

The Whited Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

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CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

Here was another issue of Nemesis, the curse of another life through his coming back from the edge of the water. In the crush of self-hate, he smiled at the woman. . . . Until a moment ago the wrecking work of the morning had put thoughts of Soronia from his mind. He had come to the shop partly to marshal his final resources in an out-of-the-way spot and arrange the last line of action, and partly to avoid the possibility of arrest for the moment in case the Panther had brought an emissary of the law. His end was a matter of hours at best; his cruising and his friendship with Constable were over. Saint Pierre, of the lesser islands, was the last station of his traveling. During three days he had passed many hours in the shop. What those hours had accomplished was dramatically revealed now in the anguish of the maiden as she waited for the answer to her question.

"I have been thinking a great deal since yesterday. I found that I couldn't do what I tried—at least, without seeing you again, Soronia." Breen spoke vaguely. He had sufficient honesty not to be deaf with the forces he was now employing. "The future, I cannot tell yet. I may have to leave Saint Pierre for awhile, but I shall leave my heart here, and if I live—I will come back! To-day I must see my friend and tell him that I cannot cruise farther south with him."

She would have fallen had he not held her, but her eyes were shining. The old man ran for restoratives. Breen would have put the girl into a chair, but she clung to him.

"I have waited for you so long, my maker of pictures," she whispered.

Pere Rabaut stood beside them with medicines. The veneer of shop servitude was gone from the gray old face. The sharp black eyes were directed steadily upon the stranger, who saw that they were ready to soften or burst into flame. Breen saw, too, that he was less in the presence of the father of a creole girl of Martinique than the father of an old-world household.

"I am waiting for you to speak, monsieur," said Pere Rabaut.

"You have not waited long, sir," Breen answered. "It was just an instant ago that I had the honor of hearing from your daughter's lips—that she would wait for me until I could come back permanently to Saint Pierre."

"I know you will forgive an old soldier of France. So many people do not understand—don't try to understand—that I deemed it a privilege to marry the mother of the maid in your arms—not because a governor general of Martinique was her father—but because she was worthy the worship of an old soldier of France. The girl is like her mother, monsieur."

"It is an honor I do not deserve, sir—the daughter of a country woman of Josephine and a soldier of France," said Breen, grateful that one of his utterances contained or covered no lie.

The bow from the veteran was a gracious thing. He held a glass to the lips of his daughter.

"I do not need it now, father," Soronia said softly.

There was a knock at the door. The maid hastened to her room, and Pere Rabaut, once more the master of the shop, greeted a gasping patron. Breen was left to his thoughts. . . . That which he had done was unchangeable.

"Nicholas Stembidge, rejoice! This is your wedding day!" he muttered. "What a time you've had down the years! You have lived long and freely, taking what you saw and daring consequences and prattling like a defective to keep up your spirits! Nick, do you recall the prime sentence of your philosophy—'There is nothing which Doctor Death cannot cure'? Isn't that a wonderful saying? So wonderful that it has exceptions! No, Death will not put Peter and his lady out to sea! . . . The police are after you; your lips are hot with lies; you sit in the gloom. Nick Stembidge, you are whipped, cornered. You go out a coward and a liar. Where is your laugh of yesterday?"

And yet he smiled at the perfection of the pride-humbling trap the Fates had laid for him this day; smiled at the words he had uttered to Soronia and her father, who had bristled into a soldier of France.

And yet there had been no other way. After what he had done to Constable, it was not in him to deprive Soronia of what she seemed to need—not under her pitiful eyes! His own part did not enter. He conjured no golden haze as the mate of this creature of ardor, fragrance, and gentleness. Nor, on the other extreme, did he reflect that to spend one's days in a torrid shop with a woman of black blood was a fitting end for a brutalized life.

He put the woman out of his mind, and turned to the sorry business of the wounded friend. He must find Constable and say the last words; then take the blame from his friend in the presence of the woman. If he were taken into custody on the way—there was no help for that. All remnants of justice and whiteman's demand that he set out at once. He hurried to the court.

"Soronia," he called, "I'll have to go now. Mr. Constable expects to leave with his ship to-day, and I must talk with him before he goes."

