

THE LORD'S PURSE-BEARERS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649639502

The Lord's Purse-Bearers by Hesba Stretton

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HESBA STRETTON

**THE LORD'S
PURSE-BEARERS**

THE
LORD'S PURSE-BEARERS.

BY
HESBA STRETTON,
AUTHOR OF "JESSICA'S FIRST PRAYER," "IN PRISON AND OUT,"
"NO PLACE LIKE HOME," ETC. ETC.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."



LONDON:
JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.
MDCCLXXXIII.

051 a 461

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

PREFACE.

SEVEN years ago I wrote, "Nothing is worse for children begging in the streets, neglect itself is far better, than the easy method of gratifying our emotional pity and pacifying our conscience, by simply taking money from our purse, and dropping it into their little outstretched hands. Better to drop a live coal upon the quivering palm. If we can do nothing more, for Christ's sake let us refrain from doing them this injury. Whatever the pretext may be, however plausible the reason for begging, it is always a cruel wrong to the child when we suffer it to succeed."

Since then my convictions on this subject have steadily grown deeper and stronger. I look upon giving to a beggar as a crime similar to giving strong drink to one already drunken: giving to a child who is begging is but tying a millstone about his neck, and drowning him in the depths of a sea of crime and misery. Last year I was shocked and

aroused once more by some words spoken in Exeter Hall by the Rev. R. C. Billing, Rector of Spitalfields. "Hundreds of children," he said, "under the shadow of my church are being starved and made to suffer that they may move the Christian public; and the Christian public will pass along the streets, and dispense their alms to those who are moving them to pity by such imposition." Mr. Billing took me to visit the low lodging-houses in his parish, and the Workhouse Infirmary, where I saw for myself the wretched child whom I have called Fidge in the following story. When my story was finished—written with sore pain of heart to myself—I submitted it to Mr. Billing, and he told me it was "only too true." Mr. George Holland, of the George Yard Ragged School, Whitechapel, who has laboured there, among the lowest of the poor, for many long years, said to me, "It is impossible to exaggerate the misery of children used for begging purposes."

Yet our Lord's command is "Freely ye have received, freely give." And St. Paul recalls for us another of His sayings: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." No one can be a Christian who lets the least of Christ's brethren suffer want. Only let us take care how we give,

and what we give. You give money in the streets? Even sinners do the same; and the half-drunken charity of the gin-palace will often exceed yours. In this way you do not, and you cannot, minister unto the Lord. Every desolate child has a claim upon us; but when he cries to us for food, let us take care that we do not give him a stone, or put a scorpion into his hand.

Christ gave His life as a ransom. Not many among us can do this literally; but each of us can seek out, and help to the utmost of our power, those who are ministering to the children of our great cities; and they and we can thus fulfil the last command of the Lord Jesus, when He asked the Apostle who had denied Him "Lovest thou me? And Peter saith unto him, Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs."

August 1882.

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