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.

[illegible] path one night, and it was a night of great beauty to me. I found you lying over there close by the mouth of that pit. I caught you up and carried you down to safety. And for a little while you were mine in my heart's thought, and you could not say me nay." His voice broke in a sob. A man can sob only under certain emotions. Stuart had never felt that before.

As for Rhena, she caught her breath and then stood pale and still. "They told me Dr. Saxon brought me in. Why did they not tell me the truth? Why did he not tell me? I owe you my life."

It was both a question and a statement. Stuart would not even now anticipate the love that might yet be his. He stood there facing her, silent after that one outburst. At last he said gently, "I would like to keep the glove: may I?"

She did not answer him. He put the glove back in his pocket. She was very, very pale.

He said one more word, "You believe I love you?"

"Yes; I believe it," she answered in a very low voice.

"I shall always love you," he said. He took off his hat. The act was one of reverence. "Some time when I have won your love, as I know I have not yet, I shall speak again," he added slowly. And then he turned and went back over the trail, never once looking behind. If he had—

When he disappeared behind a clump of firs, Rhena knelt down by the old stump and laid her head upon it, and her prayer was very much like the prayer of that night when Louise had called upon her. After awhile she rose and went down the trail. But she was not the same woman. Her heart was shaken for the first time in her life by the love of a great and good man. Ah, it is possible if he had said to her, "Rhena!" she might have said, "Stuart!" and given him all. It was dangerous for her to think of him. She felt as never before. And then the glove, the knowledge of her safety due to him—she trembled. There were times in her feeling when if Stuart had come back she would have said to him: "I love you. Let us go on our way through life together!" And she went on into the next cottage, a look in her eyes that was new to them and an emotion in her heart that she could not suppress.

As for Stuart, he went down into Champion with a feeling that was not that of defeat or discouragement. It had been a crisis with him. He had at last spoken. He had nothing to regret in all he had said. And in spite of the fact that his answer had been no something told him it was not final. He was the last man in the world to try to argue the woman he loved into loving him. He was not and could not be a pleading suitor for the heart of this woman of all persons in the world. He said to himself the time would come, although he did not attempt to picture when or how, when she would be his as he wanted her to be. With that great thought burning in him he entered upon one of the busiest and most significant weeks of his life.

In the first place, when Sunday came he joined the church. He had already two weeks before gone into the preparatory meeting with Andrew and there recited his experience. It seemed the most necessary act in the world that he should identify himself openly and boldly with other Christians in the organization which Christ loved. There was not a moment's hesitation in Stuart's mind about the duty and privilege of church membership. That was a notable day in his life when Andrew asked him to rise and give assent to the church covenant.

The news that Stuart Duncan was going to join the church was interesting enough to call out a large part of the population of Champion. Andrew had never seen such a congregation. St. John's was crowded, very largely with the miners and their families. Stuart was the only person received at this communion. When he rose at Andrew's invitation, his face was calm and even beautiful. It was a splendid sight to see these two men facing each other at the communion service. When Stuart kneeled to receive the baptism, Andrew's voice trembled for a second over the words, "I baptize thee, Stuart, my brother, disciple of Jesus," and many an eye in the audience moistened. When the bread was passed, Stuart received it from one of the miners who had worked in Champion mines ever since Stuart was a boy. He was a deacon in St. John's, and Stuart never forgot the look on the old man's face as he handed the plate in at the end of the pew. More than half of Andrew's membership were Cornishmen. It was a day long remembered by them.

And to Stuart there came also as he partook for the first time of the elements a new and serious thought of the fellowship he had begun with these men, nearly all of whom had been in his father's employ. It was true they were of the rudest, most uneducated sort. Their type of Christianity as church members was not very exalted. They were at this very moment engaged in a method of struggle against capital which was contrary to all Stuart's real convictions, but he had reached a point where he looked upon the struggle from a different basis. The men in the church were for the most part prayerful, honest and above all generous with what they possessed. Stuart did not know it, but Deacon Sam Penryck, who passed the bread and wine, had that very morning given one of the suffering families in Cornishtown a third of his own savings which he had stored up for the winter to take him through the strike. But it was not about the type of Christianity that [illegible] thing as he sat there. [illegible] relations with [illegible] he was now [illegible] of the body of [illegible] been growing me[illegible] love that he was his [illegible] ever since the death of [illegible] much more now, especially [illegible] conversion and this day's communion. Andrew's prayer touched on that. The service was very impressive.

At its close Stuart asked Andrew if he might say a word, and very simply but strongly he stated his Christian faith and asked for the prayers of the church that strength and wisdom might be given him to live the true life of a disciple. His words as he stood there in all the strength and glory of his young manhood touched the men deeply. They did not show it much, but they felt it and talked of it on their way home. Such a scene had not been known in Champion in their lifetime.

