The Whited Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

By Will Levington Comfort

Copyright, 1916, by Will Levington Comfort
Copyright, 1917, by J. B. Lippincott Company. All rights reserved

CHAPTER XI.

When Constable opened his eyes he was far down the slope, and Breen was bending over him.

"Hello!" said he. "What unhorsed me? I had just settled down comfortably to view that spout when—pluff! I began to lose track o' things and my head broke. What was it—gas, altitude——?"

"More likely old Pelee was up to something he preferred you shouldn't see," said Breen. "I know the racket turned me sick as a poisoned rat while I was dragging at your leg. I know that the natives wouldn't venture within two hundred yards; also, that you are a mortal heavy young person."

"And so you retrieved the fallen under the guns of the enemy? That was good of you, Breen. It was, indeed."

The natives were pressing in. Darkness was beginning. Breen was conscious of a catch in his throat.

"Peter," said Breen quietly, "I ran from you this morning."

"You didn't run from me this afternoon, the which is lucky for me. Take a little touch yourself, old playmate, and don't get moody. One needs a pal when one makes such a mussy dumping-ground of good chances. The engaging Mr. Stembridge never did me any harm, and all that the newspapers could accomplish in the minds of people at large would move me to no deeper emotion than to say, 'Dear folks be—hanged!'"

"Peter, if I hadn't been here, you would be a good daylight run out on the decent ocean by this time, with the lady!"

"Please don't goad yourself further, Breen. That matter is mine—all mine." Constable spoke in a low voice. Breen was bending over him in the dusk. "You didn't force yourself upon me. You didn't even come along by chance. I asked you to cruise with me. You volunteered to tell me about yourself. I said it wasn't necessary. 'This man has a mind, and he isn't a coward,' was the conclusion I came to that night, and I haven't seen fit to change my opinion."

"But the lady——"

"Yes, the lady has spoken. I am done—down and out. * * * The point is, you didn't turn on Pelee's throttle. You're not to blame because I'm a dub of a lover. I'm not on sick report."

"You're game, Peter," said Breen as he helped the other into the saddle.

"Not game enough to abduct one frightened little mother-handled girl," Constable replied.

They were riding together down the winding trail, apart from the guides. The lights of Ajoupa Boullion were ahead, and the mountain carried on a frightful drumming behind. The coiling masses of volcanic spume, miles above the craters, generated its own fire, and, lit in the flashes, looked like billows of boiling steel. Constable was very weak, and Breen rode upon sheer nerve—nerve that men had often wondered at.

"Peter," he said at length, "you are not through trying to get the lady out of this?"

"To think that such a tone and such a question could come from the 'implacable Stembridge'!" Constable said, with a laugh.

"The 'implacable Stembridge' was never crucified before," Breen answered. "To you and me, together, it does not vastly matter that I am Stembridge, one of the bigger wolves. But others have come in. Because I am here, you stand dazed tonight, your heart torn out. Because I am here, you went up to the mouth of that horrible pit to-day, and lay down to die. I have played with men and women, Peter, but I never wrecked a white man before, or broke the heart of a friend."

A hand stretched across the dark and fell upon Breen's arm and tightened there. "I know how you feel; but what would you have me do?" Constable muttered.

"When I see a wisp of smoke on the horizon, and know that you and the lady and the Madame are wrapped in it——"

"For four days I have been dreaming that dream, Breen."

"It must come true this night. There will have been a reaction. Go there to-night. Speak to her alone. Tell her how you came to know me—how men look at these things—that the newspaper story was as new to you as to herself. Tell her of your trip to Pelee, and how the disorder they see and hear down in the city looks up there at first hand!"

It was at this instant that a full-rigged thought sprang into Breen's brain, which had known but the passing of hopeless derelicts throughout the day. He dared not trust the thought to words, lest the other should cancel it, but he called to the guides to increase the pace.

"Ah, she would not listen to words of mine," Constable answered hopelessly. "If she had any faith in me, words would not be necessary. A man knows when he is beaten. I have drawn my little quietus for one day. To-morrow——"

"There may not be any to-morrow for Saint Pierre."

