

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## MISTER HORN AND HIS FRIENDS, OR, GIVERS AND GIVING.

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## CHAPTER I.—NOTICE OF MISTER HORN.

Mister Horn—the Mister to be written in full, as if it were part of the name, just as much as the Horn.

Everybody—his wife as well as other folks—used to call him Mister, just as if it were his christened name. He was, indeed, the only Mister in the village; as there was but one squire and one parson and one doctor.

How he came to be known by this honourable distinction was certainly not suggested by his appearance—a little, sharp, wiry man, with a quick, kindly eye, a mouth well shut, short legs, walking so fast that they seemed always afraid of being left behind—carelessly dressed, yet everything about him looking like a part of the man himself, from his short-bowed neckcloth to the strong, unpolished walking-stick. A sort of compressed man. You felt that there might have been a good deal more of him fairly enough, but nature had dried him and packed him up small, that he might not be in the way. And who can deny that a man's usefulness is largely dependent on his size? Your long men are mainly ornamental, and accordingly find their place in uniform, either in the army or out of it. Your big, stout men are the "Newfoundlands" of us human creatures, lumps of gentle goodness who go wagging benevolently through life. It is your terrier that does most good—among men as among dogs—sharp-eyed, sharp-eared, sharp-tongued, and, if needful, sharp-toothed; quick to smell a rat. Mister Horn was precisely that. Never in the way, and good for a hundred things, if you took him right. If you didn't, he was a terrier still; he bristled and showed his teeth.

Mister Horn had begun life as a farm labourer—literally begun life, for as soon as he could make noise enough he had been sent out to scare the birds from the grain, and as soon as he could reach up to the bridle he had led the cart-horses to water. His sixty years had been full of progress; he turning his hand to one thing after another and prospering in all—woodman, gardener, bricklayer, builder, he had at length reached a good position as steward.

The Mister was probably a tribute of respect paid to his prosperity; it was no deference exacted by his manner or exclusiveness. As plain in life as ever, free and friendly with the poorest, the children trotted along by his side, looking up for a smile and a nod; the boys stopped him for a moment to fling their peg-top, or to have a turn at marbles; and on a summer's evening one might come upon a group under a shady tree, and there, amid a lot of delighted youngsters, would find Mister Horn entertaining them with a story.

He was useful, too, as he was beloved. As a Methodist, he had many opportunities of religious work; and here, as in the visible world of brick and mortar, he turned his hand to most things, and what he did at all he did well. He was the "leader" of the Sunday morning class in that village "Society," which numbered well on to forty members, a too large, some folks said, but nobody was willing to leave it. Superintendent of the school that met in the afternoon, local preacher in the evening, and sick visitor all the week round, Mister Horn had, as he said, far too much else to do to grumble. "That takes more time than a'most anything else that I know, for I never knew a grumbler yet that ever had a moment to do any good with." This remedy for grumbling was worn to the patness of a proverb, and was a formidable weapon with which he usually came down upon anybody who was disposed to come fault-finding to him. "Look here, dear friend, get you away and do something—for pity's sake do something. Do some good somewhere. Cart-wheels grumble and creak sometimes for want of grease, but very often it is for want of work, and you'll never give over creaking and grumbling till you do something." Heaven itself, with Mr. Horn, was a place of eternal and incessant work. "And I count that's the brightest bit of heaven's joy," he would say, "that there they serve Him day and night in His holy temple—day and night. I know that there will be no grumblers there because they are all too busy. They have got so much to do that it keeps them always singing."

Mister Horn had overtaken Bill Smith. Bill Smith was a big, broad-shouldered blacksmith, with a face red, radiant, and honest, such as comes only of a good conscience, plain living, and healthy toil. Moreover, Bill was Mister Horn's favourite disciple and one of his best friends, so they walked up the hill together toward the village where they lived. The sun was setting, throwing their long shadows over the hedge and into the clover-field beyond. The clear air was full of singing, every bird taking its part in the evening hymn. The banks were rich with fern and flower, with soft green mosses and dark, creeping ivy. This scene of happy contentment had suggested the conversation. Mister Horn began it. He had stayed to hear the birds, and after listening a minute or two had interrupted their gratitude by this passage:

"Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of everything living." Then after a moment's pause he had started his favourite topic, "The good Lord loves to give, Bill."

"Ay," said Bill, "He does that, Mister Horn, bless His holy name."

"And nobody has got much of His likeness about them if they don't like to do the same," continued Mister Horn, in his sharp, jerking, decisive style.

"And yet 'tis strange what a hindrance it was to me when I first set out," said Bill. "I was always thinking o' what religion would cost. I thought I must seek the Lord and join 'long with His peepie, but the devil kept tellin' me that it would cost so much. Why, I very soon found that religion saved me four times as much as ever it cost."

"I do wish the grumblers would think of it in that way, Bill," jerked out Mister Horn. "Why, there's Sally Green,

the silly creature; before her husband got converted she used to reckon herself lucky if she got half Jack's wages, and only a slight chattering besides; and now that he brings it all home, and is a decent fellow and a good husband, she goes grumbling at what he gives to the Lord's cause."