She appeared in the dress in which he

had first seen her. There were tender remonstrances which he scarcely heard, but he answered gently. His mind was with the man.

"And you will be back this afternoon?"

In the hollow of the universe there seemed no reason that he could utter why he should not be back that afternoon.

"Yes, little fairy," he answered.

"And I shall watch from the upper window, if the smoke clears, for your friend's ship to sail. . . . Ah, don't stay long from me!"

The sun could not shine through the ash-fog which shut out the harbor distances and shrouded the great cone, but volumes of dreadful heat found the earth. Though the Madame lay well in the harbor, she was invisible now, even from the terraces. There was no line dividing the shore from the sea, nor the sea from the sky. It was all an illimitable mask, whose fabric was the dust which had lain for centuries upon Pelee's dynamos.

There was no carriage for hire. The day had driven the public drivers to cover. Breen walked to the plantation house. The servant was loath in answering his ring. Mr. Wall was in the hallway. The fall from guest to an enemy of the house pulled hard upon Breen's philosophy.

"Come in, sir," said Uncle Joey. His tone was repressed as he added: "Had I known your address, I should have sent your effects to you."

"I wasn't thinking about that, but looking for Mr. Constable," Breen declared.

"You are Nicholas Stembidge?"

"Yes."

The elder man stared at him savagely.

"Don't you think you have done enough damage?"

"More than enough, Mr. Wall; but there remains, from my point of view, an unfinished sentence."

"He is not here."

"Then I need trouble you no further."

Breen had not the heart that instant to ask to see the ladies. At the pier he learned from Ernst, who had charge of the launch, that Mr. Constable was not aboard the ship, and had given up the idea of sailing for the day, apparently. At the Roxelaue, Breen found that Constable had made his way beyond toward the River Blanc, which had flowed black and boiling yesterday. At the Hotel des Palmes there was definite word of M. Constable, American. The proprietor bore witness that the gentleman had stopped at the establishment long enough to procure food, mules and guides—the last at great cost, since the natives were in deadly fear—for a trip to the craters of Pelee.

CHAPTER IX.

The morning which broke through the defenses of Breen, and crumpled the dearest purpose of Constable, also drew Miss Stansbury into the vortex of intense emotions. Whatever dominant traits and impulses she had inherited from her mother, it had been her self-training to repress. Ample opportunity had been afforded her to note in her mother the career of an indomitable mistress of affairs. The result of her observations was a positive distaste for stiffness of views in any sphere, and a conviction that the display of masterfulness in woman did not make for woman's happiness.

As a girl, it had not occurred to Lara to exert an authority counter to her mother's. When she became a young woman she carefully avoided any extremity which might lead to the breaking of either her own or the more visible will of the house.

Now, in the midst of painful developments, it was borne home to Lara that she had progressed too far in the way of amiability; that she had unconsciously outstripped her intention, and passed into the boundaries of self-effacement. In the crisis of the newspaper revelations, she had followed her mother's initiative without question. The creature of indecisions that she had become grew more and more odious to her as the forenoon passed, and in her contrition she realized that the man whose first wish was to spare her from harm had been repaid with a lack of courtesy and a greater lack of courage.

Nothing that she had said or done, it seemed to her now, carried the stamina of decision. She had implored him not to speak; she had run from him, like a frightened child to her mother, when he had told his love and begged her to seek safety aboard his ship. In none of her dealings had she shown the strong womanhood which marked her ideals; and in singular contrast stood out his graciousness and patience. The thousand little things in which she had subserved her own inclinations to the maternal will had dulled the delicate point of personality, without which a man cannot stand valiantly through the crux of harsh days. It was all plain now, so hideously plain.

The chief of the acts she regretted had to do with the morning itself. What manner of "friendship" was this which accepted as authoritative the testimony of a newspaper's suspicions? She had done more than this, in handing Constable the document that witnessed against him, and shutting the door upon his possible defense. There was an added poignancy in the knowledge that her mother would not have thus used one of her favorites. Her distaste for the American caused Mrs. Stansbury so readily to accept newspaper evidence as a triumph of her judgment. As if such thoughts of wretched-

ness were not sufficient to start tears of vexation, Lara's mind finally added to the inventory of its miseries by reverting to her conversation with Constable in the carriage on the day of his arrival. How she had berated the essayist for declaring that the stuff of friendship stirred not womankind! How vigorously he had agreed with her!

