

HOW ARCHIE MACGREGOR PAID OUT THE HORSE-COWPER.

ARCHIE MACGREGOR was a Glasgow thriving butcher, and a well-known visitor at the Cattle Market. He was a regular characteristic Celt, with a long memory, and a very unforgiving disposition. On the list of Archie's acquaintances was a horse-cowper named Bob Buchanan. Now the horse-cowper was a fairly good man socially, but he had one rather narrow side to his character, and that was an inordinate love of money, with the determination to have it at all risks. In this respect, Buchanan, it was said, would have sold his own father, if the opportunity of making money out of the transaction had been possible.

A good many years back, Buchanan had sold Archie Macgregor a horse, in the way of business. The purchase turned out little short of a "sell" for Archie. He got by far the worst of the bargain, as he found to his cost, when too late to get the matter rectified.

"That was a rale bad trick o' Bob's," Archie said to himself one day in thinking over the matter, "to sell me a broken-winded spavined auld horse for a brisk young yin. He sell't

mair than the horse on that occasion, as my pocket kens to its cost. But stop awee; I'll maybe sell him as cleverly some day, afore I cast oot wi'm. If no, my name's no Archie Macgregor."

As will be guessed from the tone of his private mind, Archie had a plot of revenge of some indefinite kind stowed secretly away in his big head, which he only waited an opportunity to put into practice against the fraudulent money-grasping horse-cowper.

Everything, they say, comes to those who wait, if they only wait long enough, and Archie's opportunity of revenge turned up at last.

Archie had been aware for some considerable time that the avaricious horse-cowper had been looking out for a wife with some money, his first wife having been dead several years. And in the certain knowledge of this, Archie was able to pay off his well-remembered grudge against the horse-cowper.

Among Archie's shop customers was a cranky old maid, of a semi-genteel type in both dress and manners, who had just come into a certain money legacy. The legacy was small, some of the folks said, but others again magnified it to the large amount of £25,000.

One day shortly after the old maid's legacy had become known to her friends, the horse-cowper stepped jauntily into Archie's shop, and briskly "How-d'ye-do'd" him.

Civilities mutually exchanged, the horse-cowper began, in a sly underhand way, to pump Archie on a matter that lay very close to his mind. For he had heard of the old maid's windfall, and knew that she frequented Archie's shop.

"Man, Archie, that's wonderfu' news I'm hearin' about a customer woman o' yours—Miss Maggie Smacker; I suppose ye've heard a' about it—an' the particulars?"

"Heard what?" unconcernedly answered Archie, never letting on that he smelt the horse-cowper's motive.

“Dae ye mean to say ye hivna heard o’ what everybody roon’ here’s been speaking o’ for three weeks back—Miss Smacker’s legacy?”

“Oh, yes,” carelessly said Archie, “I’ve heard sae much aboot it that I’ve got tired o’ the subject; ye see I’m married an’ done for already, sae there’s nae yise for me botherin’ mysel’ aboot ony auld maid’s legacy, be’t muckle or little.”

“The amount, Archie,—have ye heard o’t?” quickly put in the horse-cowper.

“Twenty-five thousand pounds, they say,” frankly answered Archie, slyly watching the effect on the fortune-hunting horse-cowper. The golden bait instantly took, Archie was secretly delighted to see.

“Twenty-five thousand pounds, Archie!” exclaimed the horse-cowper, “man, that’s a rare chance for somebody. Mony a man wad marry a modern witch o’ Endor for half the amount.”

“Ah, but Maggie’s a fly yin,” put in Archie. “She’s no gaun to gie hersel’ awa’ in marriage to ony man that believes in the full extent o’ her legacy, she stoutly declares. The man that seeks her hand in marriage must think muckle o’ hersel’, an’ little o’ her money.”

“Ay; is that so?” muttered the horse-cowper, half aloud and half to himself. “In ony case, she’s worth looking after, Miss Smacker, an’ wad prove a boon to a strugglin’ man.”

After some further off and on remarks, the two parted; the fortune-hunting horse-cowper with a deep laid scheme in his mind, the main object of which was the possession of the auld-maid legatee’s money; the other with the determination to have a good laugh, and a bit of hard revenge on the avaricious horse-cowper for the swindle practised on him years before, in the sale of the broken-winded spavined old horse.

Now, the horse-cowper was an unscrupulous go-a-head fellow, who was not inclined to stick at a trifle. So,

having made up his mind on the matter, he at once got an introduction to Miss Smacker, as a suitor for her hand, through the kind help of Archie Macgregor, who, by way of private revenge, was only too glad to put the horse-cowper in her way.

But why was Archie Macgregor so anxious to help forward the horse-cowper's suit?—he who years before had so badly swindled Archie in the sale of a horse. Did Archie know the real amount of Miss Smacker's legacy? Well, perhaps he did? Let the diverting sequel tell.

"This is a bonnie nicht, Miss Smacker," was the horse-cowper's salutation as he entered the legatee's humble apartment as a suitor, for the third time.

The auld-maid legatee frankly admitted it was.

"Yes, a rale bonnie nicht," repeated the horse-cowper, dropping uninvited into the nearest chair, "nearly as bonnie as yer lovely sel', Miss Smacker, no to flatter ye wan wee inch."

Observe, this was said to an auld maid whose scraggy yellow-ochred countenance was past being photographed.

Miss Smacker was secretly delighted at the pretty compliment so artfully paid her by the fortune-hunting horse-cowper. But, is it real? she mentally asked herself, or, has he heard, like the rest, of my modest legacy, which rumour has so largely added to? I'll test him, she concluded within her own mind. So, she said:—

"Mr. Buchanan, you have, of course, heard of my legacy?"

