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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The decision of the union was being faithfully carried out. The troops and their officers were placed under guard in the engine house, and the police of Champion were assisted by the miners, who claimed that the firing of the troops had been without excuse and that the placing of them under arrest was called for by every dictate of justice and fair play.

As we pass this incident in the course of this narrative which is connected with the story of our lives in Champion it is sufficient to say that next day the troops were taken back to De Mott by the authorities, and in the trial which came off afterward the case was dismissed on the ground of insufficient evidence to convict. As a matter of fact, there had been great provocation on both sides, but the firing of the troops was always considered by the miners as not warranted by the facts. They always spoke of the killing of the two men as "murder" and looked upon the acquittal of the officer who gave the command to fire as an outrage and a clear miscarriage of justice.

So ended that memorable night. Stuart went home at last, feeling that the problem was no nearer solution, so far as the strike was concerned, and agitated as never before by the great rising within him of emotions and thoughts heretofore entirely unknown to him. The sight of the conflict these men were making for a few cents more a day for labor, which meant the risk of life every 24 hours, was a sight that grew more and more significant to him as he watched the struggle unfold. He could not see the end. He dared not anticipate the final result.

As the days went by the situation remained practically the same. The effect of sending troops down the range had so far shown the mine owners that they had really a very ugly chance to take in forcing new labor into the mines. The few men who had gone on from Champion to De Mott had gradually been persuaded to go back, or they drifted away in search of work elsewhere, as the owners put off getting more men. In reality the owners dreaded more than anything else the flooding and ruining of the mines in case the attempt to put new men in was successful. Besides all this, the price of ore was rapidly rising, and many of the owners had great quantities of ore in the stock piles, and it was believed by many that there was no great desire on the part of the owners to start in again so long as such large quantities of ore were already at the top. It was thought that even if the strike continued until spring the owners would be able to realize large profits on lapsed contracts and on this account would really be the gainers by not operating the mines. Meanwhile winter was fast coming on, and the miners were finding it more and more difficult to get credit at the stores. Many of the merchants refused to trust the men any longer. There was a prospect of some ugly scenes of suffering in Champion unless matters changed decidedly in a fortnight.

It was at this time that Stuart first really thought of his great wealth with reference to its use in improving the condition of affairs in Champion. He had gone down to see Eric, who was able to be about the house now, and while there Andrew had come in. The three had drifted into a discussion of ways and means to relieve the distress that was apparent already among the families of the miners.

"I cannot help feeling that this strike is all wrong, Eric," said Stuart, continuing the conversation as it had started from the standpoint of the miners. "I am in receipt of letters every day from my agents in Cleveland beseeching me to come in with the other owners on their refusal to grant the men their demand of $2 a day. They say in every letter they do not see in case of a break in the union how I am going to manage affairs if the men hold me to my original decision of giving $2 a day."

"What will you do?" asked Eric.

"Time enough when that time comes. Does the union show signs of weakening?"

"Not yet. But there is no telling." Eric sighed. "I am changing my opinion of the strike and all. Somehow I have seen a different vision of the future since my injury and especially since the night in the square."

"Do you mean that you are more hopeful or less so over the final result?" asked Andrew.

Eric was silent and very thoughtful before he replied.

"I don't expect to see it in my lifetime; I mean the triumph of right and brotherhood, and I will tell you why. The love of money is as old as civilization. I do not know of a stronger or more enduring passion. It reaches down into the very basis of all human struggle and is the mainspring of every civilized man's life. Why, even the church is honeycombed with the love of money! And the more I study the problem the more I believe that nothing short of a very convulsion of nature will ever tear away the clinging, grasping hand of civilization on its eternal clutch of gold, the love of wealth, the cause of all the selfishness of the modern world as we know it."

"There is no question about money being at the bottom of most of the world's selfishness," replied Andrew. "But its use has sometimes proved a blessing. I very often think I could be a better man if I could pay off all my debts and buy all the roses I want."

"Yes, you would then get to be as selfish as the rest of us," smiled Stuart. He came back to the topic first started. "How can we do anything in the present emergency? Here is a practical condition. I don't know that it helps much to discuss how the men got into it. I understand that women and children are beginning to suffer. I don't know that we need to push our investigations into causes further than that."

"Well, you've got plenty of money," broke in Eric bluntly.

"So I have!" Stuart spoke quietly, but almost as if for the first time a consciousness of his great power had flashed across his mind. The other two men watched him curiously—Eric from the standpoint of the workingman, Andrew from the point of view of the church.

"I'm ready to consecrate every cent I possess to the good of humanity!" cried Stuart, with enthusiasm. "And I want you two men to show me how to do it wisely."

Eric rose and shuffled toward the window. Then he came back to where he had been sitting and remarked, "You must be converted sure if it's gone in as deep as all that."

