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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Continued from First Page.

art said sadly. "It's one more factor in the problem. Let's face it like men and hope for better things to come. Of course Andrew is right about the relief of suffering women and children. I have a plan, too, that I believe can be carried out to a certain extent in getting the men to work instead of receiving aid in idleness. I need more time to work it out. Meanwhile we ought to consult with the doctor and the city officers as to the best and most effective way of"—

There was a knock at the door, and Dr. Saxon came in. "I haven't but a minute to stay. Heard you were here.

There was a knock at the door, and Dr. Saxon came in.

Wanted to tell you that the typhoid has started in and looks like a bad job. Never knew typhoid to come this way in winter before, but all the streams are poisoned. Jim Binney is going with it. Sanders' two girls are down with it. Cornishtown is likely to be swept with it. I can't make these people obey my directions about the drainage. I find they've been drinking poisoned water all the fall. The mines ought to furnish the doctor with a company of militia with orders to stand guard over these obstinate, stupid old"—

The doctor choked off the next word and went on: "And if they didn't obey, shoot 'em on the spot and save expenses of medical attendance. Tell you, Stuart, I'll run up a bill against the company for all this work I've put in lately without pay. I'm tired of it. Been out on Davis hill every day now for a month. Tipped over this afternoon coming down the Iron Cliff road and got two bushels of snow up my sleeves. If there is anything I hate, it's snow up my sleeve. I'm going to quit running my head into avalanches for these ungrateful, thankless"—

Just then a loud knock at the door interrupted the doctor, who all the time he was speaking was shaking the snow off his coat upon the stove, which hissed and sputtered with the doctor's vigorous growl.

"Is the doctor here?" said a voice as Eric went to the door and opened it.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Lew Trethven has broken his leg. Fell into prospecting hole near upper trail of Cornishtown. He wants doctor to come right up."

"Yes. Hear that, will you!" said the doctor, who was listening hard to catch every word. "Trethven has broken every leg of his body three separate times since I've been here. If he had six legs, he'd break every one of 'em. He always falls into a hole at the close of day, when I'm the farthest off and feel the least like going to see him. I've mended him so often that he looks like a bamboo fish rod."

"Say, doctor, can you come right up?" asked the man outside as he caught a glimpse of him through the opening.

"No; I haven't had anything to eat all day since breakfast. Tell Trethven to wait until morning. He's used to breaking his legs by this time. Tell him to set the fracture himself. Tell him I'm sick. Tell him"—

Eric shut the door, and the man outside walked slowly away. The doctor saw him go by the window.

"Excuse me," he muttered. "I forgot to blanket Ajax." He darted out of the room, and Stuart saw him go around the corner and overtake the man. Ajax was standing out near the street where the doctor had left him. Stuart saw Saxon rush the messenger from Trethven into the cutter, climb in himself, leaving one foot out as usual, turn Ajax around with such haste that for a moment it was a matter of doubt whether the miner would remain inside or outside the reeling, swaying cutter, and then they disappeared behind a great drift by the side of the street.

When Stuart went home that afternoon, he carried with him a burden that grew heavier as the twilight deepened. There were more questions to settle than a few about the expenditure of $1,000,000. Humanity was full of refusals to be helped. It was the same cry that Jesus made, "They will not come unto me that they might have eternal life." And these saloons! He walked past a dozen on the main street. They never had thrust themselves so conspicuously into his senses before. And as he was going by one of them, a crowd of miners noisily burst out and scattered over the sidewalk. One or two of them noticed Stuart and seemed ashamed as they slunk by. He went on past the Salvation Army hall and could not help thinking of Rhena, living her daily life in such surroundings, working with this rough, turbulent element, although the large part of the miners had so far kept away from the saloon.

He lingered a little as he walked by, hoping to get a glimpse of Rhena, but did not see her and went on home.

The next few days were days of great anxiety to Stuart. The doctor's predictions as to the typhoid fever proved correct. It broke out and swept over Cornishtown with great fury. No one could remember when such an epidemic had raged there. Stuart sent down to Chicago and had several trained nurses come up and begin duty at his expense. He blessed God for the things that money could do in cases like this. He also relieved Dr. Saxon by hiring two assistants and of course made the doctor himself understand that all the work he did while the mines were shut down would be reckoned the same as if the men were being paid.

But all this was nothing to what he longed to do. He went himself into the miners' cabins and acquainted himself with all their rough and meager surroundings. Several times during these visits he met Rhena, but she was always busy with her duties and hardly exchanged a word. Stuart fancied she tried to avoid meeting him. Her manner was different. He wondered vaguely if she knew, if she had been told, that he had found her that night and carried her down through the upper trail.

All this time he was also working at the problem of the men in idleness, and the more he thought it over the less confident he grew of his ability to solve the difficulty. Champion was a mining town, with nothing else of an industrial character to occupy labor of any kind. There had once been an attempt to put in smelting furnaces, but it had failed owing to the expense of fuel. Stuart confronted a condition of practical ignorance on the part of the miners concerning any kind of manual toil except that to which they had been born. It is of course hardly necessary to say that he daily used his influence with the men to persuade them to agree to his terms, and yet even while talking and urging he could not avoid a feeling of great unrest, and with it all went a certain admiration for the men who gave as their reason for not coming back to the Champion mines on Stuart's terms, "It don't belong to be for us to take the dollars while all the rest of De Mott men be shut out at the old wages by other companies." The whole situation was a deadlock so far as the union was concerned, and the whole problem was a complication of events and conditions in the commercial world which Stuart faced as a new thing, especially when he found himself attempting to apply the teachings of Jesus to his part of it. He was willing to act on those teachings as fast as he discovered them, but other men connected with the strike on both sides were not willing. And he was, willingly or unwillingly, a part of the commercial system, and as far as he had gone yet he saw little relief for the Champion men or little opportunity for the use of the money he was ready to give or use except to help lessen the immediate sufferings regardless of what other people might call its cause. He had not been enough in the habit of using money for other people to know how to do it either wisely or in a way to produce permanent results.