"Of course. For that matter, we might be boiled out like a pair of tater-bugs before we can pick up a snack in Ajoupa Boullion. Then, again, the people may be right, and I a frenzied alarmist. Pelee is throwing off pressure true and steady as a clock running down. It may be that he'll relieve his crowded chambers this way."

Such words, more than anything that had passed, revealed the extent of Constable's reaction. They were entering Ajoupa Boullion, where food and fresh mounts were procurable.

"It's probably better for her that she did not give herself to me," Constable observed, when they were in the saddle again. His mind was deepening the bitter groove now. "We'll put all this behind us presently, Breen. We're mates, I guess."

"This is our last ride together, Peter. There are many reasons. One is—the law is on my trail! * * * Will you please inform me what you are laughing at?"

Constable carefully related the Crusoe episode.

Breen groaned. "Don't you see, Peter, you are winding yourself up tighter and tighter in my crimes?"

"Somehow, I can't get wrought up over trifles to-night. The detective matter disposed of, what are the other reasons why you and I must diverge after this night?"

Breen was silent a moment. "I was pretty hard-hit this morning," he said finally. "The rough weather broke down my idea about not going to the shop again. It seems incredible, but Soronia has never had a lover—before. I found her—if you'll forgive me—in need of me. You see, I had just come from the reeking stone of sacrifice where you lay; and I relit a pair of creole eyes—promised to go to sea no more."

"Suppose I had missed Crusoe?" Constable asked bitterly. "Suppose I had been a poor liar?"

"There are many Crusoes, Peter. They won't all fail. You can't keep this one off always. It amounts to just this for me—that I have found my little isle in the midst of the sea, like that other promoter who all but conquered Europe."

"But why could you not both go aboard with me?" the other persisted.

"I have told you that after this ride I cease to vampirize the career of Constable. If Crusoe finds the Rue de Rivoli, very well. If not, for the present, very well again. None of his ilk shall find you and me together. Two or three times, back across the forbidden tundras of years, I have met men who stack up something as you do in my thoughts to-night. I never hurt any of those fellows as I have hurt you. I'm too fond of you to hit you any harder. Let's talk about something else."

Constable had received a singular appeal. He knew that if there were any future for him, he would think of Breen's last words co-ordinate in memory with the quaking rim of the crater. It did not occur to him to answer at once. They were passing through Morne Rouge, so overcrowded now that people were sleeping in the streets. On the dark downtrail again, words did not come to him, and when the party re-entered the bank of falling ash and the sulphur stench, it was not good to open one's mouth in speech.

The guides were paid at the edge of the city. Saint Pierre was dark and harrowingly still. The hoof-beats of the two mules which the Americans retained were muffled in the ash, as if they were pounding along the sandy beach. Often the rousing fetor of death reached the nostrils of the riders, above the drying, cutting vapor of the volcano, and their beasts shied and snorted at the untoward humps on the highway. It was as if war and pestilence had stalked through Saint Pierre that day, and a winter storm had tried to cover the dreadful aftermath. A door opened at last before them, and there was a cry from Soronia. Pere Rabeaut hurried out and led the mules to shelter.

Constable sank into his old seat at the round table under the window. He watched Breen and the woman. His friend was huge and lean in the lamp light; his white clothing stained from the saddle, his hair and mustache white from ash, his black eyes burning in a face haggard unto ghastliness. The woman was in his arms as they stood together. What they said, Constable did not allow his mind to reason with, but the glory of her lover's presence which shone in the eyes of Soronia called down upon the watcher his own black vistas of desolation. She had found, for an hour, the true and the beautiful—the soul anchorage which he was never to know! * * * He would keep all craft of the Crusoe stamp from blundering into her sweet haven—this much he could do, was his thought. Food was placed before him, and he ate a little, for the sake of Breen. His eyes pained from the lamplight, and he dropped his face forward into his arms on the table. Close to the wood, the vibrations of the mountain boomed louder in his ears.

"But you must not go away again!" Soronia implored.

"Yes, for an hour—two hours at the most—little fairy," Breen whispered.