She sought her own room when the tumult mounted to the point of tears. Presently she went to the door and locked it, for the inevitable thought had come. What did the name of Peter Constable mean to her? She had felt his strength. Long ago she had dreamed of such strength and put the dream away. Whether or not he was to be the conqueror, she knew that mastery like his could rouse her heart. She was evading the substance of the question. Before the mirror she frowned severely at the Lara there.

"Tell me this," said the woman, "do I want him to go away?"

"No, no!" said the image.

"No," repeated the woman; "not if he be innocent."

The image scowled at her conversation. "You deserve to suffer. You sent him away without a tittle of your trust, without a morsel of your mercy."

Standing in the upper hallway, she heard what passed between Breen and the planter at the front door. Why did not Uncle Joey demand extenuating circumstances? She was sure that Breen would have dropped some hint, at least, of Constable's part in the mysterious alliance, had it not been for the barbed iron of the other's words. Lara's palms ached from the pressure of her nails.

She did not go downstairs to luncheon, but often crossed the hall, entering Constable's room to look at the mountain and cityward along the smoky highway. In one of these watches she saw the little black carriage of Father Damien approaching. He would have driven by, but she ran below and called to him from the veranda:

"Come in and rest a minute, father. Is there any good to tell?"

"Very little, Lara. The gray curse is on Saint Pierre, indeed. I have grown afraid for my people, and am warning them to seek refuge in Fort de France. Your guest suggested this step, and has helped nobly with money to care for the people fleeing to the capital."

She drew from him an account of his meeting with Constable on the highway in the morning. He told her, too, how the young man had sent sick native mothers and their children out to the ship for refuge from the heat and sulphur fumes, and of the large sums of money he had volunteered for the care of the favored few who fled to Fort de France. Lara bent her head forward toward the priest.

"And what do you think of this man, father?" she questioned suddenly.

The old man's mild gaze fell before the glowing eyes of the girl. "I did not think when I first met him that he was gifted with such zeal," he answered weakly.

"Where is he now, Father Damien?"

"That I cannot tell, dear. We have not seen him since morning. Some say that he has gone to Morne Rouge; others that he has ascended to the craters of Pelee."

She sprang up, but repressed the exclamation upon her lips. Her mother had entered.

"Good morning, Father Damien," Mrs. Stansbury said pleasantly. "Is Lara rehearsing private theatricals for you?"

The priest made haste to depart, saying that he was on the way to Fort de France with the money Constable had given, to make the refugees there as comfortable as possible. The ladies followed him to the door. It happened that the old man faced Lara as he said:

"I hope it may be a false rumor that your friend has sought the craters of Pelee. Such services as his we cannot afford to do without. There is power in the man—"

"I think I have felt it, father," the girl answered quietly.

"What does this mean, this talk of 'friend' in connection with the confere of a thief?" Mrs. Stansbury asked.

"I did not quibble in the use of the word—"

"Do you count as a friend one who would try to put you aboard a ship which bears the reputation of the Madame de Stael?—one who would bring to our house the notorious Nicholas Stembidge?"

"You were also invited to go, remember."

"My dear child, you are overwrought. I cannot believe that you are appealed to by this sudden interest of his in your welfare; nor that you dreamed of accepting terms that would have frightened our Domremy saint who braved wars."

"I do not like your talk of terms, mother. There were no terms. Mr. Constable asked me to board his ship, that I might be safe. His care for my welfare is not important in this talk."

"Do you think you would be safe to go with him?"

