

JOHN MAYGER'S CURE

John Mayger was a wood carver who had served his apprenticeship under an expert journeyman in his own small town of T—. Moved with the desire of bettering himself, he determined to start for other parts where the opportunities were greater and the wages much more generous. He carried with him the highest testimonials to his skill and integrity, but unfortunately the dingy solitude of his lodgings in the large Canadian city of M— soon proved as great a bane to him as it had done to so many others before him. Neither innocent recreation nor congenial company was to be found of evenings by the unfriended newcomer, and very few weeks had passed before he made his way to a nearby saloon. Needless to say, John Mayger was soon a heavy drinker; before the year was out he was a drunkard.

He had found employment at his trade shortly after his arrival in M—. His new master was a German who, like thousands of his race, knew how to be a devout and practical Catholic as well as a shrewd man of business. Herr Bauer had taken an interest in John Mayger, who was a skilful workman, and whose honesty was above and beyond all suspicion. Yet warnings and pleadings and threats had but little effect. So that, although the employer had eventually to dismiss him, it was hardly a fortnight before the natural generosity of his disposition and the interest in his business combined to make him take the unhappy carver into his service again.

Things went on in the same old fashion till one day John Mayger made a serious mistake in a design of panelling that had been entrusted to him. It was an important piece of wood carving for a millionaire's drawing-room, and John had now so lost his nerve through excessive drinking that he felt compelled to prime himself with strong liquor in order to steady his hands when responsible work was given him.

This serious bungling in his latest task made the poor drunkard realise that things had come to a crisis. He knew that his employer would no longer keep him, nor could he give him a testimony of character. If John Mayger was discharged he would starve. With these reflections uppermost in his mind, he made a piteous appeal to his employer to be allowed to remain in his service on any conditions.

'On one condition only,' retorted Herr Bauer, speaking with a sternness which concealed regret and even affection for the skilful young man thus brought so low. 'On one condition, a severe one, but you may take it or leave it. It will be a long time after what has occurred before I can trust you again with the simplest work. My confidence is destroyed. It will be for you to restore it by becoming a sober man. Meanwhile if you care to do second-class work here at a second-class workman's wages of ten dollars a week, you may do so, but none the less the moment I see the sign of drink on you or even see or hear of you entering a saloon, you will leave the premises on the spot—and for good.'

The wage reduction was stiff indeed. John Mayger had been earning double that amount every week, and yet he was compelled mournfully to admit that the sum Herr Bauer was going to deduct weekly nearly represented the amount he weekly spent in drink. His master seemed to read his thoughts. 'I feel that this arrangement will not leave you much to spend in liquor, John, but what you shall receive will about keep you. It is to take it or leave it.'

The young man consented. But the kind-hearted employer contrived matters so as to save his self-respect. He was still permitted to retain his own work-table, and many a delicate piece of carving came his way to feel the cunning of his hand.

John Mayger's battle with the drink for the next few months was terrible. But he fought a winning fight, in which his will-power was greatly aided by the pinch of poverty. The stern condition imposed upon him by his employer was continually before him, and urged him to struggle manfully every time the insidious craving appeared. He knew the uncompromising character of Herr Bauer, and it made him feel that his last chance had gone.

And yet John Mayger thought that all was not right. Business is business, it is true, but had not that stern contract that he had entered into a year before meant, if it meant anything, that Herr Bauer was making money out of a workman's disgrace? This view of his affairs was pointed out to him by a fellow-carver, who persuaded him that he was getting little satisfaction out of life, and that an occasional stroll downtown would harm no man.

The point of view appealed to John Mayger, who had begun to grow despondent over his poor prospects. But while determined not to touch a drop of strong liquor or to enter a saloon, he saw no reason why he could not, now and then, enjoy the music and the glitter of the 'Blue Lion,' down the avenue.

John was strictly sober, and the condition still held him fast, but—he had broken his promise. It was here that the tide turned on him. One evening he was coming out of the 'Blue Lion' when he walked almost literally into the arms of Herr Bauer.

'Good-night, sir,' said John.

'Good-night,' said his employer. 'I want to see you in the office first thing to-morrow morning, John.'

John went to bed with heavy misgivings, which were fully justified in the morning. Herr Bauer was cheerful and friendly in manner, but quite determined. It was dismissal. When he had said as much he drew out of the safe a post office depositor's book, opened it and pointed to a credit account of five hundred and fifteen dollars.

'See here, John,' he began, 'here is a savings bank account which I opened for you with the first ten dollars I deducted last year from your weekly salary. I have kept it up ever since for fifty weeks, so that, with interest at three per cent., the amount at present is a little over five hundred dollars, and at the end of the year it will be somewhat more. Of course, as I have just said, I am going to stick to the letter of the condition, now that I know you are visiting taverns. At no time have I had the slightest intention of profiting by the reduction I made in your wages. It will be a simple matter to transfer this money to your account, John; it's yours, and we part friends.'

Herr Bauer's action had the effect of a salutary douche, which the generous and well-meaning little German had intended it to be. The sight of so much money diverted from the tavern-keeper's pocket into his own in the short space of a year, after efforts that had at last become easy; the thought that there might have been twice as much had he resisted temptation when he first came to M—; the strong desire that grew within him to add more dollars to the amount already in the bank; the resolution firmly made at that moment to do so—all these things fluttered confusedly through his head and left him quite deprived of speech for the moment.

His employer looked at him squarely. 'I am pleased to say that I can write you splendid references now, John, and with a clear conscience.'

'God bless you, sir,' broke out poor John Mayger at length, his pent-up emotion finding vent in a few warm tears, for which he was not ashamed, for the two men were alone in the office together. 'God bless you, sir,' he repeated with emphasis. 'Twas the good plan, and 'twas the good head an' the good heart that thought it out. An' it happened in the nick o' time, too. I don't know how to thank you enough, an' 'tis sorry indeed I am to have to leave you, the way things are, for I'd like to keep the book and to pay in the ten a week to you every week over the desk to mind for me yourself in case of—in case of accident.'

'There will be no accident this time, John,' said Herr Bauer, smiling. 'I have thought over the plan you suggest, but I have come to the conclusion that this great city is not for such as you. Go back now with your bank account to your own town. I know of an opening with one of my customers there; I will write for you to-night.'

The incident related in this story happened years ago. The accident that John Mayger feared never happened. He is now an employer himself, and blesses the day he came under the fatherly influence of the German wood carver.—*Canadian Messenger*.