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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spy out his habits? He's as fast as most of the young men, I suppose. What difference does it make? What right have you to pass judgment on him?"

Stuart was staggered at first. Then he recovered himself and replied: "Louise, I love you. You are my sister. I speak as I do because of my knowledge, and I say to you that if you marry Hal Vasplaine you will be a miserable woman. Louise, listen to me," Stuart went on, his love for his sister for the moment causing him to forget his own condition. "This man who has asked you to marry him is—oh, Louise, he will wreck your life! He is"—

"You need not say any more," interrupted Louise coldly. "I have promised to marry him. I like him. I believe I love him even, since your brutal attack on him behind his back. You claim the privilege of marrying beneath you. Let me do the same, if that is what you call it."

Stuart reeled almost as if he had been struck. He had been standing facing Louise since she took her arm from his. He passed his hand across his eyes, and then in a low tone he said:

"Let us go on. We shall never understand each other."

Louise without a word took his arm again, and they went on in silence. By the time they reached the town square most of the lights were out, except in the houses where the sick and dying lay. Everything was wrapped in the quiet of a still winter night. The Salvation Army hall looked cold and bleak, its unpainted siding black with age. There was a light shining from Rhena's room. Their way led right past the house. Stuart trembled as he went by. He feared Louise might say something.

She did not, however, and neither spoke a word until they reached home.

Aunt Royal was still up and waiting for them. "You must have walked fast," she said, looking keenly at them both.

"We did," replied Stuart. "It is a very cold night."

He went into the library, where there was an open fire burning in the grate. The rooms were still heavy with the perfume of roses and carnations.

Aunt Royal and Louise followed him, after Louise had said a few words to her aunt. Aunt Royal was as excited as she ever allowed herself to be.

"Louise tells me you object to her marrying young Vasplaine," she said, confronting Stuart abruptly.

Stuart was surprised. He did not think Louise would mention the matter to her aunt. But Louise was thoroughly angry, and small natures like hers are never satisfied to wait long before expressing resentment. It was a very natural thing for her to confide at once in her aunt, being sure in this instance of her perfect sympathy.

"Yes, I do object," replied Stuart firmly. He looked straight into his aunt's face.

"On what grounds?"

"The character of the man," answered Stuart quietly.

"His character! Do you know that the Vasplaines have held the very highest position in the best society for several generations? Has not young Vasplaine been received everywhere in society where you and Louise have been?"

"It is possible that society may have more regard for wealth and a family name than for the little consideration of character and morals. I have heard sometimes that that is the case," said Stuart, with a sad smile.

"Why have you allowed the Vasplaines to come into the house, then, if they are such dreadful people?" asked Louise as she sat in one of the deep easy chairs, with her feet out toward the fire.

Stuart did not reply. He was distracted by the events of the evening. He realized that his home life was disturbed by the conflicting factors which necessarily entered it with all his newer ideas and definitions of life. Nothing could be more certain than the fact that henceforth the lives of his sister and Aunt Royal lay in directly opposite ways from his. He felt the needless irritation of the present discussion and longed to escape from it.

Louise, however, had no intention of letting Stuart go without suffering from a blow she knew so well how to inflict. "Aunt, I told Stuart he ought not to object to my choice if I didn't object to his. I don't think, though, that we shall be disgraced by a Salvation Army alliance in the family. Miss Dwight was presented to Una and her escort this evening, and by the appearance of her face it was easy to see she thought them a very handsome couple."

Stuart clinched his hands tightly as he stood with his back to the fire. The old passion rose in him to its highest point, and nothing but the grace of God kept it from bursting out into a torrent such as in the other days had more than once terrified Louise, reckless as she was in provoking it.

There was a deep silence in the heavily perfumed room. Stuart drew a long breath. Then he looked fearlessly into Aunt Royal's eyes, and with a sudden movement he stood close by his sister.

"Louise," he said, and at first his voice was calm, even loving, "you do not know how you hurt me. I expect to ask Miss Dwight to be my wife, but I will never subject her to the humiliation of living under the roof of a house where"—

He broke off abruptly and went out of the room. He felt unable to finish calmly. Aunt Royal and Louise sat up quite late talking over the whole matter. It is not necessary to enter into it. The whole situation was becoming unbearable so far as Stuart was concerned, so the two women agreed.

"What if Stuart marries her and brings her home here?" Aunt Royal would say.

"Then I shall leave the house, but I don't believe Rhena Dwight will ever marry him," Louise would reply. And there the matter rested for the time being, in the thought of the women.

The next morning Stuart did not appear at breakfast. He left word that he had very important business at the office and could not wait for the late meal to which Aunt Royal and Louise were in the habit of sitting down.

He had reached a point in his feelings where he felt the necessity of telling Rhena all. What Louise had said about that chance meeting at the ball disturbed him seriously. But the great question with him now was to know the truth from Rhena herself.

