

CHAPTER XV

You Shall not Covet Your Neighbour's Goods

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.

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384. The Wishes of an Envious Man and a Covetous Man. - It is not forbidden to desire health, honours, or riches, provided they are only acquired by good means and with good motives; but that is not what the envious do. At the court of a king of Sicily, whose name I forget, lived two officers, one of whom was envious, and the other avaricious or covetous. Both were known to the court as such. The prince wished to divert himself one day at the expense of their passions, to make them better understand how odious they were. He had them brought before him, and after praising their merit, declared that he had made up his mind to reward them, by giving them whatsoever they wished. "Nevertheless," added he, "I would have you remark that he who first prefers his request shall receive but once what he desires, whilst the second shall obtain double that much which the first requests. The two soldiers remained a long while silent. A very long time! either wished to speak first. The covetous man said to himself: "If I speak first, I shall receive less than the other, for then he shall get twice as much as I." The envious man, on his side, thought within himself: "I could not endure that this man should be more richly rewarded than I. I would rather get nothing than be the cause, by my own fault, of his obtaining double as much as I do." As the prince had already waited a considerable time for their answer, he decided that the envious man should be the first to express his wish. Thus he commanded him to speak. It was a hard thing, a very hard thing. "What favour can I ask?" said he to himself; "what means can I devise to prevent this greedy man, whom I detest, from obtaining more than I shall? If I ask a horse, he will ask two and be given them; if I wish for a house, he will likewise wish for two and receive them; and I could never endure that, no, never! I prefer to ask for a punishment, so that he may be obliged to undergo twice what I do." After giving way thus far to his odious passion, he spoke as follows: "Prince, I would have one of my eyes scooped out, and this other man's two." At these words, every one present burst out laughing; they all jeered and scoffed at the envious officer, who was thus entrapped into such a revelation of the shameful passion that was gnawing at his heart. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., III., 337.

385. The Masks at the Wedding. - When envy takes possession of a heart, there are no crimes of which it is not capable; but what especially irritates the envious is the advantages enjoyed by others. In 1643, in a town of Germany, a young man of distinction was celebrating his marriage with a young lady whose hand had been sought by a number of unsuccessful suitors. The rabid jealousy of these young men manifested itself by a signal instance of revenge. All at once, during the evening, an immense number of masks were seen to enter the banqueting-hall. The first thought which occurred to the guests was that they meant, by an agreeable surprise, to contribute to the gayety of the wedding; accordingly, their whole trouble was to make way for the new-comers so that they might play their parts in a suitable manner. Some of the masks then made a sign to the bridegroom to follow them into an adjoining room which he did. A few minutes after, they returned bearing a coffin magnificently adorned and covered with black cloth, which they set down in the middle of

the hall; then they began to dance about, singing lively popular airs. Insensibly they moved towards the door, and departed, as it were, unnoticed. The general attention was fixed on this strange scene, the upshot of which every one impatiently expected. They all hoped that the masks would soon return to the hall, and that something very amusing would come of the affair. They waited, therefore, but waited in vain, for the masks did not return. They sought them everywhere about the house; they had disappeared. In the uncertainty in which every one was, it occurred to one of the guests that in the coffin might be concealed a magnificent wedding gift the donors of which chose to remain unknown. Immediately the pall was raised; but, oh, horror! instead of a wedding present was found, - would you believe it, dear friends? the corpse of the bridegroom who had been strangled by these envious wretches disguised and masked. The murderers were brought to justice, but the deed they perpetrated is a standing proof that envy may lead to the greatest crimes. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., III., 334.

386. A Man that Wishes for Nothing. - It is good philosophy, my friends, to know how to be content with little, and to desire nothing: then one leaves the earth without trouble, and finds enjoyment where others see only torments. Listen. At a time when a purple fever was making sad havoc amongst the poor who had not had time to be removed to the Hotel Dieu, (the church-run Hospital,) the community of priests of St. Marcel, in Paris, being unable to suffice for exhorting the dying, asked the assistance of the Capuchin friars. One of these, a most venerable man, commenced his visits of charity with a low stable, where a victim of the contagion lay suffering. What does he see on going in? A dying old man, stretched on some filthy rags. He was alone; a bundle of hay served him as a bed; no seat, no furniture; he had sold all, during the first days of his illness, to obtain a little broth. On the black, bare walls hung an axe and two saws; that was all he had, that and his arms, when he could move them: but then he had not strength to lift them up. "Take courage, my friend," said the Capuchin going in; "God is dealing mercifully with you; He is going to take you out of this world, where you have had nothing but troubles." -- "Nothing but troubles!" repeated the dying man in a feeble voice; "you are mistaken, Father, I lived contented enough, and never complained of my lot. I never knew either hatred or envy; my sleep was calm; I worked all day, but I slept soundly all night. The tools you see there procured me my daily bread which I eat with a thankful heart, and never envied those whose tables were better served. I saw the rich more subject to disease than others. I was poor, but until now I got good health. If I recover my health, which I do not expect, I will go back to the wood-yard, and continue to bless the hand of God, who has hitherto taken care of me." The confessor, much surprised, knew not how to talk to such a penitent. He could not reconcile the sight of his wretched pallet with language so content. He composed himself, however, and said to him: "My son, although this life has not been wearisome to you, you must, nevertheless, make up your mind to quit it; for you must submit to the will of God." -- "Undoubtedly," replied the dying man calmly and firmly; "every one must pass away when their turn comes; I knew how to live, and I know how to die; thank God for having given me life, and for making me pass, by death, to Him. But, I believe the moment is come; yes, I feel it - Farewell, Father!" -- He had barely time to say these few words, when he tranquilly yielded up his soul into the hands of his Creator. - GUILLOIS, Nouv. Explic. du Cat., 266.

387. Death Caused by Envious Desires. - To a person actuated by envy, dear friends, the sight of the prosperity of others is the greatest torment that can be imagined. Oh! how many troubles should we avoid, did we only know how to moderate our desires and rejoice at the prosperity of our neighbours. Allow me to tell you the sad story of an envious person. It was a Prussian, who lived at the beginning of the 19th century, on the banks of the Rhine. He had a fine fortune, and was the

owner of numerous cattle; but, notwithstanding all this, he was no less jealous of what was possessed by others. In the evening, when the cattle were returning from the pasture, he was accustomed to place himself before the door of his house, to watch the flocks going home from the fields; whenever he saw a finer cow than any of his passing by, he was as vexed as could be, saying: Ah! I have no cow like that! If, in the spring, he saw his neighbours' farms presenting the appearance of a fine harvest, he said sorrowfully to himself: See! everything prospers with others, whilst nothing succeeds with me! Thus he had the unhappy art of tormenting himself. And what was the result, my friends? After dragging out for some time a sickly, miserable life, he was seized with a violent bilious fever, and died just two days after receiving a legacy of two hundred thousand francs, left him by one of his relatives. Let us beware then of giving way to that spirit of envy and cupidity, that would be enough to embitter our whole life. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., III 336.
