

The White Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

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CHAPTER XI.

When Constable opened his eyes he was far down the slope, and Breen was bending over him.

"Hello!" said he. "What unhorsed me? I had just settled down comfortably to view that spout when—pluff! I began to lose track of things and my head broke. What was it—gas, altitude—?"

"More likely old Pelee was up to something he preferred you shouldn't see," said Breen. "I know the racket turned me sick as a poisoned rat while I was dragging at your leg. I know that the natives wouldn't venture within two hundred yards; also, that you are a mortal heavy young person."

"And so you retrieved the fallen under the guns of the enemy? That was good of you, Breen. It was, indeed."

The natives were pressing in. Darkness was beginning. Breen was conscious of a catch in his throat.

"Peter," said Breen quietly, "I ran from you this morning."

"You didn't run from me this afternoon, the which is lucky for me. Take a little touch yourself, old playmate, and don't get moody. One needs a pal when one makes such a mussy dumping-ground of good chances. The engaging Mr. Stembidge never did me any harm, and all that the newspapers could accomplish in the minds of people at large would move me to no deeper emotion than to say, 'Dear folks be—hanged!'"

"Peter, if I hadn't been here, you would be a good daylight run out on the decent ocean by this time, with the lady!"

"Please don't goad yourself further, Breen. That matter is mine—all mine." Constable spoke in a low voice. Breen was bending over him in the dusk. "You didn't force yourself upon me. You didn't even come along by chance. I asked you to cruise with me. You volunteered to tell me about yourself. I said it wasn't necessary. This man has a mind, and he isn't a coward," was the conclusion I came to that night, and I haven't seen fit to change my opinion."

"But the lady—"

"Yes, the lady has spoken. I am done—down and out. . . . The point is, you didn't turn on Pelee's throttle. You're not to blame because I'm a dab of a lover. I'm not on sick report."

"You're game, Peter," said Breen as he helped the other into the saddle.

"Not game enough to abduct one frightened little mother-handled girl," Constable replied.

They were riding together down the winding trail, apart from the guides. The lights of Ajoupa Bouillon were ahead, and the mountain carried on a frightful drumming behind. The coiling masses of volcanic spume, miles above the craters, generated its own fire, and, lit in the flashes, looked like billows of boiling steel. Constable was very weak, and Breen rode upon sheer nerve—nerve that men had often wondered at.

"Peter," he said at length, "you are not through trying to get the lady out of this?"

"To think that such a tone and such a question could come from the 'implacable Stembidge'!" Constable said, with a laugh.

"The 'implacable Stembidge' was never crucified before," Breen answered. "To you and me, together, it does not vastly matter that I am Stembidge, one of the bigger wolves. But others have come in. Because I am here, you stand dazed to-night, your heart torn out. Because I am here, you went up to the mouth of that horrible pit to-day, and lay down to die. I have played with men and women, Peter, but I never wrecked a white man before, or broke the heart of a friend."

A hand stretched across the dark and fell upon Breen's arm and tightened it there. "I know how you feel; but what would you have me do?" Constable muttered.

"When I see a wisp of smoke on the horizon, and know that you and the lady and the Madame are wrapped in it—"

"For four days I have been dreaming that dream, Breen."

"It must come true this night. There will have been a reaction. Go there to-night. Speak to her alone. Tell her how you came to know me—how men look at these things—that the newspaper story was as new to you as to herself. Tell her of your trip to Pelee, and how the disorder they see and hear down in the city looks up there at first hand!"

It was at this instant that a full-rigged thought sprang into Breen's brain, which had known but the passing of hopeless derelicts throughout the day. He dared not trust the thought to words, lest the other should cancel it, but he called to the guides to increase the pace.

"Ah, she would not listen to words of mine," Constable answered hopelessly. "If she had any faith in me, words would not be necessary. A man knows when he is beaten. I have drawn my little quietus for one day. To-morrow—"

"There may not be any to-morrow for Saint Pierre."

"Of course. For that matter, we might be boiled out like a pair of tater-bugs before we can pick up a snack in Ajoupa Bouillon. Then, again, the people may be right, and I a frenzied alarmist. Pelee is throwing off pressure true and steady as a clock running down. It may be that he'll relieve his crowded chambers this way."

