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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never could get unmixed," added Andrew frankly. "I never wrote a book in my life, but I believe Champion is full of material for it."

"Perhaps some one will put us into a story some time," said Stuart contemplatively. "Meanwhile, my dear friends, to the realities of our present conditions. Every man could probably write one good story if he had to. At any rate, we live a story in our own lives, and I am beginning to learn that every human being is a tragedy—a possible one, I mean. Since I became a Christian"—Stuart spoke with a dignity that could be called nothing less than reverential—"I see a new world. I understand Paul's statement: 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things are become new!' And among them all nothing is so new to me as human beings."

"They seem pretty old and commonplace to me sometimes," said Eric. "But I believe I know what you mean."

"I don't believe you do wholly. But I'll let you think you do. Now, we are going to see if three men of brains and willingness, with an interest in humanity, can do anything to help solve some of the questions that have been thrust into some of our own lives. First, say, there is the money part of it."

Stuart paused, and Andrew looked thoughtfully over at him. All three men were now at a point where the conversation and their object in conferring together had shut out everything but the most intense and absorbing interest.

"Well," said Eric at last, with his usual bluntness, "you're the only one that has any money. It's for you to say what can be done on that line."

"As near as I can figure out," continued Stuart as if he had not heard Eric, "the property left by father is worth in the neighborhood of $4,000,000. Half of it is in the mines and their equipment. Father had full control of the property at his death and practically operated the mines as the company. You know, Eric, how father managed. While the other ranges went into the hands of stockholders, leaving a few men in control with a surplus of stock, father worked along from the time he was a captain in the Beury mine, running all the business by himself. It is practically in the same shape now. I could sell out in ordinary times for $2,000,000. The mines turned out under father's management wonderfully remunerative. Then there is nearly $1,000,000 that I hold in trust for Louise. That of course is hers to do with as she chooses. The remaining $1,000,000 is in such shape that it could be converted into cash at any time and is entirely under my control."

"Then you have $1,000,000 to spend?" asked Andrew simply.

"Yes; it amounts to that. Of course the mines pay for themselves while they are running. This $1,000,000 represents savings, accumulations in the business, profits. Most of it was made in less than five years."

The men were all silent again. There was a good deal of hard thinking going on. Stuart spoke first:

"The question now is, 'How can this money best be used to the glory of God? How would you use it if it was yours, Andrew?' He asked the question suddenly, turning to the minister, who sat close by the table with one arm resting on it close by one of his favorite plants.

Andrew stared at Stuart and did not know what to say. At last he exclaimed: "That's a very hard question to answer. In my wildest dreams I never approached the edge of a thought of a million dollars to spend. I never had over a thousand dollars a year in my life. I should think a million dollars would buy up all the hothouses in the United States, and as for rare specimens—well, it takes my breath away to imagine what a million dollars would do. But I'm off the track. Yes, I know what you mean. It isn't a question of what I could get for myself, but what I could get for other people, and I am inclined to believe it is harder to spend money for others than for yourself."

"I don't know about that," broke in Eric. "I have always believed if I had a million dollars to spend in Champion I could make good use of it."

"Go on, Eric; tell what you would do," said Stuart, turning to him.

"Well, for one thing," spoke Eric, his dark eye glowing under the impulse of his idea, "I would build a house or hall dedicated to the cause of labor. I would have it in the center of every useful and inspiring idea that could elevate and enlarge a man's mind, sensibilities and affections. I would have a platform there on which the best speakers, singers and preachers could bring their messages to the people. I would put two of the greatest joys of the world within easy reaching distance of every workingman in Champion—I mean music and flowers. They would be under the roof of this building dedicated to the common people.