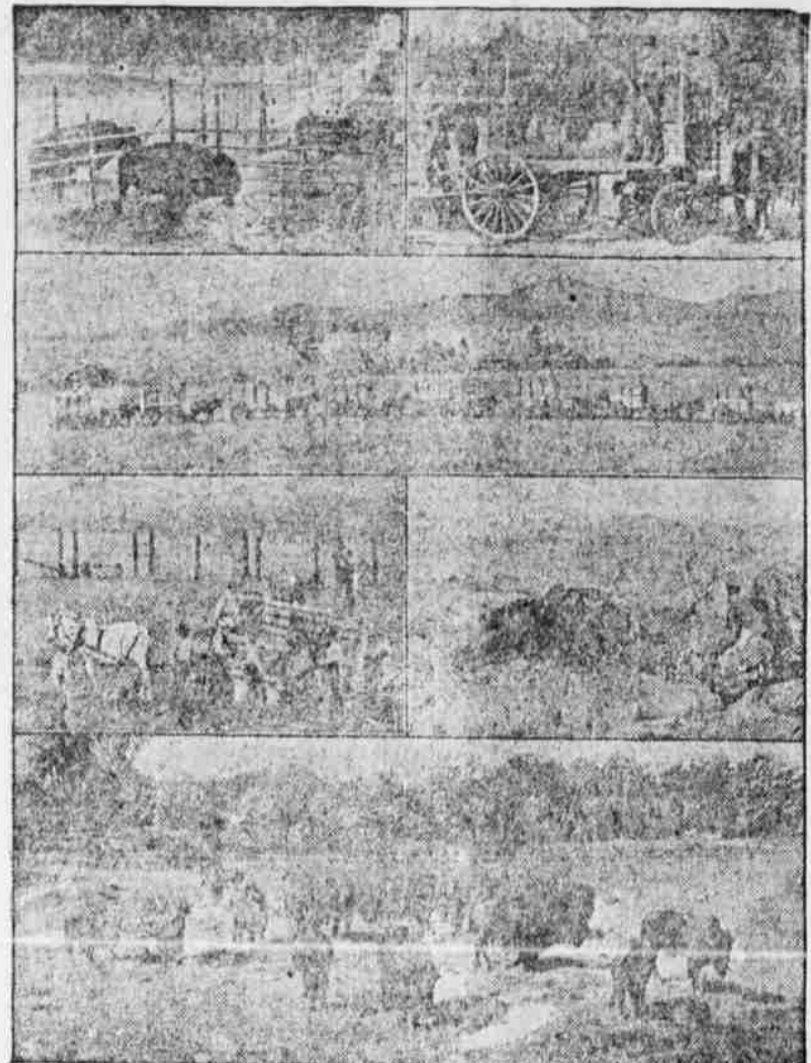
"Safe as the sea—safe as the black women and their babies now crowded upon the terrible de Stael! I do not care to talk further. You have followed your inclinations regarding Mr. Constable, and until now I have allowed your inclinations to be mine. I am guilty as a man who outrages the sensibilities of a man who deserves at least the consideration of a gentlewoman. I shall learn the truth about these reports, and if they are as false in substance as I believe, I shall make up for my incivilities."

Mrs. Stansbury felt that there was a resistance no less formidable than sudden. It must be crushed, of course, but the present moment was not propitious. She laughed gently.

(To be continued.)

The deposit of dew is greatly influenced by color. It will be found thickest on a board painted yellow, but not at all on red and black.

AWKWARD PASSENGERS.



BUFFALOES FOR AMERICA'S NATIONAL RANCH.

1. Transporting buffaloes for preservation. The animals driven down the chute to the traveling wagons.
2. The buffalo's traveling saloon for a 2,000-mile journey.
3. Arrival of the buffaloes from the New York Zoological Park at the Wichita ranch, Oklahoma.
4. The buffaloes sprayed with crude oil before they were released upon the ranch.
5. One of the United States buffalo preserves. A general view of the Wichita ranch.
6. Part of the herd that stocked the government ranch. Buffaloes in the New York Zoological Park.

STATISTICS OF SURVIVING BUFFALOES.

Total buffaloes in the world	2,017
Wild	325
In captivity	1,722
Wild in U. S. A.	25
Wild in Canada	300
Captive in U. S. A.	1,116
Captive in Canada	478
Captive in Europe	130

Photographs by Sbepton.

