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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of a collar he had on when he started out had melted away down his neck under the folds of his great coat.

"But, doctor, why don't you have more sense, as you say to the rest of us?" remonstrated Stuart. "Here you are today wet through, and like as not you won't get a dry thread on you again until tomorrow or next week, for all that I know. You'll take your death cold this way."

"Did you ever know me to take my death cold?"

"And this place we are arranging for you," continued Stuart, "will be a comfortable berth for you the rest of your life. You're getting too old, doctor, to expose yourself through another winter."

"I'm not such an old fool as to be cooped up in a hospital yet. Who will look after the men outside if I stay here all the time?" the doctor asked stubbornly.

"Why, we can get a man all right. There are plenty of young doctors who are eager to begin practice here."

"Yes," burst out the doctor, "young upstarts who have a lot of newfangled surgical instruments and are eager to try every one of 'em on every case they get—anything from rheumatism to liver complaint! I was talking with one of 'em last winter, and he wanted me to swallow his latest contraption for operating on the throat with an electric searchlight and battery combined, and I don't know what all! What'll become of my people if these fellows are turned loose on 'em with their inventions? No, sir; I don't intend to turn 'em over to any such risks! Mines and providence are dangerous enough, but a new doctor with a lot of brand new instruments is too much even for Champion men."

"But you are all the time grumbling about the hard work, and when we arrange a good, easy place for you you won't take it," said Stuart, firing a parting shot as the doctor started toward the hall.

"Good, easy place! Stuart, you know I'd rather die from tumbling, Ajax and all, into an old shaft on my way to set Lew Trethven's leg the nineteenth time than petrify dead in the best hospital on earth!" retorted the doctor.

It is possible he will die that way some time, for under no persuasions would he consent to abandon his outdoor work on the ranges. After all, was it not out there that the doctor felt the love of humanity and its hunger for love? And nothing could ever satisfy him except that. The thought of turning over the people of his "parish," as he sometimes called it, to strangers, was a thought he could not endure. He had cared for them too long, and please God, he said to himself often as he tumbled through drifts and waded through gorges, he would still claim the privilege of calling them names and loving them.

So the short summer went swiftly by, and Stuart's plans matured so far as the building was concerned, but he confronted some new problem every day. It required all his growing steadiness of purpose, together with all of Rhena's great love for him, to keep him calm and hopeful. It was not such an easy matter to use God's money for the good of the people who were most in need of it. He had talked over a plan of profit sharing with Eric and some of the other miners, and it was one of many plans he determined to try in the near future. He was being hindered in his efforts to exercise what he had come to call his stewardship by the very men he was most eager to help. Many of the miners would not consent to any improvement in their cabins, and did not take kindly to Stuart's attempt at drainage. Added to all the rest was the ever present factor of the saloon, which never paused in its work of destruction, and stood as a constant force to tear down any and every good work.

But as the fall came on and the great building began to take form and the possibilities of the future for Champion grew upon him Stuart settled one fact very firmly and without vagueness. Whatever his plans might be and however much he might stumble and make mistakes in the days to come, he knew that his use of money or brains or property or whatever he possessed was a use the account of which he owed to God. He was fully persuaded that his stewardship was a sacred thing and a very vital part of his Christian faith, and he finally had a feeling of great peace as he rested on the conviction that he had dedicated all possessions to unselfish purposes for the good of humanity as far as God gave him strength and wisdom to work out the details. The special ways and means by which he was to dispense God's money was a matter which must be left to experiment and trial. The way in which the money should be used was not an important thing in comparison with his entire willingness to use it as his brother's keeper. He argued, and rightfully, that if men of capital once acknowledged that they were God's stewards and once were willing and eager to use money and talents to the glory of God's kingdom in the earth it would not be a difficult thing to find how best to do it. If a man wants to do God's will, the way to do it will very soon be found. The great need is that the man should first be eager to do the will.