They were in the living rooms across the court, where the bird cages were tiered and covered with cloths. She clung to him pitifully.

"With you away—oh, my lover, no, no! * * * I cannot live again for hours and hours!"

"Hush!—he is in great trouble. He must not awake until after I am gone. Then he must not know where I have gone. I am going to the plantation house on the Morne d'Orange. It is for him. Two hours at the most, and the last—the last I shall ever leave you, little fairy."

Breen recrossed the court and entered the fruit shop on tiptoe. Constable did not move; his breathing was inaudible. At the street door Soronia joined him like a shadow. He kissed her and put her arms from him. It was eleven-fifteen by the old French clock.

Soronia, alone, stared for an instant at the figure sprawled across the table—the man who had caused her lover twice to be torn from her arms that day. Then she moved to a chair, in the shadows at the far end of the shop, and sat down rigidly to wait.

CHAPTER XII.

In the dim upper hallway, Lara read in the face of her mother, hard and white as ivory, that the clash of wills had come. A slender arm barred the door through which the daughter had to pass.

"Lara, what do you mean to do?"

"I mean to hear what this man has to say."

"At midnight—listen to an outlaw?"

"Yes; let me pass!"

The elder woman did not move her arm. Slowly, softly, she said: "I say that you shall not! Order Uncle Joey to send the thief away, or you and I—are estranged."

Lara faltered before the revolting possibilities of the moment. "Mother," she implored, "don't poison the years! I am a grown woman—I see my way clearly!"

She leaned against the arm that crossed the doorway. It did not give. The face close to hers in the feeble light burned away her self-control. The rigidity of the bar suffocated—as if it had pressed against her throat. Every fiber of her young body sprang tense to burst the insufferable bond. Not a tissue relaxed, although the bar was forced. Her mother's fingers scraped like wood across the casing. The sickening sound made an imperishable record in the girl's brain. Horrified at the thing she had done, Lara would have fallen at her mother's feet, praying forgiveness, had there reached her now a murmur of pain or relenting. But the face was not changed. The sovereign will would not have broken had she hewn her way into the room with a sword. Low-spoken, freezing utterances found the brain of the girl, promptings of the dread, imperfect faculty:

"Go, grown woman, who sees her way clearly! Go with the thief to your lover—who dares not come to you! Go out to the hunted ship, then—with the thief and his dull tool!"

Lara seized her hat and shawl and darted past the pitiless voice, shutting her ears with her hands. Down the stairway she sped, her one thought to flee. There was truce below; the awfulness of defeat behind. * * * The men had heard nothing. Breen stood by the door, his face whitened with dust. The planter waited near the foot of the stairs—another obstacle.

"Go to mother quickly—she needs you!"

"Where are you going, Lara?" the old man gasped.

"To the ship with the other refugees!"

"Not with this man, child——"

"He is Mr. Constable's friend."

"But I'll go with you, dear! I'll have a carriage brought——"

"In the name of pity, Uncle Joey—don't leave mother alone longer—up there!" she said desperately. "I am going out to the ship. Your nephew has asked me to be—his wife. This man will take me to him. Go to mother!"

The planter turned a last look at Breen and obeyed, his face a field of conflict. Lara threw the shawl about her shoulders and hurried to the door, which Breen opened in utmost amazement. She turned to him in the dark, with the burning question:

"Is Peter Constable dead?"

"No——"

"Is he hurt—lying on the ship?"

"No, he is reasonably well, and in Saint Pierre."

Reacting weakness rushed over her now, the doubts of an untried soul, and the loneliness of an outcast. The scene in the upper hallway was upreared in her brain. She had been borne throughout the day, unerringly by the processes of mind toward the expression of her own will; but the fruition was so sudden and horrible as forever to be beyond the shadow and circumstance of extenuation.

If Constable were well and in Saint Pierre, why did he not come to her, instead of sending this man? Even though Breen were all a man could be, had Constable the right to send him to her, after the allegations of the press? Could there be any truth in the suggestions of her mother? Might there not exist in the Constable character a war of the base and noble?