He spent the forenoon at the office. There was plenty to do. The fever and the want on the part of the miners' families were grim factors now in all Champion. The other ranges were fast feeling the effects of the double scourge of sickness and suffering. Scores of the miners' children were dying daily. To meet the emergency Stuart used his money lavishly. Everything in the way of medicines and nurses' supplies went out of the office in large quantities. He took a melancholy pleasure in spending his money this way. He could at least relieve some pain, lessen some anguish. It was a drop only in the great ocean of the misery, but he had some satisfaction in contributing that much.

A little after noon word came to him that the child in the cabin at the end of Cornishtown was dying. Stuart had no particular reason for going up there more than to any other cabin where other children were dying, but somehow he felt drawn in that direction, and about 2 o'clock he drove up the narrow wagon road and left his horse and cutter at the same place where he had stopped the night he had found Rhena.

He walked on up the path over the trodden snow thinking of that night. The air was crisp and the sky clear. The whole town behind him lay in its setting of snow dressed hills, beautiful as a picture painted by a master, giving so outward sign of the anguish and sorrow that beat within the homes of the miners below.

He knocked gently at the cabin door, and Rhena opened it. She colored faintly at sight of him, but without a word beckoned him to enter.

The doctor was kneeling by the bed. It was a child, a little girl, only 10 years old, who was dying. Stuart went and stood at the end of the rude bed. Rhena seated herself close by the doctor. The father of the child was helpless from accident. He lay in the next room. The mother was kneeling by the side of the doctor.

"Is she—is she going—now—doctor? Don't say so. She be young to go!" cried the mother as she leaned over the bed and looked into the wasted face there.

"Yes, she's going. She will soon be out of suffering," replied the doctor, very, very gently. No one was ever more gentle than Dr. Saxon in the presence of the last enemy. He never relaxed his efforts until the last second of life. He looked death in the face with a frown. That was a part of his rough, abrupt character. But he looked the dying and the mourning in the face with the look of a compassionate angel.

Very fast the last great change grew now. The father cried out from the other room that he wanted to see his little girl once more. Stuart offered to bring him in. The doctor nodded, and Stuart went in where the man lay and with Rhena's help succeeded in

They had reached the big stump in the middle of the trail.

getting him into the other room and propped up in a chair where he could see the child. Great tears rolled over his rough, coarse face as he sat there. It was not very long. The doctor made a movement as he held the slender wrist. The eyes opened full on the father as he looked. There was a faint smile. It crossed the face as the sunlight, on a day of low lying clouds when the wind is blowing hard, crosses a meadow. It was gone, and the gray shadow followed fast after. The form stiffened, there was a sigh, another, and that was all. The doctor laid the little hand down and said, "She is gone." He turned his face away from the mother, and Stuart was startled at the look. It was as if Saxon had seen the death he was continually fighting and was enraged at the victory won against his human skill. But he turned again to the mother, who had, after the manner of women among the miners, flung herself over the bed with great shrieks and cries, and lifting her up he half led, half carried, her into the other room and laid her down, sobbing and groaning, on an old couch there. And Stuart could have sworn the doctor's face was as beautiful as mercy and as full of blessing as mortal man's can ever be. When he came back after performing his office for the dead, the doctor went away. Those were days when sleep and rest were strangers to him. He never fully recovered from the terrible strain of that winter.

Rhena remained a little while to do what she could, and Stuart sent a boy who had come up from a neighbor's down for the undertaker and promised all in his power. When Rhena went out, he went with her, and they were soon walking together over the very trail where Stuart had started out the night of Rhena's fall. She had other houses in Cornishtown to visit and needed to save time by the short cut which the upper trail afforded.

Stuart had not asked if he might go with her, and she had neither assented to his company nor rejected it. He had forgotten all about his horse and cutter down the other path. She seemed pensive and thoughtful. The scene they had just witnessed affected them both deeply. It was not an unusual sight these days with either, but death never lost its majesty to Stuart, and Rhena was never more exalted in her feeling than in the presence of the great enemy.

There was hardly room in the trail most of the way for two persons. Stuart walked behind her. They were silent for the most part, except a question or two about different sick people, until they reached the big stump in the middle of the trail, the other side of which Stuart had found Rhena lying.

She turned her face a little as she was about to walk around the old landmark, and Stuart spoke to her. He was very pale and trembled. It seemed to him that a great crisis had come for him. When he had spoken the first word, he at once became more master of himself.

"Miss Dwight, I wish to tell you something. Will you allow me to say what I have felt I must say for a long time?"

Rhena looked startled. Her lip trembled. She seemed unable to answer.

Stuart went on. Now that he had made up his mind, he was like his father in the determination that drove him to his purpose with an iron energy that possessed his whole positive nature.

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