The United States government is interested in the preservation of the buffalo, and it has established two ranches

one at Wichita, Ok., and the other in Montana. For the latter Congress has voted a sum of \$8,000, \$5,000 of which has been paid to the Flathead Indians for the ground. The remaining \$3,000 will go to the expense of fencing the ranch, which covers twenty square miles. The Wichita ranch covers twelve square miles. It was stocked from the New York zoological park with twelve pure blood American buffaloes, presented by the director, Dr. Hornaday. The animals made the journey of 2,000 miles by rail. Each one was placed in a large comfortably padded down a chute leading from the buffaloes' inclosure. The method is shown in the first photograph. When the buffaloes arrived, after a seven days' journey, they were sprayed with crude oil and then released. Canada is also establishing buffalo preserves.—Illustrated London News.

AMERICAN FARMERS WANTED.

Victoria Is After Them to Start Irrigation in Australia.

The invasion of the Canadian wheat belt by American farmers, about which there was so much comment two or three years ago, may be duplicated in Australia, says a Melbourne dispatch to the Boston Transcript. George Swinburne, the minister of agriculture of this state, proposes that an organized effort be made to induce American farmers with a practical experience of irrigation to settle in Victoria. In this he is seconded by Elwood Mead, the American irrigation expert, who, after serving the United States government and various American colleges, is now chairman of the commission on rivers and water supply of the state of Victoria, with headquarters in this city.

It is argued in the commonwealth that in the United States irrigation has advanced beyond theory and become a prosperous realization, whereas in Australia there is much to be done in educating the farmer besides affording him a supply of water. Experiments, lectures and lessons in irrigation are having good results here; there are examples of successful irrigation farming already in the commonwealth, and since the terrible years of drought which culminated in 1902, irrigation on a large scale has been hailed as the hope and the aim of Australia. But it is likewise true that at many places in Victoria and New South Wales, where irrigation is employed, much water is wasted and the soil is improperly used.

It is Mr. Swinburne's idea, therefore, to get the Americans to settle in different parts of Victoria and actively engage in farming, so that their Australian neighbors may be able to learn irrigation from them. Mr. Mead has told Mr. Swinburne that there are hundreds of farmers in the western United States who would readily settle in Victoria if they knew that the land in many parts of this state was more productive than that of a large number of successful irrigation districts in the United States. Mr. Mead intends to make, this latter fact widely known, and it is planned by Minister Swinburne to have two or three representative American farmers invited to Victoria at this state's expense to see what it has to offer in the way of land and opportunities, and enable them to report to their friends.

Should the plan succeed it may be that New South Wales will adopt it also, for that state is already committed to what is known as the Barren

Jack project, which when completed will be one of the biggest irrigation plants in the world.

THE READING HABIT.

Some Persons Who Peruse Many Books Gain Little by It.

The phrase is a very common one in these days of splendidly equipped libraries and trained librarians, and undoubtedly "the reading habit" may be one of the most valuable possessions one can acquire; but unfortunately there are so many reading habits—almost as many as there are individuals who read.

"Rosie is such a reader!" Rosie's mother informed a caller, proudly. "She reads everything that comes out. The lady up at the library says she can't keep up with her. She has three or four books a week."

"What have you been reading lately?" the caller asked, turning to Rosie.

Rosie stammered and hesitated, she could remember two or three books but no more. She was simply making a sleeve of her little empty mind, and pouring the stories through as fast as her eyes could swallow the print.

The caller's thought ran back to her own childhood, where, like little Charlotte Yonge, she had been allowed a chapter a day of "Waverley," provided she first read twenty pages of Goldsmith's "Rome" or some equally solid work. What if the "Rome" vanished with the years? "Waverley," slowly read and eagerly pondered, became the joy of a lifetime. She thought of the children whose bedtime "poetry hour" with mother was the very heart of the day—of still another mother, who for a whole summer lived with her boys and girls the splendid King Arthur legends.

What of all the slowly distilled wisdom and delight of these treasured hours could poor little Rosie know, rushing at express speed through all the "best sellers"?

"Poor Rosie!" she sighed. "Poor little Rosies everywhere!"—Youth's Companion.

To Sharpen Scissors.

Cut them rapidly on the neck of a small glass bottle, or better still, on a ground-glass stopper. It trues the edges and makes them cut like new.—Woman's Home Companion.

What has become of the old-fashioned home where children had molasses for every day, and the jam was saved for Sundays and company?