His Brother's Keeper; or, Christian Stewardship.

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON,

Author of "In His Steps," "The Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," "Malcom Kirk," Etc.

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right and rights to maintain."

"But what has all this to do with us, Eric? We have been over all this ground before. Do you not love me?"

"Indeed, truly I do." Eric turned his large dark eyes affectionately toward his friend.

"And do I not love you?"

"Yes," replied Eric simply. "But our lives are of necessity widening out farther apart. What can prevent that? In the very nature of the situation it could not be otherwise. Here I am advising thousands of men to a course which is directly opposed by your father and would be by you if you were in his place. The time is coming when the clash between your interests and mine will be so fierce that"—

Stuart jumped to his feet. "Do you mean to say, Eric, that friendship true and loving cannot exist between you and me simply because of the accident of birth or the circumstance of wealth or difference in surroundings? Have we not already proved that it can exist?"

"Yes," replied Eric slowly. "It can exist, but it is in one sense an unnatural existence. You represent capital; I represent labor. Take the present situation of the strike. I believe as much as I believe anything that it is right and even religious that we do as we do. Deep in your heart you condemn us for the movement. If you were in your father's place, you would feel exactly as he does about it. How, then, can we expect the old relation between us to be continued?"

Stuart sat silent, looking out over the beautiful valley. The town looked very pretty in its setting of hills and pines. His father's house was the most conspicuous residence to be seen. From where the two men sat it looked palatial. Down at the other end of the town among the miners' houses Stuart could distinguish Eric's home, a little two story cottage, not different from a hundred others. He did a good deal of hard thinking in a few minutes; then he said:

"Eric, you began the talk about the difference between us. Do you want to break off anything? Is that your intention?"

Eric for the first time grew flushed beneath his dark bronzed face. "No," he said. "I simply wished to state the conditions under which we now live. There is no change in my feelings toward you and cannot be."

"Neither is there in mine toward you, Eric. Why do you place the responsibility so wholly on me, as if I would be the one to change or as if it rested with me to say that our friendship was possible or not?"

"Because it does rest with you. Are you not representative of riches, power, intelligence, all the great machinery which sets things in motion, society, that world by itself, leisure, culture, advantages? And is it not for you as representative of all these things to bear the responsibility which must always rest on the strong and the educated and the wealthy?" Eric paused on the crest of a wave of speech that seemed about to break over all his self control.

Stuart after awhile said doggedly: "It comes back to the question, Is our friendship to continue on the old basis? I can be no other than I am. If I have been born to wealth and leisure and education and society and travel and all that, I am powerless to change it. And you are what you are because you have been born into it and choose to continue there, though you know, Eric, you could rise out of it if you only would."

"It is useless to discuss that point," replied Eric quietly. "But tell me, Stuart, in answer to the main question, do you believe in this strike?"

"No; I can't say I do," said Stuart, with his usual frankness.

"There! You see where the difficulty lies," replied Eric sadly. "The very nature of the situation compels a breach in our old relations with each other. Of course I believe in the strike or I wouldn't be the leader of it."

"It seems like a bad way to get at what you want," said Stuart.

"Have you studied into the details of the situation? Do you know all the facts which have led up to this movement?"

"I know what my father has told me. He says the men did not consult with the companies and went out without warning or notice of any kind."

Eric rose to his feet. "It's a lie!" he exclaimed, with a sudden passion that no one would suspect existed. It was like an explosion that transformed the man into another being.

Stuart also rose. "Do you mean to say that my father lied to me about the facts?"

"I do!" retorted Eric. "He lied, and he knows he lied!"

Stuart took one step toward Eric, and the two young men confronted each other. Suddenly Eric turned on his heel and without a word walked down the hill. For a moment Stuart seemed on the point of going after him or calling out for him to stop, but the next moment he stepped back to the stone and sat down. When Eric had disappeared behind a clump of trees, Stuart rose and went toward home by another path.

When he reached the house, Louise met him and told him his father wanted to see him at once. He went in and stood by the bed, his whole being stirred by the interview with Eric. It was the first real passion to speak of that had roused his self controlled nature. His father spoke with the bluntness that always marked his speech.

"Stuart, I want you to go to Cleveland for the company. This strike has caused complications with our local agents. There is important business that I ought to see to in person. Can you go at once? The eastern express is due at 6 o'clock."

"I am at your service, father," replied Stuart. He was still going over his recent interview with Eric.

"Here are the papers. I can explain the business to you in a few minutes."