"There's a heap of strange things in the world," said Bill, half to himself, "but there a'n't many more strange than that is."

Mister Horn stopped. With his left finger and thumb he took Bill's sleeve, his right hand holding up the plain ash stick that he carried. It was evident that Mister Horn was going to be impressive. This was always his preparation for something emphatic.

"Bill"—there was a solemn pause, the stick meanwhile suspended—"if folks saw this matter in the right light the Church would have enough to convert the world." Down, like lightning, came the stick, and away went the short legs at a tremendous pace.

This was Mr. Horn's hobby. There was nothing that he thought about, talked about, prayed about, or preached about, so much as this duty of giving. Many people, very many people, said that he rode this hobby to death. Well, Mister Horn was always mounted on it, it is true, and ready to start. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted that these very many people were peculiarly nervous, and its most playful neighing, or the mere sound of its hoofs in the veriest jog-trot, filled them with terror, and made them rush for shelter and defence from the furious rider. It was literally Mr. Horn's soul that delivered itself in these words. He stopped at the end of twenty paces or so, while Bill leisurely came up with him.

"It seems to me that half the folks would do their duty right enough if they only saw it," said Bill quietly. "You see, they don't think about it, Mister Horn."

"Don't think about it, Bill!" cried Mister Horn; "of course they don't, and that makes it so much the worse for them. Folks think that if they can only explain a thing it's just the same as excusing it. Why, all the mischief in the world comes from not thinking. What have people got their heads pieces on their shoulders for except to think about things? Why, anybody would think that folks had got figure-heads, like ships have 'em, for nothing but show, as to their thinking about giving. But they can think about other things quick enough. They can think about getting, Bill, and about keeping, and about everything else except about giving."

"That's true enough," said Bill.

"And then they ought to think about it, Bill, they ought to. Surely it ought not to be anything so very wonderful that folks should think of the loving Father who gives them all that they have got. He gives them the health and strength and sense to get bread with, and they think they do it all of their own selves. They know better when they get on their backs with a fever. Then they know. But 'tis a pity we can't learn our A B C without going into the corner for it, and getting a smart tap or two with the rod. I often think of what the Bible says about the disciples—they considered not the miracle of the loaves. That's the miracle that folks generally overlook to-day, and the wonder is that the Lord doesn't let us feel the pinch o' famine oftener, that we may know where it comes from. God's stream o' mercies has got to run shallow sometimes that we may hear it brawling, and begin to think about where the fulness comes from. Just let a man sit down and ask himself *how much he has got that God could take away*, and he'll begin to look at things in a different way then; there's eyes, and ears, and health, reason, character, home, family, work, wages. And let a man think how the Lord keeps His hand upon them, and could take them away in a minute, and I think he'd be all in a hurry to bring in the tithes to the Lord's house then. There's Jim Niggardly, with his coal and timber stores—twenty years ago that man got his twelve shillings a week, and now he is getting his five hundred pounds a year. He lives better—I mean he eats and drinks better, and he dresses better—he spends five shillings on himself where he used to spend one. Well, that's no harm, as I told him to his face, if he'd give five shillings where he gave one. Not a halfpenny more can you get out of him for the Lord's work. If he hasn't thought about it, he has had my thoughts about it, plain enough."

Bill nodded his head, as much as to say that he had no doubt about that. Mister Horn had a talent for giving men his thoughts, and it was practised to perfection.

Here they reached the cross-roads that ran to the two parts of the village of Tatingham, and here the companions parted with a cheery good-evening. Bill, with his bag on shoulder, went whistling down the hill between the leafy hedge, where we shall follow him by and by. Mister Horn kept along the level highway that passed by his house, talking earnestly to himself as he went. What he thought of, and what it led to, we must leave to another chapter.

## CHAPTER II.—WE GO HOME WITH MISTER HORN.

A few yards from a cross-road was the house of Mister Horn. If Dante's vision had presented to his view men and women transformed into houses (marned folks, of course, into one house) instead of into trees, this house was exactly what Mister Horn and his better half would have come to.

It faced the highway with clean windows, notably clean, and spotless blinds always faultlessly even. The two yards of garden between the house and the highway was enclosed by iron railings, black, and sharp-pointed. The little iron gate in the middle was always fastened and locked, except on very great occasions. From the gate to the front door reached two yards of whitened stones, never soiled. The spirit of the whole front gathered itself up in the face that peered from the shining brass knocker; a polished face, haughty and stern, conscious that nobody trifled with it—no tramp ever lifted it for his single knock, no bungling messenger rapped at it by mistake. The evergreens, too, in the strip of garden were in keeping with the rest; they grew thick-leaved and sombre, as if they did their duty seriously and knew it; they were never guilty of any spring freaks, and had no patience with the gadding butterflies and the likes of them.

This is what Mistress Horn would have turned to.

