



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. X.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MAY 11, 1860.

No. 39

THE HAPPINESS OF BEING RICH.

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CHAPTER IV.

(Continued.)

When Pauw entered his home, he found his father sitting at the table. The poor man was pale, and looked very desponding; his eyes, wearied with his unwatched and involuntary vigil, were dull and restless.

'Pauw, why are you so red in the face?' he asked, in some surprise.

'Why, father,' was the answer, 'I have been to Katie; she was sitting sobbing and crying so that I could have broken my heart to see her.—The shoemaker wanted to turn me out of doors; but we have come to an understanding. Are you ill, father? You seem to me to look so pale; shall I run for the doctor?'

'No, no, it is gone now; it was nothing but a disturbance of the nerves. And what was the cause of Katie's sorrow? what made the shoemaker so angry with you?'

'Why, I don't exactly know: mother has said in the shop yonder that Katie was not good enough to enter our family, and thereupon—you can easily fancy how—the shoemaker got on the high horse. But he is off again by this time; and when mother comes home, I will go with her to the shoemaker's and set all straight.'

'Your mother! your mother,' said the schouwveger, with a deep sigh, 'she will make us all miserable. She can't restrain her pride, and chat and gossips as if we had ever so many thousand crowns coming to us.'

'Three sacks of gold, father. When I was coming just now from the shoemaker's Annie, there at the green-grocer's, asked me if it was true that we had, over and above the sacks of gold, I don't know how many houses and ships on the sea.'

'Good heavens!' said the schouwveger, sadly, 'tis very unlucky. With all this chattering and prating of your mother, we shall never have a moment's peace again. All the thieves and vagabonds of the city will be lurking about the house. Who knows how many plots will be contrived to break in here at the first opportunity, and rob us—murder us, perhaps.'

'Yes, indeed, father; that is very likely. It seems the whole city is standing in groups discussing our wonderful legacy.'

'Wonderful legacy!' repeated the schouwveger, scratching his head in desperation. 'Ah, Pauw, there is not near so much as they say.'

'The neighbors say it is at least three sacks of gold,' said Pauw, laughing.

'The neighbors are out of their senses.'

'Well, father, wasn't there at least one single sack of gold?'

'No, no; only a moderate burgher's fortune; enough to live quietly on with care and economy.'

'Whom am I to believe? Mother talks of a great house with a *porte-cochere* on St. James's Place; of hats with feathers; of maid-servants and footmen; and of so many other things, that I really thought she had found Fortunatus's purse, and we were going to live in a mountain of gold.'

'Your mother will bring us to lie on straw again,' cried Master Smet, with bitterness and wrath. 'But wait—I'll let her see that I am master here. And if I once get off my hook, I'll trample her hat and feathers under my feet, and tear all her silk clothes to pieces; and if she won't dress as she ought to do, I'll turn her out of doors. Yes, yes, don't look at me so, Pauw; I'll turn her out of doors. And you, too; what's that round your neck, you prodigal?'

'Oh, bless me! I had forgotten all about it,' sighed Pauw, tearing the satin neckerchief from his throat. 'Mother made me put it on; but the fewer colored rags I have on my body the better I shall be pleased.'

The young man now started backward, keeping his eye fixed with gloomy surprise upon his father, who had again stooped down with his hands, as though exhausted by fatigue, and was looking vacantly at the table.

After a while Pauw said, half angrily—

'I wish the legacy was—I know where!—We were not born for riches; we don't take kindly to them. Would you believe, father, that I'd rather remain poor than pass my life like this?'

'Oh, my child, don't wish for poverty,' said his father, with a sigh. 'If your mother does not behave more sensibly, we shall soon be cast down again into the depth of misery and want.—Perhaps they already stand threatening at our door.'

The tone of his father's voice was so singularly harsh and melancholy, that the young man looked at him with a kind of terror, and exclaimed, with painful anxiety—

'But, father, you are ill—very ill.'

