

### His Brother's Keeper

Christian Stewardship

BY CHARLES M. SHELTON

Author of "In His Steps," "The Crucifixion of Philip Barlow," "Robert Mack's Seven Days," "The Man with the Whip," etc.

Aunt Royal's voice came to his ears with its usual placid smoothness.

"Louise left me on her marriage. She immediately after her marriage, she went south and then took a trip out west. When she returned, they took rooms in the Avenue hotel. I saw them often, but not intimately. Vasplaine had begun to drink. But when he finally left her I was as much surprised as you are."

She paused suddenly, and Stuart was silent. The great gift clock on the mantel chimed a silver ball into a bowl, and Aunt Royal turned her head slightly toward it. Stuart still looked at her reflection in the mirror.

"When did Louise leave New York for Champion?" he finally asked.

"I don't know anything about it," replied Aunt Royal, with the first mark of irritation she had shown.

"Do you mean to say, aunt, that after Vasplaine's desertion of her, Louise never came near you?" asked Stuart, turning full upon her and looking into her face almost as resolutely as if he really knew the facts.

Again Aunt Royal's face paled. She could not control her blood, even after so many years of artificial repose in the exercise of society manners.

"I tell you I did not see her after Vasplaine's disgraceful desertion of her. He turned out to be a gambler and a dissipated fool of the worst sort and flung Louise's property and money away like a madman. I don't know where he is now."

"I have not asked about him," said Stuart dryly. "I am anxious for Louise."

He remained a moment more in silent thought. He could not help believing that this woman had not told the truth, but he was powerless to prove his belief. At last he found his heart so sick at the thought that he longed to escape from the house.

"You will stay to lunch?" Aunt Royal asked politely as he rose and moved to go.

"No, I thank you," replied Stuart quietly. "I must start back to Champion this afternoon."

"I hope poor Louise will recover," she said, and was about to add something more, when one of the servants came into the hall and announced an important message at the telephone from some one connected with Aunt Royal's proposed summer tour.

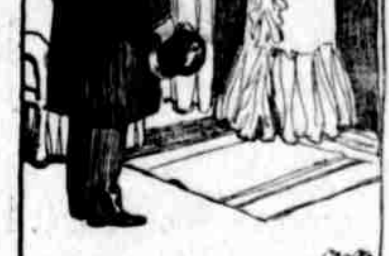
"Excuse me while I answer this. I will let you see yourself out," she exclaimed with her conventional politeness, and was gone.

Stuart was just going out when the servant, who had opened the door for him when he came in, spoke to him.

"I can tell you something about your sister, sir, if you will wait a minute."

"Of course I want to know all I can," Stuart was surprised, and reflected that this man might be simply a tale-bearer, or trying to earn a fee, but the thought that Louise might possibly be the gainer by knowledge he might learn of her quieted Stuart to listen.

"I haven't time to tell it all out," whispered the man hurriedly. "But Mrs. Vasplaine, she came here one night about a week ago, and I couldn't help hearing what went on in the drawing room. She begged her aunt to take her in and shelter her till she could find a place. Her husband had run off with another man's wife and gambled away all the money, so near as I could make out, and the poor lady was almost crazy over the shame and ruin of it. She begged and begged, but her aunt wouldn't listen to taking her back, with all the scandal. You understand, sir, how people in society look at those things, and so at last Mrs. Vasplaine went away. She looked as if she would drown herself, sir. I felt so sure of it I slipped out back way and followed her, and saw her take a depot bus, and then I saw her. I don't mind telling you, sir; this is



"This is an unexpected pleasure, Stuart," truth, I live her this week, anyway. I'd as soon live with the devil's wife as with her, and no mistake, begging pardon if she is your relative."

Stuart clinched his hands tightly, and in his heart he uttered a groan.

There stood Aunt Royal, her face flaming. She had come into the hall through a side door right behind the servant. How much of the man's story she had heard Stuart could not tell, but it was enough to let her know that Stuart at last knew.

"It's a lie, a miserable lie," she screamed. "It was the only time Stuart ever saw her in a passion. He had been locked to the door, and for a moment he looked in the face, and then, without a word, he turned around, opened it and walked out. The warm sunshine seemed like something almost human as he closed that door behind him and walked away. He knew the truth now. At last there was no doubt in his mind

that Louise had been a shelter in her greatest need. This society woman, who would not call itself rather than the woman's loss of society standing and her selfish ease and pleasure. And that he was right in believing the servant's story was shown by after events as well as by items of news which came to him from various sources through New York acquaintances.

Putting all he could gather into a connected series, he managed, before returning to Champion, to learn in general terms after Vasplaine had ruined her financially and then brutally abandoned her.