"Oh, yes, my dear Miss Smacker, I have heard a wee bit cheepin' whisper o't," he admitted, "but it gaed in at my right lug and passed oot o' my left. It's yer bonnie sel' I'm interested in, Miss Smacker, yer bonnie, lovely sel'. My life is a lonely yin like yer ain, I dare say; will ye be mine?"

"Stop! stop! Mr. Buchanan," broke in the auld-maid legatee. "Are ye fully aware o' the extent o' my legacy?"

"No more than the man in the moon, my dear," answered the horse-cowper; "it's yer bonnie sel' I'm interested in."

"Weel, then, I'll let ye ken the exact amount o't, so that ye may look weel afore ye lowp."

Here the avaricious horse-cowper noticeably cocked his ears in spite of his attempts to appear indifferent.

"I've been left a clean twenty-five ——."

"A' richt, my dear Miss Smacker," broke in the horse-cowper, "be't hundreds or thoosands, I'm on the job. Again I ask you—Will ye be mine?"

"But I want to distinctly let ye ken that its only twenty-five ——."

"Nae maitter tho' it was only twenty-five shillin's," again interrupted the fortune-hunter, "I'm on the job, I say; it's yer bonnie, bloomin' sel' I'm wantin', an' once more I ask you—Will ye be mine?"

"Oh, spare my delicate feelin's, if *you* please, Mr. Buchanan," said the auld-maid legatee. "It's no every day in the week that a lonely woman's asked in marriage. I'm awfu' agitated owre this—awfu' agitated: the win' has gotten roon my heart owre't, I feel. I only wish I had a peppermint lozenger the noo."

"Is there a peppermint manufactory near at han'?" questioned the adaptable horse-cowper, being very anxious to make himself agreeable and kind. "Is there a peppermint manufactory aboot, Miss Smacker, I ask? if so, name the spot."

"Oo, never mind; I'll win' owre the bit shock," said the legatee. "But are ye quite sure ye cood tak' me, Mr. Buchanan, puir an' lonely as I am?"

"She's a fly yin," thought the horse-cowper. "She's testin' my sincerity by preachin' up her poverty; but it's a' richt. I'll bring doon my bird in a crack." Then, once more addressing the legatee, he said aloud—"Am I sure I

cood tak' ye, poor as ye are? Of course I am. Hang your twenty-five thous— that is, your trifling little legacy."

"Twenty-five pounds," put in the legatee.

"She's testin' me hard," thought the horse-cowper; "but I'm wide awake for her little game." Then, once more raising his voice, he said:—"Hang your legacy, Miss Smacker; be't large or small, it's your bonnie sel' I'm after, an' nothing beyond that. Answer me at once, my dear, and put me out of pain—Will ye be mine?"

The auld maid's hand fell into the clasp of the fortune-hunting horse-cowper, and so the matter was settled between them there and then.

A marriage, and, following that, an expensive wedding-trip took place. Everything went as merry as marriage bells should do, till, on returning home from their marriage jaunt, the horse-cowper, having spent all his available cash, gently hinted to his wife to fork out.

"Fork out what?" asked the legatee in surprise.

"Some o' that twenty-five thousand pound legacy that was left ye six weeks since, an' that ye've sae carefully kept dark sae lang. Come, Maggie, we're noo man an' wife; nae mair need for love palavers; in plain language, fork out, for I'm fair on the rocks."

The newly-made wife was astonished beyond measure at the turn things had taken.

"My legacy's a' spent on mysel' in silk gowns, as ye weel ken, sir," she replied in a tone of reproach.

"All spent!" said the husband aghast, the truth beginning to flash in on his mind. "*All* spent, did ye say? Twenty-five thousand all gone on silk dresses? Oh, stuff an' nonsense!"

"Twenty-five pounds only, as I weel warned ye, an' nae thousands aboot it," said the legatee.

"Show me the papers, woman!"

"They're in the shuttle o' the kist there; ye can examine them an' satisfy yersel' as to the amount."

In less than no time the fortune-hunting horse-cowper was over at the chest, and had disinterred the law papers. It was only too true! The sum left to his wife had been only twenty-five pounds, as she had truthfully stated to him.

"Woman, you have sold me,—swindled me! I have been misled in this matter! I am undone!"

"Undone, are ye? my sang, but this is a fine cairry on six weeks after marriage!" angrily answered the legatee, "after a' yer fine professions o' love, too."

"Oh, hang love an' you both," retorted the sold fortune-hunter.

"What! an' is that a' the consolation I'm to have, after throwing awa' my auld maidship on a common horse-cowper, an' my guid solid twenty-five pound legacy as well? I wonder, sir, what'll be your next procedure?"

"A divorce—an instant and final divorce," gruffly answered the wroth horse-cowper, "it's the only straight way out of this gross mistake."

"A divorce!" screamed the confounded legatee. "Siccan a fell exposure! I'll tak' to my bed for't first," and at once the legatee began to put her threat into practical execution.

In fact, so much was this the case, that it took about two pounds' worth of medicine and no end of doctor's attendance to take her out of bed, once she had got into it, as the horse-cowper afterwards knew to his salt cost.

He was married however, and practically done for, both he and she well knew, seeing which the sold fortune-hunter put the best face he could on the matter, and latterly found Miss Smacker not such a bad wife after all.

As for Archie Macgregor, he had a good broad laugh over the business all along the line, and it was the horse-cowper's belief that he was more than merely instrumental in leading him into the mistake. When they happened to meet on

the street, he could scarcely mistake the grin on Archie's face.

Archie and the horse-cowper seldom speak now, but Archie hears that if you wish to raise the horse-cowper's hair, just ask him in what bank he has invested his wife's twenty-five thousand pound legacy, an' if he's leevin' aff the interest yet ?