Such words, more than anything that had passed, revealed the extent of Con-

stable's reaction. They were entering Ajoupa Bouillon, where food and fresh mounts were procurable.

"It's probably better for her that she did not give herself to me," Constable observed, when they were in the saddle again. His mind was deepening the bitter groove now. "We'll put all this behind us presently, Breen. We're mates, I guess."

"This is our last ride together, Peter. There are many reasons. One is—the law is on my trail! . . . Will you please inform me what you are laughing at?"

Constable carefully related the Crusoe episode.

Breen groaned. "Don't you see, Peter, you are winding yourself up tighter and tighter in my crimes?"

"Somehow, I can't get wrought up over trifles to-night. The detective matter disposed of, what are the other reasons why you and I must diverge after this night?"

Breen was silent a moment. "I was pretty hard-hit this morning," he said finally. "The rough weather broke down my idea about not going to the shop again. It seems incredible, but Soronia has never had a lover—before. I found her—if you'll forgive me—in need of me. You see, I had just come from the reeking stone of sacrifice where you lay; and I felt a pair of creole eyes—promised me to go to sea no more."

"Suppose I had missed Crusoe?" Constable asked bitterly. "Suppose I had been a poor liar?"

"There are many Crusoes, Peter. They won't all fail. You can't keep this one off always. It amounts to just this for me—that I have found my little isle in the midst of the sea, like that other promoter who all but conquered Europe."

"But why could you not both go aboard with me?" the other persisted.

"I have told you that after this ride I cease to vampirize the career of Constable. If Crusoe finds the Rue de Rivoli, very well. If not, for the present, very well again. None of his ilk shall find you and me together. Two or three times, back across the forbidden tundras of years, I have met men who stack up something as you do in my thoughts to-night. I never hurt any of those fellows as I have hurt you. I'm too fond of you to hit you any harder. Let's talk about something else."

Constable had received a singular appeal. He knew that if there were any future for him, he would think of Breen's last words co-ordinate in memory with the quaking rim of the crater. It did not occur to him to answer at once. They were passing through Morne Rouge, so overcrowded now that people were sleeping in the streets. On the dark down-trail again, words did not come to him, and when the party re-entered the bank of falling ash and the sulphur stench, it was not good to open one's mouth in speech.

The guides were paid at the edge of the city. Saint Pierre was dark and harrowingly still. The hoof-beats of the two mules which the Americans retained were muffled in the ash, as if they were pounding along the sandy beach. Often the rousing fetor of death reached the nostrils of the riders, above the drying, cutting vapor of the volcano, and their heads shied and snorted at the untoward humps on the highway. It was as if war and pestilence had stalked through Saint Pierre that day, and a winter storm had tried to cover the dreadful aftermath. A door opened at last before them, and there was a cry from Soronia. Pere Rabaut hurried out and led the mules to shelter.

Constable sank into his old seat at the round table under the window. He watched Breen and the woman. His friend was huge and lean in the lamp light; his white clothing stained from the saddle, his hair and mustache white from ash, his black eyes burning in a face haggard unto ghastliness. The woman was in his arms as they stood together. What they said, Constable did not allow his mind to reason with, but the glory of her lover's presence which shone in the eyes of Soronia called down upon the watcher his own black vistas of desolation. She had found, for an hour, the true and the beautiful—the soul anchorage which he was never to know! . . . He would keep all craft of the Crusoe stamp from blundering into her sweet haven—this much he could do, was his thought. Food was placed before him, and he ate a little, for the sake of Breen. His eyes pained from the lamplight, and he dropped his face forward into his arms on the table. Close to the wood, the vibrations of the mountain boomed louder in his ears.

"But you must not go away again!" Soronia implored.

"Yes, for an hour—two hours at the most—little fairy," Breen whispered.

They were in the living rooms across the court, where the bird cages were tiered and covered with cloths. She clung to him pitifully.

"With you away—oh, my lover, no, no! . . . I cannot live again for hours and hours!"

"Hush!—he is in great trouble. He must not awake until after I am gone. Then he must not know where I have gone. I am going to the plantation house on the Morne d'Orange. It is for him. Two hours at the most, and the last—the last I shall ever leave you, little fairy."

