

CHOICE LITERATURE.

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

BY MARK GUY PEARSE.

CHAPTER VII.—OLD FRIEND CHAFFER—WHERE HE LIVED.

Of all Mister Horn's especial friends, there was no such favourite as old Friend Chaffer. If Mister Horn began to talk of what people could do in the matter of giving, all knew pretty well what was coming; there was sure to be something about old Friend Chaffer.

Their admiration was mutual, and usually expressed itself in the same terms.

"Ah, he is a wonder, is old Friend Chaffer," jerked out Mister Horn, while the ash stick came down with a thump, as much as to say, "Ah, there's no mistake about that, master."

"You know he's a wonder, is Mister Horn, wholly a wonder," quoth old Friend Chaffer, with a shake of his little old head, and a broad smile that revealed the lingering grinders, few and far between.

He lived in the village of Hillingsham, commonly known as Hill'sam. The traveller who should pass up the narrow, winding hill and reach the scattered houses of this parish, would not think it peculiarly favourable to the development of heroes.

Old labourers, bent and withered as if beaten down by the winds and rain, and dried up by the suns in which they had spent fifty or sixty years of their life, crept along in smock-frocks, each with its peculiar ornamentation in front like a breastplate of needle-work; the projecting legs were buttoned in leather gaiters that narrowed into marvellously small ankles, and then went swelling into a pair of huge hob-nailed boots. Younger men had, for the most part, enlisted or emigrated; while the daughters were hired from year to year at the Michaelmas "statty," as the statute fair was called. The early cock-crow woke the little place to the kind of waking sleep that was its life; the hum of the threshing-machine was fitting music throughout the monotonous day; and in the evening the booming cock-chaffer had it almost to himself.

The church stood long and low amid a clump of dying trees. The church-yard, separated from the road by a slimy horse-pond, was neglected and nettie-grown. The weather-worn wooden memorials of the dead, stretching the whole length of the grave, told only of long life and unchanging names. The village, that commenced with the church, was in every way a continuation of its appearance. It was ugly—almost ugly enough for a town. The houses were neither sufficiently old nor poor for Nature to have touched them with her kindly hand into something of her own; there was no moss-grown thatch, nor walls thick with honey-suckle and clustering rose, nor ivy climbing—

"Aloft, a grove; beneath, a knot of snakes."

The cottages were most of them of dull red brick with slated roofs, that in summer looked fever-stricken with the heat, and in winter looked blue and red with the cold.

At the other end of the village was the other place of worship, as if between them they would secure all the souls. It was a white-washed little place, with low roof and two arched windows. The door was covered with many coats of paperings, remnants of various parish notices and circuit announcements, with lingering patches legible enough to make an absurd jumble, in which a public tea-meeting was followed by compulsory vaccination, and special sermons had to do with votes for the knights of the shire, and "sermons will be preached by—" followed by a list of rate-payers as long as one's arm. Everybody knew in a moment that it was a Methodist chapel.

Such was Hill'sam, where old Friend Chaffer lived and worked through the six days of the week. But Hill'sam on Sunday seemed quite another place. The church woke up and crashed out a merry peal that met you with its music a mile away. The men put on the week's clean smock frock, the women donned their old red cloaks, and the best bonnet saw the light once more. A Sunday at Hill'sam was a day to be remembered. You overtook men and women hot and dusty with their long walk, the father carrying one, perhaps two little ones, while the maternal shawl bulged with the shape of a basket.

You might have known where the chapel was by the folk that lingered about the door and in the road. At church all went in before the service commenced, and were ready at once reverently to worship God; but at chapel they waited thus as if to make sure that the preacher had come before they risked themselves inside—perhaps there was too much reason for their caution.

Then the singing at Hill'sam: Well, to say the least it could not be forgotten. There was a clarinet, and which tried to make up in zeal what it lacked in skill; and the fiddle—the fiddle fiddle—that had its periodical fits of goodness, and then was periodically reported to have given up religion and gone to church. There was the pious old leader—Heaven bless him!—who believed tunes were spiritual exactly in proportion to their runs and repeats. Yet was there a heart about it all, and an earnestness, that were very much better—more acceptable to God and more profitable to the people—than the vain performances of many more ambitious places in which no one can join.

After the service the preacher for the day had to meet the one Society class. This over, all adjourned to the vestry, where a score of cups and saucers, the opening of bundles, and other signs, intimated that dinner came next. One basket produced a knife and a fork—they were for the preacher; for him, too, were the slices of bread and meat, and the further luxuries of a plate, a screw of salt, and a mustard pot. The others sat round on the forms, ranged in families—a family clasp knife with its one large blade did common duty on the bread, and bit of cheese or bacon. Then came two or three cups of tea, completing the meal.