She had found herself practically without friends in New York. The only relative there was Aunt Royal. She naturally turned to her in the hour of her trouble. She was probably at that time well nigh crazed with the succession of blows that had fallen upon her. It seemed to Stuart incredible at first that Vasplaine in so short a time could get possession of Louise's money and squander it. But the more he learned of his career the less he wondered. Louise had trusted him, fascinated by a certain attractiveness such men often possess. And when he finally left her she found herself alone in a great city, ruined.

Her aunt's refusal to receive her added the final stroke to the weight of her shame and misery. Stuart never knew what Louise had done after leaving her aunt's house before she appeared so unexpectedly in Champion. There were at least two days when he supposed she must have wandered about or taken the wrong train to get home, all that time fast losing her reason and yet with enough left to shape her way back to the old home. The shock of her experiences told the story of her condition as Stuart found her when he lifted her up from the doorstep that rainy night.

All this gave Stuart bitter thoughts as he hurried back to Champion. He almost dreaded to go off the train for fear the doctor would meet him, as he did before when his father had died, but no one was there with any news, and when he reached the house he was surprised to find Louise sitting up and looking no worse than when he went away. He tried to take courage for her. The doctor said she might linger a few days through the summer, but gave no hope of mental recovery. With this constant shadow of death in their home, therefore, Stuart and Rhena, with thoughtful and serious hearts, their love for each other refined and strengthened by their affliction, went forward with their great plans for the brotherhood of humanity.

The Hall of Humanity was going up rapidly now. Stuart had determined to have it ready for dedication before winter set in if possible. He had employed a very large force of the best workmen he could find. All this, of course, meant that he and Andrew, Eric and Rhena and the doctor, together with other good people of the town, had given a vast amount of thought to the plans and purposes of the building. At the same time Stuart was beginning the foundations of his own home down in the town. The Hall of Humanity stood on one side of the square nearly opposite St. John's church. Stuart had owned several small buildings there and had torn them down to make room for the new building. His own house was to be near by.

A few days after Stuart's return Eric and Andrew had come up at Stuart's request and with him and Rhena were sitting in the library at the Duncan mansion discussing the plans that were now beginning to take visible shape. Eric had gone back into the mines with the other men and seemed to be passing through an experience of bitterness. He had not yet recovered from his humiliation at the loss of his influence over the men. He was able to be present at the conference on this occasion, owing to a half holiday which the miners were celebrating in one of the numerous lodges.

"I don't understand this arrangement here," said Andrew, who was examining the plans of the hall, which lay spread out on the table.

Stuart explained the particular point, and then they all began to talk about the building.

"What is your exact idea about the use of the big hall?" asked Eric as he pointed at the diagram marking the place of an immense auditorium.

"I don't know that I have very many 'exact' ideas about any of the uses of the building except that I want it to represent in general the great world helpfulness. I have thought of great singers and lecturers who could be induced to come up here at moderate prices, understanding our object, and then pack the hall full of men and women and children at a small sum within their reach to pay. I believe we could attract up here some of the best talent in music and speech in all the world and give the miners of Champion a taste of some of the world's best beauty. Then I would have a week or two of fine picture exhibitions or fine art exhibits and so on, with, say, four times a year a great flower exhibit. I am a convert to your idea, Eric, of music and flowers for everybody. We could let Andrew here have charge of the flower show if he would promise not to ruin us with his bohemian extravagances."

Andrew was so excited over the thought that he got up and began to pace the room.

"My!" he exclaimed. "Just think of a hall the size of that lined all the way around with chrysantheums or callas or orchids! You'll allow me a few orchids, won't you, Stuart?"

"But, look here!" cried Rhena. "Don't let Andrew spend all our money on orchids! The first thing, the extravagant fellow! Think of all the dollars it will take to run these other departments, Stuart. I have questioned some of the practicability of all these rooms leading out from the main hall."

"Why, you did the planning for them yourself, little woman. What's the matter with them?"

"The question I raise is how much all these different things will really help the people. Now, here, for instance, is the space we have left for the Salvation Army hall. I admit it looks beautiful on paper, and it will no doubt look fine when it is done in wood and stone, but will the army feel at home in it? Will they be able in there to reach the very people who now come into the old hall?"

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"Why, you critical soul, what do you want us to do—make a specimen army hall like the old shanty we have already and knock out a dome pines of glass and stuff miners' hats and the defunct remnants of old clothes into the holes to make the place appear homelike and attractive?"

"There's a good deal of sense in what your wife says, just the same," said Andrew. "If the Salvation Army gets to be too refined, it won't be the Salvation Army any more, and it won't do the army's work."

"Christ was good clothes, didn't he?" asked Eric bluntly.

"Everybody was silent a minute. They all knew what he meant. And still, if the army stood for a distinct way of reaching humanity, who could tell what the result might be, if that special way was to be disturbed?"

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