Stuart drew up a chair, and his father gave him instructions. Then as Stuart put the papers in his pocket Ross Duncan said, his face and manner softening a little as he fell back on his pillows:

"Stuart, lad, in case anything happens to me, of course you know I have left everything to you and Louise. The mines, with other property and invested funds, besides New York property and bonds not connected with the mines, are worth over $4,000,000. I have left Louise $1,000,000 in property. You will be left in the sole charge of everything in case I die. Of course you understand that I am the company. This strike is against me. If I die, it will be against you. I believe I can depend on you to defend the millions I have worked so hard all my life to get together," said Ross Duncan. Then in his old manner he said, "You will have to hurry to get that train."

Stuart rose, and a conflict of feelings rose with him. What his father had just said moved him one way, the afternoon with Eric moved him another. He wanted to ask his father one question before he went away.

"Father," he asked almost timidly, "did you tell me that the strikers went out without giving the companies any notice or warning?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean that they gave absolutely no hint of their intentions to any one?"

Ross Duncan rose up a little, and his face changed.

"They sent their representative, as they called him, to me about two weeks before the morning of the strike to confer about wages, but I wouldn't recognize any such representative with any right to interfere with my business and tell me what wages I ought to pay."

"Who was the representative?" Stuart asked the question, well knowing the answer.

"Who was it? Who but that praying, pious friend of yours, Eric Vassall!" Ross Duncan sat up, and the wound on his forehead grew purple. Stuart was frightened at the sight. He could not say anything. His father sank down again, exhausted with his anger. Stuart went away without even a word of farewell. There was a bitterness in his heart that was new to it. Eric had been right, then, according to his view. The company had received notice. There had been an attempt at consultation. As the train whirled him on he cursed in his heart the whole social perplexity.

He reached the city, attended to the business and started back the next day to Champion. It was just dusk when he stepped out on the station platform. He thought a crowd of curious looking people was there. Something had happened. Dr. Saxon came up, seized his

"What's the matter, doctor?"

bag and grasped his hand in a strong but nervous manner. Solemn, strangely set faces looked out of the dusk at him.

"What's the matter, doctor?" asked Stuart, trembling at something, he could not think what.

"Your father, my boy"—

"Is he worse?"

"Come this way. My buggy is right here. I will drive you out to the house. Get right in."

Stuart got into the buggy mechanically. The doctor threw himself in, and the horse made a plunge into the dark.

"Tell me the truth, doctor." Stuart's voice was steady, but faint.

The answer came after a moment. "Your father died, Stuart, an hour ago. He had a stroke of apoplexy. There was some heart trouble. He did not suffer."

For a moment everything in the universe reeled about Stuart Duncan. Then he found he was asking questions and Dr. Saxon was answering them. When they reached the house, Stuart met Louise first. She came to the front door and threw herself into his arms, crying hysterically. Stuart had not shed a tear yet. They led him into the room where Ross Duncan lay. The son stood and looked down at the cold face with that newly made scar on the forehead. There was no thought in his mind that he was now the owner of several millions of wealth. He was thinking of the last interview he had with that father and his parting without a word of affectionate farewell. And still the tears would not come to his relief.

At last he went out, and the sight of his sister's grief and fear brought the tears to his own eyes. He wept with her. They talked together. The doctor remained an hour and then took his leave. The night wore on. Louise, exhausted with the shock, had gone to her room. Stuart was finally left alone. He sent the servants all away. He could not sleep. He paced the long hallway until daylight. Just as the sun rose he went in where his father lay and looked at him again. Ross Duncan's millions were of no use to him now. Of what use were they to the son? What load of responsibility had come to him now! These mines, these labor troubles, this strike, these wages—what difference if he let them all go? He had a right to do as he chose with his own. He would dispose of it all and live abroad. He would—what! He was planning all this and his father dead less than 24 hours! And, then, what responsibility did rest upon him? What difference did it make to him what wages the men received? Was he his brother's keeper? Were they his brothers? The whole thing was complex, irritating. His father's death had thrown a burden on him that he did not want to carry.

He was disturbed by a noise in the street before the house. He went to the window and drew aside the curtain. The measured tramp of heavy feet was heard coming down the road. A column of men, four abreast, came into sight, with one man a little in advance of the others carrying a banner. It contained a very rude drawing of a rich man and a poor man. The rich man was saying, "What do you want?" The poor man was saying, "Crums from the rich man's table." It was all very crude and one sided in every way. The column of men swung by, nearly 500 miners on their way from the upper range to join the strikers in Champion in their regular morning gathering at the park. Every man as he went by turned his head and looked up at the house where the dead mine owner lay. It is possible that they saw the son standing there. He watched the column tramp through the dust and disappear down the road. And as he turned back toward all that remained of the mortal flesh of the man who had been worth so many millions he was conscious that he was face to face with the great problem of his own existence, with which was involved the problem of thousands of other men. How will he answer that problem?

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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