Breen recrossed the court and entered the fruit shop on tiptoe. Constable did not move; his breathing was inaudible. At the street door Soronia joined him like a shadow. He kissed her and put her arms from him. It was eleven-fifteen, by the old French clock.

Soronia, alone, stared for an instant at the figure sprawled across the table—the man who had caused her lover twice to be torn from her arms that day. The she moved to a chair, in the shadows at the far end of the shop, and sat down rigidly to wait.

CHAPTER XII.

In the dim upper hallway, Lara read in the face of her mother, hard and white as ivory, that the clash of wills had come. A slender arm barred the door through which the daughter had to pass.

"Lara, what do you mean to do?"

"I mean to hear what this man has to say."

"At midnight—listen to an outlaw?"

"Yes, let me pass!"

The elder woman did not move her arm. Slowly, softly, she said: "I say that you shall not! Order Uncle Joey to send the thief away, or you and I—am estranged."

Lara faltered before the revolting possibilities of the moment. "Mother," she implored, "don't poison the years! I am a grown woman—I see my way clearly!"

She leaned against the arm that crossed the doorway. It did not give. The face close to hers in the feeble light burned away her self-control. The rigidity of the bar suffocated—as if it had pressed against her throat. Every fiber of her young body sprang tense to burst the insufferable bond. Not a tissue relaxed, although the bar was forced. Her mother's fingers scraped like wood across the casing. The sickening sound made an imperishable record in the girl's brain. Horrified at the thing she had done, Lara would have fallen at her mother's feet, praying forgiveness, had there reached her now a murmur of pain or relenting. But the face was not changed. The sovereign will would not have broken had she hewn her way into the room with a sword. Low-spoken, freezing utterances found the brain of the girl, promptings of the dread, imperfect faculty:

"Go, grown woman, who sees her way clearly! Go with the thief to your lover—who dares not come to you! Go out to the hunted ship, then—with the thief and his dull tool!"

Lara seized her hat and shawl and darted past the pitiless voice, shutting her ears with her hands. Down the stairway she sped, her one thought to flee. There was trace below; the awfulness of defeat behind. . . . The men had heard nothing. Breen stood by the door, his face whitened with dust. The planter waited near the foot of the stairs—another obstacle.

"Go to mother quickly—she needs you!"

"Where are you going, Lara?" the old man gasped.

"To the ship with the other refugees!"

"Not with this man, child—"

"He is Mr. Constable's friend."

"But I'll go with you, dear! I'll have a carriage brought—"

"In the name of pity, Uncle Joey—don't leave mother alone longer—up there!" she said desperately. "I am going out to the ship. Your nephew has asked me to be—his wife. This man will take me to him. Go to mother!"

The planter turned a last look at Breen and obeyed, his face a field of conflict. Lara threw the shawl about her shoulders and hurried to the door, which Breen opened in utmost amazement. She turned to him in the dark, with the burning question:

"Is Peter Constable dead?"

"No—"

"Is he hurt—lying on the ship?"

"No, he is reasonably well, and in Saint Pierre."

Reacting weakness rushed over her now, the doubts of an untried soul, and the loneliness of an outcast. The scene in the upper hallway was upreared in her brain. She had been borne throughout the day, unerringly by the processes of mind toward the expression of her own will; but the fruition was so sudden and horrible as forever to be beyond the shadow and circumstance of extinction.

If Constable were well and in Saint Pierre, why did he not come to her, instead of sending this man? Even though Breen were all a man could be, had Constable the right to send him to her, after the allegations of the press? Could there be any truth in the suggestions of her mother? Might there not exist in the Constable character a war of the base and noble?