'There's nothing the matter with me; I am only a little bit tired,' was the faint reply.

'How is it possible? Can the money have

thus changed us all? Your eyes are cloudy, your face is pale, your voice is quite changed from what it was; all is so slow and so languid now, father. Ah, we were always so happy, and so merry; you used to sing from morning till night; every word you uttered was so funny that no one could help laughing. I feel sure that money is a foe to joy; for now and then I find my own head falling on my breast, and something—I don't know what—begins to gnaw at my heart.'

'Yes, my boy,' muttered the schouwveger, 'there is indeed some truth in what you say; but yet to be rich is a great advantage.'

'So it seems,' said Pauw, bitterly. 'Since there has been talk of this horrid legacy, I have heard nothing but grumbling and lamentation.—I begin to fear that people will soon call us Jan-Sorg (*careworn*) and Pauwken-Verdriet (*grief*).

'It's all your mother's fault,' said Master Smet, in a tone of vexation; 'her love of extravagance is what worries me. Only fancy, Pauw, she is gone off to look out for a maid-servant; and she has made up her mind not to have any one who has not lived with some *my lady*! I set myself against it, and was very angry; but get an idea out of your mother's head if you can! Strange people in my house. Why, I shall never sleep in peace again.'

'But why are you so afraid of everybody, father? If we had got the legacy, and if there was a great treasure, here in the house, I could understand it; but now—'

The front door was opened at this moment, and a personage entered, whose appearance cut short Pauw's sentence.

It was a young footboy, with a golden band round his hat, and clothed in an old livery coat, which hung about his body like a sack, and the tails of which reached down to his heels. The fellow had sandy hair, and a coarse lumpy face, which betokened an unwonted stolidity.

At his entrance, he stared round the room quite bewildered, and muttered, half aloud, to himself—'The people in the city are determined to take me for a fool. I'm regularly taken in; but anyhow I'll ask—'

'Well, now, what do you mean by this?' cried Pauw.

'It is only, you see, my lad,' answered the footboy, 'I am not where I ought to be. The girls in the street there have taken me in. I wanted to find my lady the schouwveger's wife, who has, all at once, got so many bags of gold and ships at sea.'

'Well, that is here,' answered Pauw.

'Here, here, in this house?' stammered the footboy. 'A *my lady* here? It can't be.'

'If you won't believe it, begone as quick as you can, and leave us in peace.'

The schouwveger shook his head in anxious thought, but spoke not a word; he kept his eye fixed on the table, with a smile of bitter contempt on his face.

'If it is here,' said the boy to Pauw, 'then I may as well say what I've come about. You must know I live with my lady van Steen. She took me from running after the cows, and said I should live the life of a lord; but you wouldn't believe how I have been treated. It is nothing but a thump here and kick there. Since I jammed the tail of her half-starved lapdog in the door, and set the window-curtains on fire by accident, she can't bear to set her eyes on me. I hear nothing but—'donkey, booby, country lout,' and—but you have known all about it, I dare say—the words rich people use. I have heard you say that your lady wanted a footman, to stand behind her carriage, and carry her muff or her prayer-book. Besides, I can turn my hand to anything—horses especially I can groom and take care of. You are, I suppose, the stable-boy; and the old fellow there is, perhaps, the coachman of my lady. Put in a good word for me, both of you; we shall understand one another very well, and contrive to live a jolly life.'

Pauw looked at his father with a merry laugh; but the schouwveger broke out into a furious passion. He sprang up, clenched his fist, and roared to the foot-boy—

'Get out of my house, you shameless scoundrel. Quick! look sharp! or I'll knock you into the middle of the street.'

The poor footboy seeing him prepare to execute his threat, slunk out at the door in consternation, and muttered—

'Now, now, don't bite me. I haven't done you any harm. These great city lords—I believe they all have a screw loose in their heads.'

And when he had said these words, he shut the door quickly, and ran away as fast as his legs would carry him.