So the week went by, and it was the night of Aunt Royal's and Louise's party. Stuart dreaded the occasion because his heart was not in it at all. It seemed to him like a cruel thing somehow to be having a gay, expensive, dressy gathering, as he knew this affair would be, at a time when little children were dying and rugged men and women in those wretched miners' cabins were tossing in the fever of that scourge which laid its bony knuckles of death against nearly every door in Cornishtown and grimly called one by one out of the burning heat within to the cold embrace of the messenger outside. Stuart spent the day in a round of visits. At different places he found Andrew and Rhena and Eric. All of them were worn and sad with the burdens of all they had done and carried. Rhena especially seemed to show the strain of her great sacrifices. Stuart came very near speaking to her once about her overwork. If he had, it is doubtful if he could have kept from telling his love in the same breath. Somehow he did not say it. And late in the evening he went home with a feeling as near the heartache as he ever knew. He seemed to have thought he must spend the day in as sacrificial and helpful a manner as possible in atonement for the evening he was to spend. But certainly if ever man was in a poor frame of mind to enjoy festivity of the fashionable sort Stuart was that man. Jim Binney had died that afternoon, and Stuart had been there just in time to see Rhena kneel by the bed and pray as the spirit went back from the rough tabernacle to God who gave it. The words of the prayer and the great sobs of the miserable wife and mother, the cries of the children, the wretched hut with its few broken pieces of furniture, the snow patches on the floor, the dirty windows, the august dying of humanity in so commonplace and for granted a manner—all this filled Stuart's heart as he came down into the brilliant rooms, decorated with their garlands and bouquets of expensive flowers and perfumed with that refinement which wealth cunningly spent knows so well how to produce.

The guests came, dressed in the latest and best that money can afford. The conversation was charming and agreeable. To hear these men and women talk a stranger never could have guessed that there was such a thing as suffering in all the world. The music was about love and flowers and beauty and sentimental phrases that had no meaning or a double one. The whole thing filled Stuart for the first time in his life with unspeakable loathing. It seemed to him like a dance in a cemetery, where the dancers might imagine they were waltzing over fragrant meadows dotted with white blossoms when in reality it was on human graves they danced, black with the freshly laid earth of new made burials. He never knew how he passed the evening. He sang with Miss Vasplaine when Louise requested it. He heard a great applause when they had finished. Una was dressed beautifully. She was handsome, with great black eyes and much color, of the type of English girls, so different from Rhena. Stuart remembered thinking at one time during the evening. He found great difficulty in conversation. He had never been very apt at the slight nothings society knows so well how to exchange. Tonight he wondered if the world was so happy and satisfied everywhere that men and women, made in the image of God, had no better way to spend their time than to meet for hours every week dressed in their best clothes, eating expensive and indigestible food, singing songs that did not contain one noble aspiration higher than a sickly sentiment, exchanging idiotic words thrown into sentences that had no throb of sacrifice or heroism or humanity in them, sitting at little tables and playing cards by the hour with a persistence and repetition never shown for any enduring needs of human suffering and then going home to sleep late next day and get up to prepare for another evening in the way of new ways of arranging flowers, card tables, menus and decorations ad infinitum ad nauseam after the manner of what pleased to call itself the "best society."

Yes, the world must be getting on very smoothly. There is no real suffering, no inequality, no need of heroism or sacrifice, no call for using human speech in any better way than to exchange compliments, no use in trying to use time except to make money and enjoy spending it, where women smile and sing, and flowers give out their perfume, and dancing feet strike the polished floor to the music of the strings behind the palms in the alcove. For the world is society. What other world is there that calls for tears and groans, and sacrifices and crosses, and bloody sweat and agony? Strike up the music faster, faster! "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Surely society must be right. The Aunt Royals and the Louises are certainly very proper and correct in their estimates of what constitutes the right thing to do. It cannot be that they are mistaken in this matter. Yet if they are it is possible the great judgment day will reveal it to them. After all, death and the judgment are two disagreeable facts. We beg society's pardon for mentioning them. Strike up the music faster, faster! Let us not think too much. Thinking leads to action, and action leads to sacrifice, and sacrifice is not agreeable.

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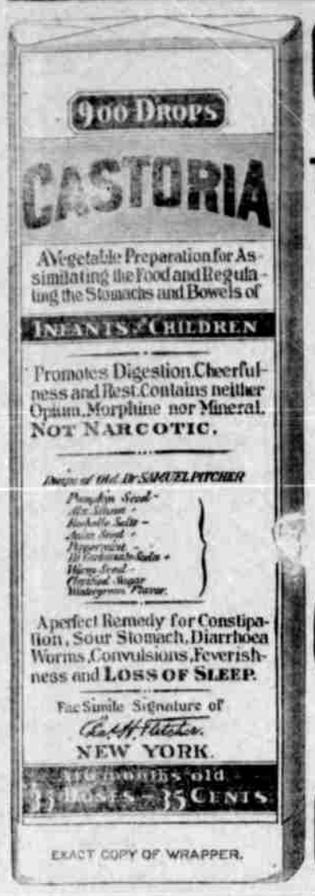

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