Andrew looked over at Stuart and said smilingly, "If you mean all that, we need time to think it over and formulate wise plans."

Stuart rose and paced the little room. "I mean every word. When I became a Christian, I said in my heart, 'I will dedicate all I have and all I am to the cause of my Saviour.' I understand fully all that means. I do not believe a man can be a Christian at all and make money his great object in life or regard money in any way except as a steward or trustee to use all that has honestly come into his hands as God would have him use it. I don't know just the exact amount of money I have at my disposal," he added simply, "Can't we three get together and arrange some kind of a three cornered, three sided society that shall have for its object the discussion of ways and means and the questions of men in relation to others in society? How does that idea strike you two?"

So for the first time Stuart suggested the plan which he afterward elaborated. The three men agreed to meet the next day with Andrew and make a definite and practical organization. Eric was now able to get out again although he was far from strong and had the prospect of a lame shoulder for an indefinite time.

At home that afternoon Louise and her Aunt Royal were discussing a proposed party to be given for the Vasplaines and three or four other families. Not anything elaborate? just a quiet affair; it was too near the time of her brother's death to entertain any great party. Aunt Royal was very particular about observing society etiquette, especially when the observance did not interfere with her selfishness. When it did, she found that the rules of polite society allowed her to have about what she wanted if she gave it the right name. So she and Louise had planned a quiet "affair," not a "reception" or a "party," at which they had decided to invite about 25 or 30 persons representing the old and aristocratic families of Champion.

"Aunt," said Louise after they had discussed what they would have to wear and to eat, "what do you think of inviting Rhena Dwight?"

"What!" exclaimed Aunt Royal. "The leader of the Salvation Army! What are you thinking of, child?"

"She is a beautiful singer," replied Louise. She seemed to be thinking hard of something.

"Do you mean to invite her in a professional capacity to help entertain the company?" asked Aunt Royal.

"She wouldn't come in that capacity," replied Louise, with a dry laugh.

"What makes you think of inviting her, then?" asked Aunt Royal, with a searching look.

"Oh, never mind! I had an idea," replied Louise.

Later in the afternoon she went out, walking down into the town, as she frequently did in winter. She loved the exercise, and, finding that it helped to keep her well and good looking, she persevered in it even in stormy weather.

Rhena Dwight lodged with an elderly widow who kept two or three other boarders in a house just below the army hall. Louise, after walking around the square, went down past the hall and knocked at this lodging house. Rhena was in, and Louise was directed to her room. She knocked, and Rhena herself opened the door. She did not know Louise at first, as the light in the passageway was dim. When she did fully recognize the face and figure with its rich setting of costly furs, she at first colored slightly. Then she asked her to come in. Louise entered, and Rhena closed the door after her. Outside the snow was beginning to fall very fast, and the short winter day was deepening its twilight about the town of Champion.

CHAPTER VII.

PLANS GOOD AND BAD.

"You are surprised to see me, Miss Dwight," said Louise, taking the seat Rhena had placed for her. "I am Miss Duncan, Stuart Duncan's sister."

"Yes, I know you are. I have seen you walk past the hall several times," said Rhena quietly. She had not the remotest idea of the purpose of Louise's call.

"We are going to have a little company at the house next week, and we would be glad to have you come," said Louise boldly, looking straight at Rhena. "I thought it would be less formal to call and invite you personally than to send a note."

Rhena looked over at her caller in the utmost astonishment. She did not know Louise at all. She had never met her in society in the old days before leaving everything for the army, and she thought Louise, knowing her story, might suppose she would possibly enjoy a taste of the old life again. The face in the fur trimmed hat looked very pretty, and Rhena felt kindly toward it.

"Thank you," she answered gently. "I appreciate your kindness; but it is impossible. I cannot go. I have shut the door upon my old life. I do not wish to open it again." She was silent, as if memory claimed her thought. Then she added, with a smile that Louise could just see through the unlighted room: "Besides, I have my regular army duties to perform every night. I cannot leave my people, and there is a great deal of visiting to be done now. The distress and suffering in miners' families are increasing very fast."

"I'm sorry you cannot come," said Louise. She rose slowly to go. "Stuart speaks of you occasionally, and I thought perhaps it would please him to invite you." The girl watched Rhena carefully. Rhena did not change color. She stood like a statue, pale and still. Louise continued: "And I thought probably you might feel like coming to the informal affair we have planned. We have asked the Waltons and the Wymans and the Vasplaines, and Una and I will do the honors of the music room, where we hoped we might have your voice to assist. Una plays beautifully."

"Una?" asked Rhena.

"Yes, Miss Vasplaine. It comes natural for me to call her 'Una,' of course. We were girls together, and besides," added Louise, with a short laugh, "since her recent engagement to my brother Stuart it seems more natural than ever. Well, I'm sorry you cannot come. We would have enjoyed hearing you sing."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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