The door opened again very soon. It was Dame Smet, who strode into the room, darting angry and threatening glances at her husband and at her son.

'Pauw,' growled the schouwveger, pale with anger, 'I am going up stairs, for I feel I can't lay hands on a woman; if I stay here, I shall do something.'

And so saying he went grumbling up the stairs.

'What's going on now?' asked the dame, in a haughty tone of voice.

'Oh, nothing at all, mother,' answered the youth. 'A stupid lout of a boy came here to offer himself as servant, and we have sent him about his business. If you must hire a servant, you may as well get one who is fit to be seen.'

'Oh, is that all?' muttered she. 'I thought, by your father's looks, that something dreadful had happened again.'

Pauw took her hand, and asked, with a voice of earnest entreaty—

'Mother, may I ask you something, before you take off your cloak?'

'Yes, to be sure, child; anything you like.'

'Oh, mother, I have been to Katie. If you had seen her, you would have burst into tears; the poor lamb was almost dying. She implores just to go to her house, and tell her that you are not angry with her; and I, knowing your dear kind heart, mother—I promised you would come. Come, mother, come.'

'You wheedling rogue, you,' said the dame, with a smile, 'who could refuse you anything?'

Pauw went to the foot of the stairs, and shouted out, 'Father, I am going with mother close by to the shoemaker's. We shall be back again in a minute.'

And, with a joyous countenance, he led his mother out of the house.

CHAPTER V.

As if the treasure had been only an envious sprite who had assumed this form to torment the poor schouwveger, his house, once so happy, was changed into a hell of gloom, and sadness and discord.

My lady Smet—for so she insisted on being called—had for some days been in delighted possession of her new clothes and her silk *chapeau*. From head to foot she was covered with velvet and with satin; she wore gold in her ears, gold round her neck, gold on her bosom, and gold on both her hands.

Thus appressed and adorned, quite like a genuine 'my lady,' she roamed all over the city, and felt not the slightest annoyance when she saw that everybody stopped and stared at her as she passed—in amazement or in amusement—and that many pointed at her with their fingers.

This universal attention was, on the contrary, a source of great delight to her, and flattered her pride extremely. She fancied that the boys said one to another—'There goes the wife of the schouwveger who has so suddenly become rich as Jew.'

And all this pointing and whispering was far from appearing to her a rebuke; she thought the passers-by were admiring the staidness of her bearing and the grace with which she walked.—She read in the eyes of every one she met—'Look, there is my lady Smet. What a fine woman? What dignity! One can see at once that she is of a great family.'

Indeed, had not the fame of her wonderful legacy made her known all over the city, no one would have distinguished her from a real 'my lady'—except, perhaps, that the suddenly-raised schouwveger's lady was covered with golden ornaments, like the figures in the window of a *magasin des modes*; that she carried her head somewhat stiffly, and turned it so slowly and so perseveringly in all directions, just as though it were set on a pivot; that she had great broad feet, and took great strides like a man; that her face was very red, and that she seemed to ask every one she met, 'Well, now, what do you think of that? I hope you see now that 'my lady' Smet is of a good family.'

She liked best of all to walk round the Meir and the Egg-market, where the most splendid and fashionable shops were to be found. There she would make some little purchases, and gossip by the hour with the shopkeepers' wives and daughters, all about *my aunt* in Holland; and about her intention to take a house, and furnish it as grandly and as richly as that of the first nobleman in the land.

She inquired daily and of everybody whether they knew of a good housemaid, or a good cook, or a coachman, a stable-boy, or a footman. She asked everybody which was the most stylish color to choose for the horses she was going to buy; and gave it as her opinion that the Meir was not a healthy situation to live in, because there was a large drain under the street. Therefore she had determined to take a house with a *porte-cochere* on the St. James's market-place; and since the owner would not sell it, she meant to rent it until some good opportunity of buying presented itself.

