho!" If you wanted him now you would never think of looking for him at the prayer-meeting. True, his name was on the class-book as a member of the Society under Mister Horn's care, but only now and then a solitary P broke the long line of A's. Mister Horn read his name every week, but usually the searching look round the room

was followed by a sigh. "A again," he said, as he turned to his book, and the pencil made three heavy strokes. For Mister Horn always put a capital A—it was associated in his mind in some roundabout way with a capital offence, and this was a sort of capital punishment.

Sunday still found James Niggardly usually in his place at Tatingham Chapel. There he sat in the one crimson-curtained pew just inside the door, with his wife and three daughters. Even on "collection Sundays" they were all there each with a threepenny bit—what a pity there are no silver pennies! James Niggardly, Esquire, himself gave sixpence. Once Mister Horn hoped that the sermon had done him good, for he actually gave a shilling, but at night he made up for it by politely bowing to the plate, so that it came to just the same thing.

Now this James Niggardly, Esquire, of Stukeville, was the greatest hindrance that "the cause" at Tatingham ever had. The old parish squire had been a hindrance when for years he refused the ground for the chapel, but the little society had prayed about it until they got the land all for nothing. The old parson had been a hindrance when he laid it down that the allotments were to grow only Church potatoes, and that "they who could do without him on Sundays might do without him on Mondays too." He did not even say to them, "Be ye warmed and filled"—much less suffer their nonconforming bodies to be comforted by parish blankets and coals, and sundry charities of which he was trustee. In spite of that the little society kept up its own fire and flourished. But this James Niggardly in the midst was a real hindrance. The others, after all, were outside, but this man seemed to leave the door open for all the bleak winds of heaven, so that everybody was chilled and miserable. If anything were to be done they all waited for James Niggardly to start it; and there were so many buts and ifs, so many fault-findings and grumbings, so many wretched objections, and when he did give it was "pitched in so low a key," as Mister Horn said, that it hindered a great deal more than it helped. The fact was that, if it had not been for his amiable wife and useful daughters, the sooner he had taken himself clean away the better would it have been for the "cause" and all belonging to it.

Mister Horn, as he told Bill Smith, had often given James Niggardly a bit of his mind. He had known Jim from a boy, had given him his first start in life, had directed and advised him in all the steps of his growing prosperity, and now he grieved deeply as he saw this root of all evil thus growing and flourishing in his soul. Mister Horn was not the man to shirk the duty, and when he did speak the words were not so rounded and polished as to "glide off like water from a duck's back," as he said. When he spoke it was pointed and well aimed, and it stuck just where he meant it to stick. "Music is all very nice and pretty," he once said to an elegant young preacher, "but you know it is the powder and shot that does the work."

The quarter was drawing to a close, and James Niggardly, Esquire, was somewhat in arrears with his class-money. It was no great amount, although it was thirteen weeks. The noble sum of a penny a week and a shilling a quarter was all that he owed. Mister Horn, with half as much to live upon, gave a pound for the ticket column, and thirteen shillings filled up the other page. But Mister Horn, folks said, was a "wonder"; and, remarkably enough in this ambitious world, nobody else coveted a similar distinction.

It was about supper-time that Mister Horn called at Stukeville for the class-money. Everything was very nice—extravagant, he thought, in his simplicity. He would not join them; he would sit by the fireplace until they had finished.

"I don't see, Mister Horn, why I shouldn't enjoy myself," said Jim Niggardly, guessing the visitor's thought, and feeling that the little gray eyes were upon him. "I worked hard for my money," and he helped himself to a dainty slice.

"Umph!" grunted Mister Horn in reply, and he thought of the penny a week and the shilling a quarter.

The supper finished, they sat opposite each other in front of the fire. They were alone, and now Mister Horn brought his chair nearer his friend; he liked to get at a man, as he called it. He went right to the point at once.

"Look here, Jim, how can you satisfy yourself with giving what you do to the work of God? Two shillings and a penny is all that you give in a quarter, besides a sixpence that they screw out of you at a collection now and then."

"Ah, times are hard, Mister Horn, times are hard, you know," said Jim, wiping his mouth after he had finished his glass of sherry.

Mister Horn's sharp eye followed the hand as it pat down the glass. After a minute's silence he rose to go, and held out his hand. "Well, good-night, Jim—good-night. My Master wants an answer, for I have come in His name, you know, and I am sure my blessed Master would never ask for anything from a man who could not afford it, much less would He beg for it. So I'll go home and tell Him that times are hard with Jim Niggardly, and that he has got nothing to give. Good-night, Jim."

"Oh, don't be in a hurry, Mister Horn; I didn't mean that exactly. You always take me up so sharp," and Jim was somewhat frightened at returning such an answer.

"I mean it right enough, Jim. There are times when a man can't give what he would like to, and he does right to speak out and say so, whatever folks may say or think. They have got no business to pry into any man's private matters. Jesus gave gifts among men, some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, but he didn't give any beggars, and I don't believe he wants any either. I like my 'Yes,' or 'No,' when I come in the Master's name, and then I go straight back and tell Him what answer I get. I can leave Him to deal with it then; and He can deal with it, Jim. When He sees any heart set upon giving, why He'll send an angel from heaven, if it's only with a mite from a poor widow. And if He sees it kept back and hoarded up, He can deal with it."

And Mister Horn took up the Bible that was lying within reach, and opened it at the Book of Haggai: "He can deal with it; listen to this: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Ye have sown much and bring in little;