The home he was building for Rhena and himself was built with the same idea which now pervaded his entire life. It was built for a home, but in such a way that its use would bless all Champion. If you visit Champion some day very soon, you will understand this better. No one can ever charge Stuart and Rhena with selfish or needless luxury. But every cent used in the building of their home was spent as if they were planning to receive as their most honored guest the Lord Jesus Christ and offer him a real hospitality after a weary day spent in the world.

That was a memorable day in the history of Champion when the Hall of Humanity was completed. The miners had a holiday, and all day long the building was thronged in all its parts by the men and their families. In the evening Stuart had planned, with the help of Andrew and Eric, to have some exercises in the nature of dedicatory services in the great hall. He had gone down early, leaving Rhena with Louise, who had been more restless than usual that day. She had, as the doctor thought she might, lingered on through the summer, gradually failing. No one had noted her condition more carefully than Rhena. She staid with her until she became quiet, and at last left her in charge of a nurse and went down to join Stuart at the hall.

The miners' band had been preparing for some time, at Stuart's request, to

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take part on this occasion. They marched into the hall early and took a position on the platform. The Salvation Army also proudly beat its way up the broad aisle, headed by the major, who, while in doubt as to the expediency of moving into his new quarters without first breaking some of the furniture to make things look just right, had finally consented to try it as it was, and if it was too good, Stuart had arranged for the lease of the old army hall again.

The doctor had been caught after a long chase up into the hills, and Stuart had insisted on his being on the platform, but could not prevail on him to offer any remarks.

"I'm no speaker. Don't ask me, Stuart. If any of the audience are sick or feel bad after you and Eric and Andrew have talked to 'em, I'll do my best for 'em; but I would only perform an operation on their skulls without using an anaesthetic if I tried to talk. It would be too painful for us all. I'll agree to yell at any good points the rest of you make, if I can see 'em without a microscope."

Andrew spoke briefly on the value of the building and its opportunities for Christian service, dwelling on the fact that it was not money that would make the plan successful, but live Christian men and women, who put their hearts into the work that the hall was to represent.

Eric followed with a very strong speech. He was coming out of his disappointment and bitterness, and was almost as popular with the men as before. If he develops he will be a stronger leader than he once ever thought of being. He declared his intention of still remaining where he was in the mines. At the close he took advantage of his opportunity to say some beautiful things of Stuart.

Stuart was the last speaker, and it was an occasion of a lifetime for any man. He was profoundly moved as he faced that audience. It was the same audience he had seen at the meetings in the square, at the railroad station, at the park and in the hall at De Mott, the same rough, stolid, impassive crowd, with here and there a face that lighted up at some human touch as Andrew and Eric had moved it. It was the same, and yet it was different. To Stuart it spoke of opportunities. He saw humanity so differently now.

He spoke well; very simply and in manly fashion. Rhena, proud and happy, felt that admiration for this strong, handsome man, her husband, which always adds to the depth and beauty of the love of man and wife. More than once the tears came as she listened to the way Stuart talked, voicing in a very plain fashion his great desire for the common brotherhood. The men listened with the most breathless interest. When he finished, there was a hearty cheer, which was caught up again and again, while Stuart, overcome by his feelings, sat back and covered his face with his hands.

It seemed a very natural thing then for Rhena to ask all to bow their heads during a prayer. It seemed to the people that nothing could more fitly close such a day and such an occasion than Rhena herself kneeling there, with all the Salvation Army kneeling, as they used to do, around her. She had never prayed so earnestly and truly for the life abundantly to be given to them all. Even while Rhena was still upon her knees, the audience, without knowing all the reason for it, felt that this building was consecrated in a very solemn and profound sense to the humanity in honor of which it was named. And Andrew, seeing that the time had come to close the services, pronounced the benediction.