After having, in the course of her ramble sufficiently exhibited herself to the wondering city, she returned homeward; and she took care never to walk twice on the same side of her own street, so that all the neighbors might have the benefit of seeing and admiring her.

On her former acquaintance she would bestow a cold smile of condescending benevolence. She

called some of the dames by their Christian names; promised them all her protection and good graces; and this she did so haughtily that the poor people who were the objects of her civility felt their hearts overflowing with gall at sight of the proud and supercilious upstart.

The schouwveger was about the unhappiest man on the face of the earth. He knew well that the treasure was not inexhaustible, and grumbled from morning till night at the extravagance of his wife. She avenged herself by calling him a hunk, a miser, a hair-splitter, and averred that any one could see that he didn't come of a good family.

Besides, the money was *hers*, and not *his*, and she might do what she liked with it. She had no notion of living like people who never saw more than one crown at a time; and if he chose to bite a farthing into quarters, and sit wearing himself out like an old miser, she would let him see that she knew how rich people spent their money.

Then the schouwveger would go into a violent passion, and insist on having the key of the chest; and then *my lady*, forgetting the proprieties of her station, would put her arms akimbo, and overwhelm her hapless spouse with such a flood of abuse and threatenings, that he was invariably obliged to beat a retreat, and creep up stairs with tears in his eyes, to grumble by himself.

Sometimes matters went still farther; on one occasion their strife had ended in blows. The schouwveger had, after considerable provocation, laid his hand somewhat uncivilly on the shoulder of his disdainful spouse; but my lady Smet, irritated by this unwarrantable liberty, had sprung at him like a wild-cat, and ploughed his face with her nails.

There the matter ended; but both husband and wife looked so spitefully at each other, and were so furious, that there remained no hope of reconciliation. For several days not a word passed between them, or if by chance one of them addressed a question to the other, the answer was a snarl or a vicious growl.

Dame Smet insisted on taking the great house on the St. James's market. Her husband talked very loud, and declared that he didn't mean to move. This disagreement led to violent and prolonged quarrels, and already the dame had declared more than once that she would go off to her lawyer, and petition the supreme court for a divorce.

Pauw, the merry lad, had lost all his mirth and energy. The everlasting disputes and quarrels of his parents had broken his spirit quite;—for, though he talked in an off-hand way, and turned everything into ridicule, he had a tender and affectionate heart.

No joke escaped him now; and when he made a faint attempt to say something lively, it was quite a failure; he couldn't help it—but there was always an undertone of bitterness and sadness in his voice.

Whenever he was alone with his father, he used every effort to comfort him and to soothe his irritated spirit. When he was with his mother, he tried with gentle and loving words to make her see that his father was perhaps a little too overbearing, but that his carefulness and frugality might easily be excused.

Poor Pauw's efforts were all in vain. No sooner did his parents meet again, than the nigardliness of the one came in collision with the extravagance of the other, and the contest was renewed with increased vigor and bitterness.

In the young man's heart was another point of anguish and depression. His mother had, it is true, abandoned her intention of separating him from Katie; but she had never ceased to impress on the poor child a sense of her great inferiority, and to inflict the deepest wounds possible on the self-respect of the shoemaker.

When Katie came to see her, she insisted on instructing her how to walk, and how to stand; how she must speak, and how she ought to salute her neighbors; how she ought to carry her head, and how she must turn out her toes.

The sorrowful maiden, sustained by her deep affection, submitted with exemplary meekness to the whims and follies of her future mother; she even seemed gratified whenever Dame Smet impressed upon her what a favor, what an honor, they conferred on her in admitting her into so good a family.

In the shop and in the neighborhood, whenever the matter was talked over, *my lady* Smet recounted her generosity and true nobleness of soul, and instanced how she had consented, out of mere good nature, to the marriage of her son with the daughter of a—shoemaker. She had even ventured to say to Katie's father that it was a very great honor for him to become a member of so distinguished a family.