Oh, what happy talks knit those hearts together, and

helped to make the Sabbath the blessed day that it was to them. Some of earth's godliest saints gathered at that humble meal. Look at the tall, bald-headed old man in the corner, keeping himself very much to himself; and we, he may, for he has neither kith nor kin, that he knows of, in the whole wide world. Those large eyes of his, staring out into vacancy as if they had seen nothing, and found in that enough to be in a perpetual wonder, have seen some rare sights. He was brought up as a lad to the business and profession of a smuggler by a pious uncle—for in those days some believed that piety and smuggling could meet together and kiss each other; and it is duly recorded yet in the "Minutes," how that the Conference gravely asked what should be done to put down smuggling in the Societies, when it was agreed that no smuggler—should be allowed to remain among us as a local preacher! He was kidnapped and pressed into his Majesty's navy more than sixty years ago, and bears upon him traces of incidents as romantic as ever were written; and those wide-open eyes have seen more history than most of us have read. But the one story he can remember most vividly, the one incident he can talk of most unwearily, is how that under an orange tree, on the top of a lonely island in the South Pacific Ocean, he sought the forgiveness of his sins and found peace with God; and how that it was followed by a revival on board the man-of-war, in which half the crew and many of the officers were converted; and how that they sailed into battle singing hymns—hymns that sometimes were suddenly silenced here and there, not because the song had ceased, but because the singer had gone to sing elsewhere.

There is good old Mother Bear, too, mumbling her bit of bread and muttering her gratitude by turns, who, when a friend called to see her the other day, said, "Ah, God is good, He is good to think of me as He do, for I ain't nohow worth it. Ye know up to las' Saturday I had half-a-crown a week from the parish, and then I had a goodish appetite, but then they tookt sixpence off, and that very day I los' my appetite, so I can do just as well as ever—Ah, God is good, He can make things fit so!"

That old white-haired saint who has just come hobbling in on a pair of sticks—he with the many folds of white kerchief wrapped about his neck, and the tight-fitting suit of black that ends in the gouty knuckles and glossy knobs on his shoes—he is the father of Methodism in these parts. A local preacher sixty years ago, you should hear him tell how that when preaching out of doors once in the neighbouring village the bulky butcher came behind and suddenly clasped him in his arms, and flung him into the horse-pond; swollen as it was with winter rains, he had a very narrow escape from drowning. And how that same butcher shortly afterward was stricken down under the power of the Word—felled like an ox—and went roaring for many days in the disquietude of his soul, until he found peace with God and became a champion for Jesus, as before he had been for the devil.

After dinner the children met for an hour in Sunday-school—humble work enough it was, that did not get much beyond the letters and small words, but, like all true work for God, it was imperishable, and Heaven kept the record faithfully in the Book of Golden deeds.

The afternoon service closed the public religious duties of the day at Hill'sam. Then the fathers and mothers, with their children and empty baskets, went homeward over the fields or along the highways, leaving the village to sink to its usual quiet for another week.

But before this our attention would have been caught by the quaint figure of one who must have a chapter all to himself.

CHAPTER VIII.—OLD FRIEND CHAFFER—WHAT HE DID.

Now of all the prosaic folks of this parish of Hill'sam there was no one with less of promise in his make-up than our ancient Friend Chaffer.

A bent little old man, with flat feet that shuffled along uneasily, was what one saw at the first glance. "As tender as old Friend Chaffer's corns," was a well-worn proverb with Mister Horn, by which he usually summed up his opinion of folk that were easily put out and vexed. As he shuffled nearer there was disclosed a figure quaint in feature, expression, and dress. The hat, that once held the skull of an eminent divine, accommodated itself to this smaller head by lying back until it almost rested upon his shoulders, and projected in front immediately above the eyes, just a fringe of flat hair marking the line of separation. Underneath was a pair of as pleasant eyes as ever merry wrinkles played around; the cheeks and dumpy nose were scorched into a permanent glossy redness; the mouth, large and s. ken, was fixed into an unchangeable smile that seemed to give a twist to all he said, making the husky sentences end in a sort of little laugh. A velvet coat with sporting buttons hung in folds around the little old man. The trousers might have laid claim to all the privileges of apostolic succession, and, like the doctrine itself, had to be much patched from many sources.

His life had been spent as a farm labourer. On ten shillings a week he and his good wife had brought up a family of eleven children, and now at seventy years of age he found his hard work rewarded with a parish allowance of five shillings a week.

Look at him well, for he is a hero. Ay, look at him, as Mister Horn would often say, look well at him in this world, for he will be too high up for most of us to see him in the next.