In spite of all this and the tremendous hold that Stuart was obtaining over the men the union held for its original terms and showed no signs of weakening. The Salvation Army still continued to exercise its restraining influence over the majority, although the drinking was increasing. Almost the only hope Stuart had now was that the Cleveland owners would be compelled to yield before the winter was over owing to the demand for ore which for the last weeks had been increasing. He had little expectation that the full demand of the miners would be granted, for he remembered that in the history of strikes very few large strikes had ever been successful. But he hoped the owners might make such concessions that the union would agree to go back on a large rise in previous wages.

So the week following communion Sunday opened with special meaning to Stuart. It was a memorable week for Champion. The fever epidemic had reached its height. Most of its victims were children. The number of deaths daily was appalling. Andrew, Eric, the doctor, the nurses, Rhena and Stuart, with all the available help from the Christian people in the town, were battling with the enemy with all the might of skill and the exercise of all that money and watchfulness could accomplish.

Stuart and Rhena had met several times that week. Nearly always it was by the side of some dead or dying child. They said little. Each seemed to be waiting for something. Rhena was worn and thin, but there had come into her eyes a look she dared not let Stuart see. The winter had its influence in addition to all this to repress and bear down the hearts of the people. Never had such snowdrifts been known in Champion or such severe cold. The nights set in with bitter winds sweeping down the hills, and after the evening train had plowed its way out of the station on its dreary trip westward Champion seemed to be abandoned by God and man. All connection with the outer world seemed cut off, the iron hills shut down hard and close about the town, and the long, terrible night began, a night of agony to those who lived and those who died. The date of the great strike and the great fever will never be forgotten by the children who were left untouched by the grim death.

One night that week Stuart had come home very late, thoroughly exhausted, with the frost chill in his bones, the benumbing sense of his responsibility weighing him down and his heart crying out, "O Lord, how long, how long!" He had gone up to his room and had sunk into a heavy sleep. He wakened between 2 and 3 o'clock with a feeling of something wrong. It was so pressing that he rose and dressed and went to the window that looked out on the town. The night was one of the bitterest ever known. The wind was blowing an icy gale through the valley. Even the Duncan mansion, warmed as it was with the best and most expensive apparatus, felt the shock of the almost solid cold that struck through everything.

Suddenly Stuart saw a light in the lower end of Cornishtown. The miners' houses or cabins there were built for the most part of logs or slabs from the mill. They were crowded very close together at the lower part of the town. As he looked the light flamed up higher, and his heart bounded as he realized that one of the cabins was on fire. The horror of it as he considered what such an accident meant on such a night stupefied him, but only for a second. The next instant he was down stairs, had flung himself into his overcoat, was out of the house and speeding down the road.

When he reached the square, lights were springing up in the windows all about. The alarm had reached the people, and they were rising. By the time he reached Cornishtown half a dozen houses were blazing. The miners had turned out in a body and were fighting the fire like fiends, but the intense cold, the high wind and the nearness of the cabins to one another at this part of the settlement made the fight a most hopeless one.

Stuart ordered all the sick and aged to be carried out of the houses nearest the fire, and he himself worked like ten men. There was no water available. The engine and hose companies had made a desperate effort to reach the settlement, but the tremendous drifts and the condition of the roads made it impossible. The snow itself was the only weapon within reach. It was piled over the low roofed cabins by the excited miners, who saved some houses on the edges by this novel method. But the wind swept everything before it in the center of the fire, and at last all that the men tried to do was to rescue the inmates.

Stuart was helping some one carry a dying child out of a cabin when a great blazing timber was caught up in the hurricane and flung as if by a giant hand right over the couch on which the child was lying and struck Stuart, knocking him off his feet and causing the man who was carrying the other end of the burden to stagger and fall. Stuart did not rise. At that moment Dr. Saxon was coming out of the adjoining cabin. The man who had been helping Stuart rose and yelled for the doctor. He came over and picked up Stuart as if he had been a little boy and carried him clear down the path to Eric's cottage. The miners said afterward that Saxon's face, as it blazed in the light of that horrible fire, was the face of one who looked both death and hell in the countenance and defied them to steal away his beloved.

[illegible]'s cottage was out of the line of the wind and fire that night. The doctor laid Stuart down. As he did so a woman rushed into the cottage and flung herself down by the side of the body. It was Rhena, and she

"Stuart! Stuart! Do you know me?"

cried as she kneeled there: "Stuart! Stuart! Do you know me? I love you! Oh, doctor, he is not dead! He is not, is he? Oh, how I love him! I love him!"

"At this rate," quoth Dr. Saxon grimly, "we shall have to put up another band stand in the square." But he looked at Stuart as he lay there, deaf to all those words of love from the woman whose heart was now his, and the doctor's look was very stern and grave.

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