The depreciating remarks of Dame Smet were a constant worry to the shoemaker. He did not conceal his vexation from Pauw, to whom he muttered his doubts how the marriage would turn out, and declared he would put a stop to it if Dame Smet persisted in treating his daughter

like a beggar-maid, who was just tolerated out of charity.

The shoemaker, although only a poor artisan, had a pride of his own; and he would assuredly have long since refused to admit Pauw into his house, had not both the lad and his father said all kinds of soothing words to him, and implored his forgiveness with tears in their eyes. But though he postponed the final decision, there remained an increasing bitterness in his heart, and he no longer regarded Pauw with a favorable eye.

These untoward occurrences began to alarm the two young people not infrequently. When Pauw was seated by Katie's side, the tears would flow silently down their cheeks.

Eight days had already passed since the discovery of the treasure; the schouwveger had not once left his house, except to go to church on Sunday.

It was now Monday, and the evening was falling in; there had been already a violent quarrel—with this difference, however, that this time it was followed by an apparent reconciliation.

Dame Smet availed herself of the propitious moment to convince her husband that he did wrong in sitting at home all day long, and that it would be better, both for his health and for his understanding, that he should go about a bit among the neighbors.

Pauw promised, at his father's request, that he would not leave the house unprotected; and so the schouwveger allowed himself to be persuaded to go out and drink a pint of beer with his friends.

His wife had expended much eloquence in the attempt to convince him that he ought not to go into a public house, but into a *cafe* in the Cathedral Close, or on the Meir, and that he ought to begin to drink wine. But, being now in a good humor, she agreed, at length, that her husband might take a turn outside the city towards the Dyke, just as he used to do.

When the schouwveger came to the Dyke and found himself among his old friends, some time was occupied in congratulations; but as soon as they had placed themselves round the table to have a game at cards, these remarks ceased of themselves, and the schouwveger felt as comfortable and as merry as before he became rich. How cheering the sound of the voices of his friends! What real affection and heartfelt peace in every one of their words!—How soft and inspiring the taste of his customary beer! What a relish there was in his pipe! How enchantingly the smoke rose in clouds above their heads!

Master Smet felt himself in another world, and for some hours forgot all about his treasure,—forgot even his wife. He found again some of his former jokes, and more than once caused his friends a hearty laugh.

The clock of the public-house was striking ten, when the schouwveger, astonished that the time had passed so quickly, rose and said that he must return home.

They tried to keep him. There was in another public-house a match going on between two butchers, which should eat most hard eggs; and they wanted to sit it out.

Master Smet, who had already remained much too late, through forgetfulness, shook hands with his friends, and assured them that he would come and keep them company some evenings every week, just as he did before.

It was quite half an hour's walk from the Dyke to the gate of the city, and the road was very lonely.

The night was dark; but, as the schouwveger had gone this road a hundred times, he walked on without fear.

He felt very glad that he had seen his friends: his heart beat more light, and in the darkness a gentle smile played upon his mouth; for he was thinking, as he walked, how many pleasant evenings he should spend there on the Dyke, among his old friends, now that spring was come again. And now he had reached the outskirts of the city, and was walking under some high trees, without thought or apprehension of danger.

All at once a suppressed cry of terror escaped him. A man sprang from behind a tree, and held a pistol to the breast of the trembling schouwveger.

'If you scream or cry, you're a dead man,' said the robber, gruffly.

'What—what do you want of me?' stammered poor Smet, half dead with fright.

'Your money or your life!' said the other with a threatening gesture.

'There—there is all I have; a five-franc piece and a few cents.'

'You are telling a lie; you've had a legacy. I'll have your money, or I'll put this through you!' roared the thief, whistling at the same time, as if to make a signal to some one at a little distance.

Thereupon two other rogues came running from among the underwood; one of them thrust a handkerchief into the schouwveger's mouth, and the other tripped him up on the grass.