These big tangible terrors possessed her. She could not go back—the bridges were burned. The man at her side did not speak, save to answer her questions. Ahead were possibilities and fancies, beside which the rumbling menaces of the mountain were clean fears. She halted. Her body swayed a little, and the man put out his hand to steady her. A cry escaped her lips.

"I cannot go on!" she exclaimed brokenly. "I have done a terrible wrong in coming. Everything is different. Leave me. I—I shall go back toward Fort de France!"

(To be continued.)

Odd Use for a Balloon.

It is said that an enterprising Parisian company has discovered a method of bleaching linen by balloon. A few hundred feet above the earth the atmosphere is nearly as pure over the city as in the open country, and it is in this higher region that the linen is dried by the aid of a captive balloon.

The linen is attached to bamboo frames and sent up. There are about six ascents in a day. An extra charge of from five to fifty centimes, or from one to ten cents, is charged for each article.

No More Run-Down Heels.

Policemen, actors and other pedestrians should drink a toast to a man in Australia, for he has come forward with a device that will lengthen the life of a shoe many months. This device is an interchangeable heel which locks to a heel pad by means of pins attached to the latter. Probably the chief cause of a shoe losing its shape and wearing out in the uppers is the running down of the heel, which throws the foot to one side and brings a strain on a part of the shoe not prepared for it. Run-down heels, too, are responsible for many cases of sore feet and have aided largely in making the business of chiropody a lucrative one. With this new device it will be possible to take off an old heel and put on a new one whenever the first is so worn as to be uncomfortable or unsightly. If people only realize the importance of a flat heel there would be few limps in the world of walkers.

NEW HEEL.

Mint Jelly.

Many persons like anything of a food variety containing gelatine, and the usual meat jellies contain such, but a splendid jelly to serve with cold or warm meat is a mint jelly, the bulk made with apples. Cook the apples the same as for apple jelly, strain the juice and add a handful of crushed mint. Boil until the flavor is extracted, strain twice and add the same amount of sugar and boil until a thick jelly is formed. Grape juice can be flavored in the same manner, and also cranberry juice, which is really delicious when flavored with fresh mint.

Corn Salad.

Eight large ears of sweet corn, three large onions, one small head of cabbage, one bunch of celery, three red peppers (the seeds taken out without touching the walls of the peppers), one-fourth of a cup of salt, a quart and a pint of cider vinegar, two heaping teaspoonfuls of mustard, dissolved and stirred in last.

Chop all the ingredients except the corn, boil together twenty minutes, add the mustard and can boiling hot.

Canned corn might be used if one could not get the green.

French Panned Oysters.

Drain twenty-five good sized oysters, rub an ounce of butter to a smooth paste with a teaspoonful flour and a teaspoonful minced parsley. Place in a stew pan or chafing dish with the oysters, add a pinch of cayenne and seasoning salt and stir and cook until the gills begin to curl; then add the yolk of an egg and, still stirring, pour the oysters over some nicely toasted squares of bread and serve at once.

Grape Catsup.

Wash and stem tart grapes, cook until tender and rub through a colander. To every three pints of pulp allow one pound of brown sugar, one cupful of vinegar, a heaping teaspoonful each of ground cinnamon, mace, allspice, salt and pepper and a half teaspoonful of ground cloves. Cook steadily, stirring frequently until the catsup is reduced to half its original quantity and is thick. Bottle and cork when cold.

Olive Oil Pickles.

One gallon of peeled and sliced cucumbers, mixed with a cup of salt. Stand for three hours, then drain and mix with three onions, peeled and chopped, and 1 ounce each of white mustard seed, black peppers and celery seed, and pack the mixture into glass jars, pressing it down firmly. Pour into the jars (dividing it equally) a half pint of the best olive oil. Cover with cold cider vinegar and seal.

Variety Pickle.

One gallon cabbage, half pint green peppers, half gallon green tomatoes, one quart onions, all chopped. Three tablespoons ground mustard, 2 tablespoons ginger, 1 ounce tumeric, 1 ounce celery seed, 2 pounds sugar, half gallon vinegar, a little salt, half pint lima beans cooked well. Mix and cook thirty minutes.

