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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which forced themselves into that little room in spite of all Eric could do. There had been three weeks almost a blank to Stuart, but full of horror and misery for the miners on all the ranges. The fire that dreadful night had made 800 or 400 people homeless. The deaths from fever had lessened some in Champion, but at De Mott the daily mortality had increased. But most of the suffering came from lack of clothing and fuel and food. The winter had continued with terrible severity. And still the union held out with remarkable stubbornness, although the week of Stuart's convalescence there was a rumor that a break would come very soon. The union had reached its limit of ability to help in a financial way long before this.

Stuart came back to strength and new vitality with all the force of the old problem intensified as he realized what the three weeks had added to it. He was glorified with the love of Rhena, now wholly his, but he knew that for nothing did she love him more than for his desire to try to solve the human problem, as it touched both their lives in Champion. With all the added warmth and enthusiasm of her great hearted wisdom he now set himself to the duty before him. It was not alone his desire that Rhena should be one of the company when Eric and Andrew came in to talk over matters. The other men had learned that woman's wit very often supplies the necessary factor in a solution of practical relief, and Rhena took her place with them as indispensable to their councils henceforth.

"Something has got to be done soon for the people who lost everything in the fire," said Andrew. The little group of four were in Eric's room, Stuart on the couch, Rhena sitting near the end of it, Eric pacing the room, his dark eyes restless and burning.

"I understand they have all been comfortably cared for, but I don't see myself what Champion people have been able to do for them in the way of housing them," said Stuart, looking at Andrew, upon whom a large share of the work of relief had fallen during Stuart's unconscious condition.

"Heaven knows how all of them have been cared for. The Salvation Army hall has been turned into barracks, and Miss Rhena here knows how much the army has done."

"It has done very little in comparison with what it would like to do," said Rhena sadly.

"Do you know what it would like to do?" asked Stuart, who was only just beginning to comprehend how great and pressing was the need since the fire and three weeks more of the strike.

"I'm afraid it's not much use for me to say," answered Rhena, with added sadness.

"You forget," answered Stuart. "What is all my money for? Why have you not been spending it all this time?" he asked almost fiercely, turning to Eric, who still paced the room and who had not yet spoken.

"I've spent plenty of other people's money in my mind," answered Eric as bitterly as he ever spoke, "but I never spent it in reality, and when it comes to the suffering we face now I wouldn't know where to stop. What right have people to go on wasting God's property so wickedly while there is so much suffering?"

He looked at Andrew as he spoke, and Andrew, who seldom made a retort of any kind, replied:

"Ask the devil. He knows more about it than I do."

"And then there is the church," continued Eric, who was irritable and nervous on this occasion, for his long watching with Stuart had been a great strain on him. "What is it doing in comparison with what it ought to do? Stuart, you asked me quite awhile ago why I joined the Salvation Army. I'll tell you why. There was nowhere else I could go for the religious expression of my life. St. John's church is a curious mixture of workingmen and tradesmen, and I'm not saying anything of its aristocracy, for it hasn't any, but if I do say it, and I am sorry to have to say it, the whole object of the church before Andrew came here to it seemed to be to meet together for meetings which gave occasion for a good deal of feeling and emotion, but never realized anything of a practical nature in helping to relieve the pressure of the physical needs of men. The whole thing evaporated in feeling and psalm singing and prayers that never really got much outside the walls of the vestry.

"I'm not crying down the Christian lives of the church members. There are hundreds of them better than I am, but the expression of their Christianity through the structure of the church seemed to me almost nothing. One may be just as strong as another, but if one of them is using a dull ax and the other one a sharp ax to cut down a tree the strength of the two men is not being equally spent so far as getting results goes, and the man with the sharp tool will do the best work, not because he has more muscle, but a better ax. It came upon me with the force of a conversion that I never could do much through the church as an instrument. That's the reason I went into the Salvation Army. It represented the sacrificial spirit of Christianity to me a hundred times where the church did not represent it at all. Take the Church of St. Peter here in Champion. It is always spoken of in the papers as the most fashionable church in town. Think of that! So The News Crier stated in giving the account of its annual meeting. What do those people know of sacrifice or of the spirit of Christ, who gave up all his riches to become poor for the sake of suffering humanity? I'm sitting in judgment on them, and I shall some time be called to account for doing it. But if I was a Catholic I'd be willing to sit on the hottest fire in purgatory to say what I think about an 'aristocratic church.' And this one here in Champion is only one out of thousands all over the country. What is the church, as an institution, doing to obey the command of Christ, to deny itself, take up its cross, forsake its ease and pleasure and follow him?"

Again Eric turned in his walk and confronted Andrew. Stuart and Rhena watched him almost sorrowfully after listening to Eric's outburst. Over Andrew's jolly, good natured face crept a gray shadow of seriousness that showed how deeply Eric's sharp condemnation had pierced.