"Oh, I have lain awake many a night planning out the spending of other people's money for my people," said Eric, with a smile that was sadder than tears. "The heartache, oh, the heartache. I have felt at the wasted music and perfume of God's rich earth! And if I had money to use I could bring some of these things close to the lives of these men and brothers whose lives are spent underground, who live like animals, as if God had never made the birds to sing and the violets to bloom. I almost hesitate to say to you two what I have felt as I have known of the rich and petted men and women of society wasting their money by the millions on their own narrow, selfish pleasure while thousands of the children of the street and the mine never heard any sound sweeter than a coarse note from an untrained voice or felt the beauty and perfume of anything better than a dusty weed by the roadside. These wants, these differences between the rich and the poor and the miracles of pleasure for my brethren and my own consciousness of helplessness in the matter have almost made me at times a hater of men, a blasphemer against God and all the universe. Money!" cried Eric as he clinched his hand on his knee, while the face, pale and worn from the recent injury, glowed with the fire of its inward spiritual agony. "If I had just what will be wasted in this town this winter in wicked display and foolishness, I could make a thousand children happy for a lifetime and save hundreds of souls from cursing God for ever having been born into a world of such inequality. I have thought sometimes I already lived in hell instead of earth. But— Well, excuse me. I didn't mean to get started this way. I'm mistaken and narrow and one sided and unreasonable and all that, and no one knows it better than I do. All the same, I am sure that as there is a God who rules and judges there will come a day of reckoning for the men and women who have spent his money on their selfish pleasures regardless of God's children who have gone through life starved and parched for the lack of the beautiful gifts of their Father which he intended all should enjoy."

There was a silence in the room. Andrew went over to the window and looked out. He came back to the table at once and without a word cut half a dozen of the choicest roses from his plants, hastily rolled them up in a paper and without a word of explanation rushed out of the room. Eric and Stuart could hear him tearing down the stairs three steps at a time. They looked at each other in silence and then rose and went over to the window.

Crossing the square by one of the diagonal paths cut through by the snowplow was Mrs. Binney, the wife of the injured miner, the woman who had come in to see Dr. Saxon the day before Stuart and Eric had been caught in the mine. She was carrying a basket on one arm and was on her way home after having been down to Champion from her house up on the hill. Andrew had been up to see Jim several times.

Eric and Stuart, looking out, saw Andrew wade through a snowdrift that reached almost to his neck and stop the astonished Mrs. Binney just as she was turning off to go up across the railroad tracks. He gave her the roses in the paper. She put them in her basket and bowed her curiously shawled and bonneted head. Andrew rushed back, darted up stairs, pulled a broom out of the closet, retired to the hall, brushed himself off and, coming back, said, panting: "Excuse me. I am sometimes taken that way. It is not dangerous."

"It would be a good thing if it was—that is, if it was catching," said Eric significantly.

As for Stuart, he had gone back to his seat and was very thoughtful, in a great study over many things.

"I am wrestling with a problem greater than any that ever challenged me," he said at last as the others remained quiet. "I need more wisdom and more knowledge. I believe, as Eric says, that money can create miracles of a certain sort in Champion, but shall I say: 'Go to, now! Behold me! I am Stuart Duncan, the mine owner. I have a million dollars. I am going to spend this money for your benefit. My friends, how will you have it? In libraries, souphouses, music, flowers, lectures, preaching, art or what not? I am ready to Christianize, elevate, improve and lift up, to bridge over the chasms that lie between rich and poor and educated and ignorant. You just keep quiet, and the million dollars will do the rest.' Is that the idea? Given, a million dollars to bring in the millennium. Is that the relation between a million dollars and a million years of paradise? It is not so easy. I can see the hall dedicated to labor. That is a possibility. And the music and the flowers and all that. Good. But there is a good deal more behind and within. One thing I know very certainly: I must see for myself what the needs are in Champion. I know in a general way, but I want to know in detail."

"There's one person can tell you all about it," said Andrew.

"Who's that?"

"Miss Dwight."

Stuart flushed. From where he sat he could see the front of the Salvation Army hall. Rhena was just going in with one of the women belonging to the army.

"I'm told that she is familiar already with nearly every case of suffering in Champion," continued Andrew. "She has even been out on the hills as far as Cornishtown. It's a pokerish place in winter, full of pitholes and abandoned prospecting shafts. I wouldn't want to get caught out there and lose my way after dark with this new snow covering up bad places."

Stuart did not answer. He was looking from the window and saw Rhena and the woman come out of the hall with bundles. They crossed the street and disappeared behind the engine house, going in the direction of the Cornishtown path.

"What did you say?" asked Stuart suddenly as he came back from his little journey with Rhena. Andrew and Eric were sitting where they did not see what Stuart had seen.

"I said that in case you ever fall into a hole in Cornishtown it might be just as well to leave the spending of that money to Eric and me," replied Andrew, nodding at Eric. "That is, leave it before you fell in. For the chances are that no one will be prospecting around at this time of the year with a rope to pull you out."