If the very many thousands whose names fill the Annual Report of the Wesleyan Missionary Society were to pass before us, a vaster, perhaps more imposing, procession would rarely be seen. Crowned heads and robes of royalty would swell its pomp; generous merchants and devoted ladies would testify that giving doth not impoverish; chiefs and chiefs decked with feathers and wild beasts' skins would lead on their tribes; furred wanderers from the north would march beside the negro and the stately Brahmin; almost every nation would lend its variety of costume and appearance, and send its pledges that all the kingdoms of the earth should become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ. But first and foremost should be none of these. Not the king with splen-

did gift in stately chariot; not the chief enthroned with barbaric pomp upon the glittering elephant; not the stalwart leader of a once savage tribe now bringing the weapons of cruelty to lay at the feet of the Prince of Peace; not the merchant prince whose vast magnificence has made his name a household word throughout the world. Heading the mighty host should be a little stature and quaint figure hurrying on with shuffling feet—first and foremost there would be our old Friend Chaffer!

With five shillings a week to live on—five shillings for rent and food, for firing and clothes, with class money never forgotten—he appears in this year's report for one pound and twelve shillings!

One pound twelve! It sets one thinking of the report, and of what some of those entries mean that look so unimportant, and are so quickly read—what stories of self-denial are locked up in them—what scheming to save, what struggles to spare. Ay, and more commonly forgotten, what system beginning thus has unconsciously spread itself throughout all the management, and wrought more than its own supply.

This one pound twelve was the result of a year's hard and painful work. Miles were shuffled over to collect a shilling, and very often for less. Little bits of garden produce were lovingly worked at, and eagerly sold for a few pence. How wanly the conversation would be turned round when any one dropped in, how cunningly led up to a certain point, until suddenly the box made its appearance, explaining and applying all that had gone before! The philosophy of that scripture, "A liberal man deviseth liberal things," could find no better illustration than in old Friend Chaffer. With no such restless thought did ever genius seek to apply a new principle or to produce a new machine; with no such uneasy watchfulness did ambition ever try to turn advantages to its own account as that with which old Friend Chaffer sought to fill his box. Like the woman of Bible story, he had but "a precious box" to bring for his Master's acceptance and service; and to fill it richly full each year was his dream, his ambition, and his toil.

Picture the large hat, the glossy face, the loose coat, shuffling up the hill with the missionary box under his arm, tied up in a coloured cotton handkerchief. In this sweltering heat, and with his painful steps, it will be an hour's hard work to get to the farm house to which he is going. At length he reaches it, and stands amid the sheds. And now, making the pigeons fly disturbed from the barn roof, and making the old dog moan in dismal concert, the little husky voice sings to the traditional tune the familiar hymn:

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow
The gladly-solemn sound;
Let all the nations know,
To earth's remotest bound,
The year of jubilee is come;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners, home."

Then panting with the effort, and pausing to recover breath and to stroke the little fringe of flat hair over his eyes, he sang the second and other verses of the hymn:

"Jesus, our great High Priest,
Hath full atonement made:
Ye mournful souls, be glad;
Ye weary spirits, rest;
The year of jubilee is come;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners, home."

"Ye who have sold for naught
Your heritage above,
Shall have it back unbought:
The gift of Jesus' love;
The year of jubilee is come;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners home."

At once the news spread that old Friend Chaffer had arrived. All knew him, and all were compelled to like him, if it were only for his simple, cheery face. The master came across the yard from his stock to lean upon his spud with an amused attention, and to roll in a few bass notes when it came to the last two lines: the "missis" and eager children crowded the old porch; the servants looked out from the windows, and boys in little smocks and gaiters gathered round him with a customary grin. When the hymn was gone through, the box was carefully untied and handed to the master, and thence throughout the house. Everybody gave something. As it came back again it was a picture worthy of any pencil to see the little old head hung on one side as the box was lifted to try its increased weight, the face glowing with contentment, and the mouth and cheeks and eyes all puckered up into a hundred quaint wrinkles that seemed to vie with each other in expression of merry gratitude. Then came a verse or two of the hymn:

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more,

"To Him shall endless prayer be made,
And endless praises crow His head;
His name like sweet perfume shall rise,
With every morning sacrifice."

Again the box was carefully wrapped up, and the little bent figure shuffled homeward, past all work for itself, but thankful, most thankful, that he could still do something for his beloved Master.

Once he boldly proposed to call upon the parson of the parish, who had not more kindly regard for the Methodists than one could expect. They were a sort of poachers who trespassed and poached upon his preserves with impunity. When old Friend Chaffer suggested it to his wife she was almost alarmed, and tried to talk him out of it. The matter soon dropped, and the good wife triumphantly concluded that he had given up so wild a notion; but, unknown to her, he shuffled away one day to the rectory.

The good clergyman received him kindly, and heard his request, and, indeed, handled with some curiosity the treasure box. But putting it down, as old Friend Chaffer fin-