At the side of the house was a little wicket-gate; it fell back at the gentlest push, and was never secured with more than a bit of string that went round the post. A short passage led to the homely side-door that opened into the kitchen, where a cheery fire sulked and blinked a welcome to all comers—the front-room grate had ornamental shavings. A tall-backed, comfortable old chair stood at one side of the fireplace. On the mantelpiece above, among the polished brass, were little odds and ends of Mister Horn's. The smell of sweet herbs greeted one from the paper bags; the well-wrapped hams quickened one's appetite, and between the bars that stretched from two oak beams peeped sundry stick and spuds. All here was cosy, homely, and snug.

This personified Mister Horn. And as the two parts suited each other, so well did his better half suit Mister Horn. Tall, handsome, and somewhat stately in her ways, folks said that she was proud; but those who knew her best felt that she was the very woman for the free and easy, the careless and irregular Mister Horn.

With her everything was serious; duty was the whole ten commandments, the law and the prophets; and duty meant hard work, almost uneasy cleanliness, and keeping one's self for the most part to one's self. Careful and thrifty, to her common-sense and quick discernment Mister Horn's industry was indebted for his success in life; and if he sometimes gave with a hint that she shouldn't know of it, it was through her good management that he had so much to give. Indeed, if the truth were all told, he owed the very "Mister" itself to her ways, and to the respectable look that she always gave to things.

By eight o'clock in the evening supper and prayers were over. In those parts civilization had not reached that pitch of folly that eats heartily at ten, and then, with the digestion at full work, goes to bed to rest. Now, seated in his high-backed chair, was the time that Mister Horn loved a chat.

The sun itself has spots, and Mr. Horn was not perfect.

Mister Horn was not perfect, we have said. He smoked, and added to the fault, as his better half explained to visitors: "I shouldn't mind so much if he'd take a clean white pipe, but that short black thing is so very common looking! I tell him it's disgraceful." Yet here, too, they suited each other. The front rooms were shuttered and locked, while the cosy kitchen sat up with the blinking fire and purring cat. In other words, the better half retired early—then Mister Horn smoked his pipe in peace.

Now he would tell of himself—how he was a little fellow when the sad tidings reached England that the heroic Dr. Cook had died on his way to India, and had been buried at sea. He heard of the young missionaries who had gone with him, left to land among strangers in that strange country far away, and the story filled the lad's heart with grief for them. Very poor, he could do but little, but that little he could and would do with all his might. Rising before daybreak he went out to sweep the roads, and thus to raise a few half-pence for the poor missionaries. No contribution was ever more hardily earned or more willingly given than the "small sums" of this little subscriber.

In early life he was converted.

In his case conversion meant the breaking in of a wonderful love upon his cold and lonely life. It was a love that lifted him right out of his hardships and poverty. It made the blue heaven bend over him in tender care; it sent the sun to shine for his joy, and the cooling breeze for his refreshing. Away in the lonely fields this love brought him a constant communion and an aliding gladness; and when he came home to his poor lodgings this love was father and mother and brother and all to him. So with all the generosity of boyhood he counted it his greatest delight, as much as his sacred duty, to testify his gratitude for such wondrous love in any way he could. Thus early the truth had burned its way into his innermost being: "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me." From the first he began to think about the claims of God's work. His favourite maxim was this: "A man ought to think as much about giving as about getting." And thus early he put it into practice. He has told us that in those days flour was at war prices—a phrase happily unknown to this generation. He earned only six shillings a week, and out of that he had to pay for lodging as well as living. But whatever else went short, he felt that he must acknowledge the goodness of the Lord who gave him all that he had. He took the old Methodist rule as the limit downward, not upward: "Every member contributes one penny weekly (unless he is in extreme poverty), and one shilling quarterly." And he felt that his giving was none the less acceptable because it cost him much. He often referred to it in later times. "There's one thing that lots of good people never will know in this world—and 'tis one o' them that we sha'n't know anything about in heaven itself—the joy of really pinching yourself to give. I often think that that is the blessed thing about being hard up when you do give—then you feel it."

It was with a merry laugh that he would tell the young members how that, when he had been at the class meeting three or four times, he said one evening, "Put me down, please, for a penny a week." The leader looked at me through his spectacles and opened his mouth wide, and after a minute or two said, "What!" as if he were quite frightened.

"A penny a week, sir," I said, putting down the money for each evening that I had been at class. The leader was what you might call a common sort of a man—for they are the commonest sort of people that I know—he thought that the less he could give the better, and if he could do without giving at all it would be better still. Just as if the Lord did not see what was left behind; and just as if he never said, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." The man was in good work, and had no family, and yet a penny a week was all that he gave. It looked so bad for a lad like I was to give so much, and it quite shocked him.

"You can't afford it, Jim, you know you can't," he said. "Put it down, sir," I replied, "put it down. There it is, and there it will be as long as ever I've got the love of Jesus in my heart."

Soon after that came the time for the renewal of the quarterly tickets. The leader headed the list with what