"I beg pardon," said Stuart. "Let us get at the subject again. It's very evident we cannot settle this matter offhand or in a hurry. But I'm sure the Lord will lead us to do something right. He hasn't given us brains and hearts and then left us to make fools of ourselves, especially when we don't want to."

We do not need to give in detail the afternoon's discussion. The plan for using the money was not fully shaped in any definite way. It could not be.

Even Eric was obliged to confess that the element of time was necessary to help in the solution. They were not planning for a day or a month or one winter, but for a good many years to come.

So Stuart finally went home after running into the office and leaving word there with a clerk to supply certain families that were known to be in want with fuel and food for the immediate time and also leaving word to send for him in case any special demand came in later on in the evening. The miners had recently made several personal requests for help, and Stuart, in his growing eagerness to know as much as possible of the facts in the town, had determined to go himself at the next pressing call and satisfy his desire for the truth.

After supper that evening Louise and Aunt Royal were discussing the coming party or "affair," which had been fixed for the following week. Stuart was sitting with them in the drawing room. There was a beautiful open fire in the grate. The mantel and tiling were handsome pieces of imported marble. The lights had not been turned on yet. It was not quite 7 o'clock.

"Horrible!" Aunt Royal spoke as if she had not understood her nephew.

"What have you decided to decorate with?" asked Louise. She had great respect for Aunt Royal as an authority in all matters of society or entertainment and deferred to her opinion without debate or dispute.

"I think we had better have Nyphetia roses in the front room and small ferns with pearl roses in the dining room. Smilax and carnations will be the proper trimming for the library and lilies of the valley for the music room. The last reception I attended in New York the Dupreys decorated the entire house with lilies of the valley. The effect was lovely."

"What did you say it cost?" asked Stuart, rousing himself to take part in the conversation. He had heard only a part of what Aunt Royal had said. She looked over at her nephew in surprise.

"I didn't say. I heard that it cost about $1,000. That is a small item for flowers in the Duprey receptions."

"It must have been lovely," said Louise, clasping her hands so that her diamond rings were the most conspicuous part of her in the light of the fire.

"I think it must have been horrible," said Stuart quietly.

"Horrible?" Aunt Royal spoke as if she had not understood her nephew.

"Yes; not the flowers, but the use of that much money to decorate for pleasure any man's private residence for the enjoyment of people who could see lilies of the valley any time they wanted to."

"Well, well!" Aunt Royal could not get any further. Louise broke in with a laugh.

"Oh, Stuart's been converted lately to some of the communistic socialistic ideas. Didn't you know that, aunt? The next we know he will begin to object to our using roses for decoration next week here in the house."

Stuart did not say anything. He was thinking of Eric's speech that afternoon, and his heart beat heavily as he thought of all the wasted music and flowers of the earth. Who was getting the best of these two great and beautiful gifts of God?

Was it not the very people who were able to pay the highest prices for them? Where was the right in squandering a thousand dollars of God's own money to enjoy the beauty of flowers when people were dying of hunger and misery in the nearest tenement? If it was God's money and if men were only trustees of the funds, would God probably consider that a right use of the money? It was only one phase of the doctrine of stewardship which Stuart had lately begun to believe in.

But Aunt Royal was not the person to remain silent after Stuart's use of the word "horrible" in connection with her decorative ideas as they were connected with social functions. She asked, sharply for her:

"Do you mean to say, Stuart, that you think we have no right to use flowers in giving pleasure to our invited guests?"

"No; I did not say that," replied Stuart dryly.

"What do you mean then?"

"I can't make you or Louise understand me," said Stuart after a pause.

"No; Stuart talks in riddles of late. He thinks we are too aristocratic and un-Christian," said Louise. There was a sneer in her voice which hurt Stuart keenly.

"Why do you say that, Louise? You know I am thinking of the poor families who are beginning to suffer at this time. Surely we ought to do as much for them as for ourselves. If we spend a hundred dollars to decorate the rooms with flowers for a party, we ought to give twice as much to help feed the hungry. The better way would be to take the money spent on the flowers and spend it on food."

"What!" cried Louise angrily. "On the people who have brought their condition on themselves by their own foolishness! Who is to blame for their being hungry and cold if not themselves?"

"The women and babies are not to blame, and they are the ones to feel the suffering most," said Stuart quietly.

"Well, you can use your money that way if you want to, but I don't waste mine on people who don't know when they're well off."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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