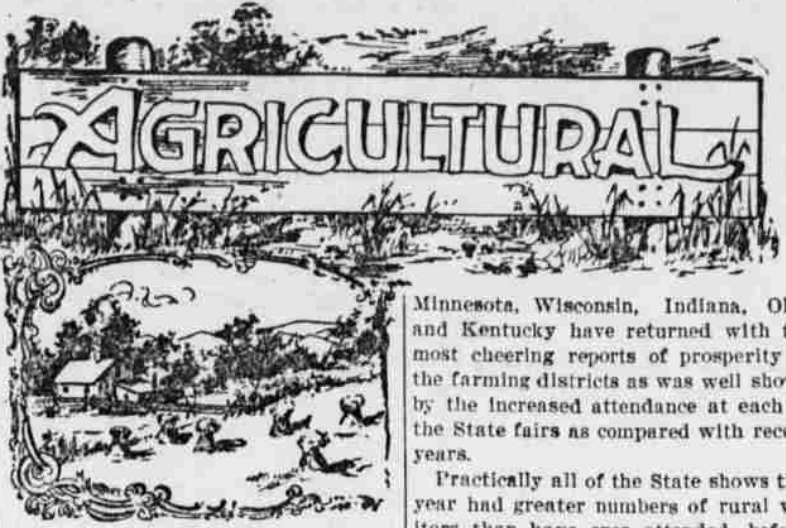
These big tangible terrors possessed her. She could not go back—the bridges were burned. The man at her side did not speak, save to answer her questions. Ahead were possibilities and fancies, beside which the rumbling menaces of the mountain were clean fears. She halted. Her body swayed a little, and the man put out his hand to steady her. A cry escaped her lips.

"I cannot go on!" she exclaimed brokenly. "I have done a terrible wrong in coming. Everything is different. Leave me. I—I shall go back toward Fort de France!"

(To be continued.)

Odd Use for a Balloon.

It is said that an enterprising Parisian company has discovered a method of bleaching linen by balloon. A few hundred feet above the earth the atmosphere is nearly as pure over the city as in the open country, and it is in this higher region that the linen is dried by the aid of a captive balloon. The linen is attached to bamboo frames and sent up. There are about six ascents in a day. An extra charge of from five to fifty centimes, or from one to ten cents, is charged for each article.



Value of Trap Nests.

To become convinced of the amount of good there is in trap nests, one must use them. He will then find out for a certainty which of his hens are laying well and which are not. Perhaps he will be surprised to learn that some of the best egg producers he has are apparently his poorest specimens. This is quite likely to happen, for not by any means is it always the finest-looking hens—the hens which would score highest in the show pen—that will lay the most eggs. Needless to say, the best layers only should be kept. If a flock is disgraced by egg-eaters, the trap nest will pick the guilty ones out, likewise the drone, so that the flock may be culled until only profitable stock is left. As but one hen can be present at a time to lay, it also does away with crowding and quarrelling, whereby the danger of breaking the eggs in the nest is lessened. It indicates, too, which hens are the winter layers, the layers of the most fertile eggs, the most symmetrical ones and the brown, the white and the speckled ones. At the same time it necessitates frequent handling by taking the hens off the nest, so that even the wildest birds become more tame, and are less likely to scare. Summed up briefly, it enables the breeder to get in touch with the individual hen, ascertain her good and bad qualities, and satisfy himself of her general condition. The only objection that can be raised against it, any way, is that it requires a lot of attention. The nests want visiting every other hour, at least, and every hour would be better, through the day. For the shiftless poultryman, therefore, they are hardly to be recommended.—Agricultural Epitomist.

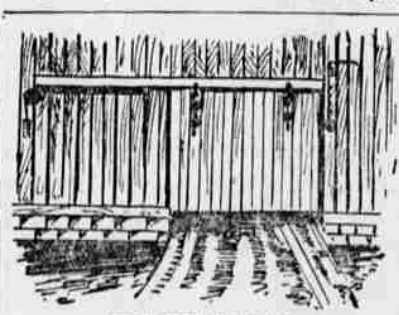
Rights of the Hired Man.

A little thought and a little "put yourself in his place" would do wonders in solving the problem of "How to keep the hired man on the farm." Of course there are many worthless fellows strolling about the country looking for jobs as farm hands, and any employer is liable to get one of them. On the other hand, there are many employers who treat their men in such a manner that no self-respecting young man would remain in their service.

As a rule the hand who goes at his work cheerfully and does not complain if a little extra job comes his way, is the man who can always find a place at the best wages going, while the one who grumbles at his regular work and flatly refuses to do an extra task is always moving from place to place. The employer who is considerate to his men, who does not impose upon them by word or deed, is the one who can always get good men, and he seldom has to hunt them up. The hired man is entitled to a good bed and comfortable room, with a place for his clothing. He is entitled to good, wholesome food, and, above all, he is entitled to decent treatment and kind words.