At the same hour in which Rhena had knelt down before that great silent crowd of miners the doors of the drawing room in Aunt Royal's mansion in New York were being thrown open to one of the first events of the society season. There were gathered the butterflies of the world, diamonds and silks, sweet music and laughter; vanity of vanity, adorned with the impressive power always apparent in a display of rich leisure, danced and ate and drank and gossiped as if the world was all play and the main business of every man and woman was to be as free from trouble and sacrifice as possible. Aunt Royal was at her best; the trip abroad had given her jaded nerves a needed repose and she was ready now for another season of gayety.

"By the way," asked a young man during the evening, who had been abroad several months, "where is that charming niece of yours, Louise Duncan, who used to visit you occasionally?"

Aunt Royal paled a little. "You did not know she is quite an invalid? Yes. She is living with her brother in Champion. It is doubtful if she survives the winter. The winters in Champion are horrible. I spent one there and it nearly killed me."

"Ah, we are thankful it was only one winter. How could we have spared you here in New York?" was the gallant reply.

Aunt Royal smiled at the compliment, and the gay company, its elegance, its flowers, its perfume, its happy carelessness of the world's woe, almost shut out the picture of that agonizing figure that kneeled one night over there close by that beautiful woman at the piano and begged for— But strike up the music faster, faster; let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

The musicians at Aunt Royal's had begun the soft, dreamy waltzes just as Stuart and Rhena came into the library of the Duncan house at Champion. They had been sent for in haste by the nurse, who had noted a serious change in Louise as the evening drew on. They went at once into the bedroom.

It did not need the doctor's presence already there, nor the stern look on his face, to tell them that the end was near. Louise was partly raised on pillows, and her eye glowed with the fever of madness that had all along been consuming her.

"Come!" she cried peevishly. "we shall be late. Don't you hear the clock striking?" It made every one in the room start to hear the great clock in the hall just at that moment strike 11.

"Come, give me my gloves and fan, and tell Jem to drive around at once. Be careful of my dress! Do I look right? The dances will be started. We shall miss the first. How slow you are! I wanted lilies of the valley, and you sent up the freisias. I don't think they are a bit pretty. Doctor, you said not to leave off my cloak when I went out to the carriage. It seems cold! What is the matter? Hark, I hear the music! Why don't they play faster? It is not fast enough."

She stopped talking, and her eyes opened wider. She seemed to see what the rest did not. Then she cried in a terrible voice: "Aunt Royal! Hal! I am going mad! I am mad! Doctor, doctor, save me!"

She fell back, and the doctor shuddered and for a second buried his face in his hands. Stuart never saw him do that before. When he lifted his head, no one asked what the end would be, for it had already come. She had died, as the doctor had really supposed she would, suddenly and painlessly. Her life had gone out like a candle flame in a winter night when the great door of the mansion is swiftly opened and the belated owner of the house is met by the servant in the hall.

"Tell the musicians to play a little faster," said Aunt Royal a few minutes later, and they did so.

When morning began to come in gray and cold, Stuart was standing by the window of the bedroom as he had stood about a year before when his father died. Louise lay there, now that the life had gone, her face almost as beautiful as when Stuart saw her on his return from Europe. The jewels were still about her neck and the bracelets on her wrists, while the freisias of which she had complained lay across her bosom.

Stuart was looking out of the window. A crowd of miners had come down the road and was standing silently in front of the mansion. He saw them there, and even in his grief he respected their purpose in coming thus early to show their sympathy before they went on down to their day's work.

He went out to the hall.

"Tell the men to come up. I shall be glad to thank them," he said to a servant.

Rhena came in. "God has given you to me," he said, "else this would be more than I could bear," and he stood thus with his arm about her, and the tears of his humanity fell fast at the sight of that pale clay on the bed.

Then he turned toward the hall with his wife.

"God is merciful," she said. "He has given us something to live for. We will spend our all in doing his will."

"Yes," replied Stuart, "humanity, after all, is worth saving. It is worth living for. We are our brothers' keepers. There is nothing better in all the world than the love of God for his children, and the love of his children for one another." And with the words he went out and shut the door upon the dead and its past, and with the woman of his love by his side faced the living and its future.

THE END.

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