"Your question is larger than any answer I can make without taking up hours of discussion," he said at last, speaking calmly, but with evident self control over a possible fury of feeling. "The church today contains some of the noblest and some of the meanest men and women. There is in the church the highest, purest, most saintly devotion to Christ and his teaching, and at the same time there are alongside of it the most awful selfishness and love of ceremony, show and hypocrisy. The scribes and Pharisees are just as much in evidence now as when they cried to Pilate: 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Long ago I came to the conclusion that the same people would nail Jesus to the cross again if he appeared in this generation and denounced their hypocrisy and selfishness as he did before. At the same time he would have a great army of disciples, who would suffer martyrdom for his sake. I regard the church of today as occupying a peculiar position in the world of struggle between different groups of men. There is a growing feeling on the part of many churches that a great revolution in the methods and purpose is at hand and that nothing will be so radically changed in spirit and purpose as the church of Christ. The amount of relief for suffering that flows out of the organization we now have is no doubt enormous. Propose to any civilized community in this country that it wipe out its churches altogether, and the proposition would meet with instant objection, even on the part of those who are most ready to denounce the church for its uselessness. I am not attempting to answer your question in full, Eric. Of course if I did not believe in the church—I mean in its possibilities of sacrifice—I would not work from it as a center. I would get out and work from some other basis. But this is my best reason for believing in the church as a power for the world's redemptive uplift after all else has been said."

Andrew paused, and the rest listened thoughtfully. "The church is the only organization Jesus ever mentioned. He especially loved it. It was not any particular form or name that he loved, but the discipleship organized in love to one another and a common Master, going forward to conquer the world for God. And after the trials and false representations of Christ in the church have had their day, after the aristocratic churches have died and the memory of their pomps and fashion is no more, after the coldness and carelessness and superficial worldliness of the church have had their time lived out, the true church will survive the wreck of all this agonizing death in life and be a universal representation of the crucified Lamb of God, giving its life for the needs of a suffering and dying race. 'I believe in the holy catholic church' [meaning the church universal] 'in the sense that I believe it contains the leaven that is necessary to leaven the whole lump. Why, even the Salvation Army never would have had an existence if it had not been for the church."

"Do you mean that the church had grown so mean and useless that the army had to be organized to do what the church ought to have done?" asked Eric, with a smile.

"No. I mean of course that the Christian men and women who organized the army had their nurture and training in the church. She was their mother. They went out from her home to do a work they never could have done if they had not been trained and taught at her feet."

"Is not the Salvation Army as much the church as any other form of organization where Christian disciples get together in Christ's name?" asked Rhena.

"Yes, I think so," replied Andrew.

"I mean to prove it by joining both," said Stuart, looking at Rhena.

"You can't join the army without giving up your own wishes and obeying the orders of your superior officer," said Rhena slyly.

"It's one of the rules of the army also, I understand," added Andrew, with a twinkle, "that a private cannot even marry without asking the consent of the commanding officer. Isn't that so, Miss Rhena?"

"I've asked it and obtained it," said Stuart. "The commanding officer says, 'Get married as soon as you recover from your present illness.'"

"She doesn't, either," said Rhena hastily. Then, as Andrew and Eric began to laugh, she blushed and said, to hide the confusion: "We are getting away from our original question. Stuart wants to know how to spend his money. It seems too bad if we can't any of us tell him how."

"I can tell him how to use several thousand," said Eric, who, after expressing his own mind on the church question, was once more the calm, thoughtful, even attractive, man he really was. Eric had great powers, but they were not developed.

"Well, go on!" cried Stuart.

"The miners need new houses in Cornishtown. What could be a better way to invest $10,000 or $20,000 than to put up a hundred substantial houses that would really be homes?"

"What do you think of that?" asked Stuart, turning naturally to Rhena.

"It ought to be done," she answered softly, "and a good deal more. I am not thinking of the houses alone, but of the men, women and children who live in them. There is no doubt they have had all these years the most miserable quarters. What can be expected of a family living in a cabin of only three rooms at most? How much refinement and civilization can come out of such surroundings? Stuart, you must drain the settlement and"—

"I'll drain the whole neighborhood!" cried Stuart. "And the houses shall be built at once. Why have you let me lie here all this time like a useless thing when so much is needed to be done?"

Just then Dr. Saxon came in. He entered as usual the minute he had rapped a peculiar knock known by every one in Champion, stopping outside only long enough to say, "It's the doctor."

The minute he appeared Stuart began to abuse him for not getting him well quicker.

"I'll never pay you, Doc, unless you give me something that will let me out of this in a day or two, or else I'll sue you for malpractice!"

"If you do, I'll sue the company for half a million dollars' worth of practice done on the miners since the strike and the fire. I'm going to retire after this winter if I can law the company out of what they owe me. But you can get out again in a day or two. The only thing that ails you now is heart trouble, and I can't cure that. You are in a very dangerous condition."

The doctor looked at Rhena, and so did Stuart, and then, after a moment of sober thoughtfulness, the doctor smiled. It was a rare smile and made his rugged, storm beaten face almost handsome. He was already moving toward the door to go out. He was in a great hurry that morning for a wonder, he said, and simply stepped in on his way up the hill to see how Stuart was.

"Stop him!" cried Stuart to Eric. "Say, doctor, don't go yet. We need your advice. We want your help in making plans for the relief"—

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