Self-Opening Sliding Door.

The door should be hung on a perfectly horizontal bar. A cord or small rope is fastened to the door near the top and runs over a pulley at the end of the track on which the door is hung. The rope is fastened to a bucket or a paint keg is good, in which sufficient weight is placed to draw the door open



SELF-OPENING DOOR.

when catch is raised. The cord running from the catch should run the entire length of the barn, so the door may be opened from any part of the driveway, or may extend to a post in the barnyard, so the door may be opened when in the wagon or on horseback.—American Farm World.

The Farmers' Prosperity.

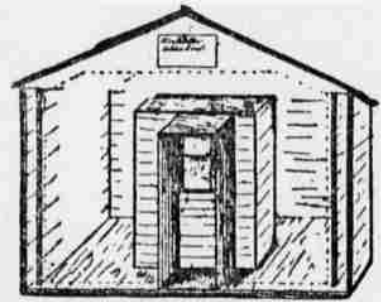
No better evidence of the prosperity of those engaged in agricultural pursuits is needed than to witness the showing of wealth at the various State fairs this season. Chicagoans who attended the annual shows at Iowa,

Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky have returned with the most cheering reports of prosperity in the farming districts as was well shown by the increased attendance at each of the State fairs as compared with recent years.

Practically all of the State shows this year had greater numbers of rural visitors than have ever attended before. Were the farmers a little pinched for money doubtless many of them would have remained away from their State fairs, viewing a few days' study and pleasure as a luxury which they could not afford. This year, however, the farmers turned out in record numbers, and spent more money than in former years.—Goodall's Farmer.

Valuable in the Ice House.

This is a storehouse, 4 to 6 feet square, in the ice house, or of any convenient size for the milk and butter. The room should be provided with a ventilator at the top. The doors leading to the room should each have a sash at the top. The sketch shows only the inside door. The house proper



CONVENIENT STOREHOUSE.

is built with walls, the space being filled with sawdust. The dotted lines show the outline of the ice when the house is filled. If sawdust is piled upon and around the storeroom it makes a fine place to store vegetables or fruits.

Fruit Wrapping Machine.

A fruit wrapping machine has been put in operation in California. It requires practically no attention and entirely automatically wraps the fruit, says Country Gentleman. The fruit rolls down a slight incline to the operator, turning slowly over as it approaches him and giving him an opportunity to remove defective specimens. The fruit is lifted and placed stem up in rubber cups, which carry it to a mechanism operating much as the human hands. It is carried to the paper being cut and printed from the roll. The twist of the paper is made over the stem end, thus cushioning the stem and preventing puncture injury. If the machine becomes clogged, it is stopped by a clutch operated by electricity. A counting attachment registers the number wrapped. The capacity of the machine is said to equal six good wrappers.

Sheep Are Not Stupid.

The sheep is usually set down for a model of stupidity, but a gentleman who has just returned from a three years' trip in the West tells the following story: "I was on horseback a great part of the time and often visited large sheep ranches. One day, while riding along, a mother sheep trotted up toward my horse, bleating pitifully. At last I made out that there was something wrong off toward the left. I followed the sheep in that direction, and soon found the cause of her distress. Her lamb had fallen into a shallow pit and could not get out. I lifted the little thing up, and the gratitude of the mother sheep's eyes will always be a source of consolation to me."

Practical Farm Notes.

Don't fall to cut out and burn any canes infested by insects and diseases.

Cabbage club foot may be prevented by a liberal application of lime to the soil around the plant.

It is a mistake to plow under soy beans or cow peas for fertilizer. They are too expensive. Better use barnyard manure as far as possible, grow a crop of clover and then turn under the sod.

Have you ever noticed that men who are the most successful farmers stick to the crops they know most about, making a specialty of them? The man who experiments with every new thing that comes along will find it expensive business.

Measure hay in the stack this way: Measure the stack in length, width and over. Multiply the width in feet by the over and divide by four. Then multiply the result by length. To reduce to ton of hay in stack less than twenty days, divide the cubical contents by 512. For more than twenty and less than sixty days divide by 422, and for more than sixty days divide by 380.