

“PAY-DAY—SOME DAY”

With Other Sketches From Life and Messages From The Word

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

A POOR IMMIGRANT BOY’S EXPERIENCE IN A STRANGE LAND

I was a chunky little fellow of twelve and the most typical “green-horn” boy you ever saw. They could have taken a picture of me and sold it for advertising purposes. I had someone else’s pants that were cut off at the bottom and someone’s left-over, thread-bare coat with the sleeves cut to fit. My shoes squeaked so you could hear them a block away, and my oversized cap rested heavily on my ears, which accounts for my outstanding conspicuous ears. My robust physique was the result of hard work and hard-tack, seasoned with mush and salt herring. My cheeks were tinted by the balsam breezes from the pine forests in the north woods. Our meager supply of the necessities of life around our homestead was happily balanced with an over-supply of natural beauty, because in the summer it was so beautiful that the sun forgot to go down. It was the land of the midnight sun.

When mother and I said farewell to the red-painted log house with its cherished childhood memories and loving friends and began our journey towards the land where the Statue of Liberty welcomes the weary pilgrims, there stepped on board the train a big-eyed youngster who had never before seen a town or city. The minute I stepped aboard the ocean liner I was seasick and each evening I cried myself to sleep longing for “home sweet home,” and with each morning came a hope that some day, soon, we would see land. I believe I learned how to pray in earnest on the ocean. After nearly three weeks of eating from our lunch basket, which no longer was inviting to a hungry and sick fellow, I noticed as we sat on deck as we were nearing New York harbor, a sailor who passed by with a kettle of steamed rice, and another one with prunes.

“Mother,” I said, “can’t we afford to buy at least some of that goodie stuff?”

So she called to the sailor and asked him how much it cost, and with a bewildered look he answered, “Why, it costs you nothing. Everything is free on this boat. It goes with your ticket.”

And here we had been living on hard-tack, crackers, cheese and anchovies, which is just like some Christians. They live on a meager fare and have a sort of funeral religion when they might have a banquet, and enjoy a bit of the coming land’s glory now.

Leaving New York on the Grand Trunk “famous” immigrant train of 1893, we stopped on the Canadian side at Niagara Falls. It was a hot July day.

The dust and heat of that coach were unbearable, as every space was packed with luggage, which consisted mostly of carpet bags and telescope cases, not to mention the numerous articles that were tied up in shawls, etc. Someone called out that the train would stop here fifty minutes. He had misunderstood the trainman's "fifteen minutes." I was given permission to go out and walk around the station, but with mother's instructions not to stay long and "hurry back."

But with fifty minutes I figured there was plenty of time and there was also plenty for me to look at. Then I figured it was time for me to get back to the train so I started across the track, but found that a train had come in from the opposite direction and obscured my train, going to Detroit, so I had to walk around the train, and when I came to the track where my train was supposed to be, it was gone. I looked down the track and saw it at a distance, with a head looking out of a window and an arm waving. I started up that track and ran for all I was worth, but the train gained momentum and I fell down exhausted on the track. The kind trainmen picked me up and brought me back to the station. Here I was in a strange land without a penny and no ticket, and could not speak a word of English. I thought my heart would break as I cried, with other travelers looking on. Kind hearts brought me candy. What poor boy wouldn't like candy? But not now! Mother was gone. They brought sandwiches towards evening, but my appetite was gone. Mother was gone. Niagara Falls had no allurements for me, and what interested me a few hours before as I watched the trains, was of no value to me now. All I wanted was to be with my mamma.

Listen, my unsaved friend. When your loved ones have been taken home, when Christ catches away those that are His, there will be no fun for you here on earth, because all that is lovely will be gone. Earth will be a dreary place for you, and you will be reminded every moment of your coming doom. You have not paid much attention to that godly mother's pleadings and prayers, but one of these mornings you will wake up and find her gone. A strange feeling will grip you as you go from room to room and find that your lovely father is gone too, and that sister that often pleaded with you about turning to God will plead with you no more. The dance will then have lost its attraction for you, the theater's new drama will send cold shivers up your spine, and your home will no longer be "home sweet home," with mother's love and father's kind interest in your welfare. It will become a ghastly place where you nervously toss about as you try to catch a bit of sleep in order to meet a new day of terror.

Some twenty years ago I motored East with my family and as we stopped at Niagara Falls the oldest girl said, "Daddy, didn't something happen here when you and grandma came here from the old country?"

"Yes," I replied, "but how in the world did you find out?" I asked.

"Oh, was her reply, "grandma told us. When you and mamma went to church Sunday evenings and grandma took care of us she would tell stories about you, daddy, when you were a little boy" (You see, friends, grandma can tell your children more about you than you will ever tell your own children). "So," she continued, "when we got real tired and it was time for us to go to sleep we would ask grandma to just tell us one more bedtime story—please, darling grandma, tell us again about the time when papa was left alone at Niagara Falls."

“Then she would relate the story until we fell asleep weeping.”

So then I told them to hop in the car and we drove to the railroad station. They got out of the car as though they were going into a cemetery. My wife and I led the way into the waiting room of that same station and Frances asked, “Where did you sit, daddy?”

“Right there,” I said, as I pointed to the seat that I couldn’t forget if I lived a thousand years. Those five children formed a circle and held each other’s hands and all of them started to cry.

“What are you crying for? Daddy is here, isn’t he?” I said. “Oh, yes, but think of the night you sat here all alone crying for your mamma,” they replied.

When in eternity you are reminded of the numerous opportunities you had to come to Christ, and you refused to come, it will simply add to the torment, the weeping, the wailing. You will blend your heart-rending cries with multitudes of lost souls who will cry, “Why didn’t I?”— but too late. Your eternal destiny will be sealed forever, hope will be gone. Happiness will be gone, but memory will live on.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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