Vanilla Crabapple Jelly.

When putting up crabapple jelly get 10 cents' worth of vanilla beans from any drug store. When the juice is strained and measured throw in the piece of vanilla bean and let it boil until jelly is made. It gives apple jelly a fine and delicious flavor.

Peppers Stuffed With Cheese.

Take green peppers, seed and boil ten minutes in water in which has been put a pinch of soda. Fill with grated cheese, dip in water and fry in hot lard.

S.S.S. DRIVES OUT BLOOD HUMORS

The skin is not simply an outer covering of the body, but through its thousands of pores and glands it performs the great and necessary work of regulating our temperatures, and also assists in disposing of the refuse and waste matters of the system by the constant evaporation that goes on through these little tubes. To perform these duties the tissues and fibres which connect and surround the pores and glands must be continually nourished by pure blood. When from any cause the circulation becomes infected with impurities and humors, it loses its strengthening powers and begins to disease and irritate the delicate tissues, and produces Eczema, Acne, Tetter, or some other itching, disfiguring skin trouble. S. S. S. cures skin diseases of every kind by going down into the circulation and neutralizing and removing the impurities and humors. It changes the quality of the blood from an acrid, fiery fluid to a cooling, health-producing stream, which, instead of irritating and inflaming the skin, cures and nourishes it by its soothing, healthful qualities. Salves, washes, lotions, etc., may be used for any temporary comfort or cleanliness they afford, but skin diseases cannot be cured until S. S. S. has purified the blood. Book on Skin Diseases and any medical advice sent free.

THE SWIFT SPECIFIC CO., ATLANTA, GA.

Force of Storm Waves.

The average storm wave is thirty feet in height. The highest storm waves ever measured were between forty-four and forty-eight feet high. The gigantic force of storm waves is shown by the fact that at Skerryvore lighthouse, off the west coast of Scotland, a mass of rock weighing five and a half tons was once hurled to a height of seventy-two feet above the sea level, while a mass weighing thirteen and a half tons was torn from a cliff seventy-four feet high.—Pall Mall Gazette.

Gains Distinction in Queer Way.

Newitt—He's anxious to be considered a man of some social distinction.

Bunker—He's taking a queer way about it.

Newitt—Why?

Bunker—He says golf is "merely tommy-rot."—The Catholic Standard and Times.

Struck for a Good Deal.

Lady Interviewer—Your wife's devotion to you is regarded as a model of married happiness. Now, how as a public man does a wife's devotion strike you?

Aspiring Candidate (truthfully)—Well, mine struck this morning for twenty-five for a new hat.—Baltimore American.

A New Name.

"What do you call a man who drives an automobile?"

"Well, judging by the way in which he takes possession of the road I should say an auto-crat."—Baltimore American.

Insisting on Accuracy.

"Did you arrest this man?" asked the police justice.

"I did not, your honor," answered the officer, formerly a resident of Boston. "Obviously I could not arrest him, for he was not in motion at the time. I merely effected his capture, your honor."

Out of the Dim Past.

Nebuchadnezzar was eating grass.

"But I'm not yelling 'Ee-yah!' and pretending to like it," he said.

Regardless of what the fans in the grand stand and on the bleachers might think of him, he continued to tear up handfuls and chew it because he hadn't anything else to eat."

Too Late.

Mifkins (to Piffer)—She's a stunning woman, old man, and you're bound to be stuck on her. But don't mention laundry or anything like that! Her grandmother was a washwoman.

Piffer (later, to the lady in question, as he relates a story)—Yes, indeed! I can tell you, it took the starch—beg pardon! the nerve—right out of me.—Life.

Poor Guesser.

The eminent statesman summoned his private secretary.

"This is the third letter I have had from Mannhyerup," he said, "at the end of which he has marked 'Confidential. B. T. L.' What does he mean by B. T. L.?"

"Don't you know?" said the private secretary, lowering his voice. "He means 'Burn This Letter.'"—Chicago Tribune.

Shy.

"I think I'd like something to read on the train," said the austere spinster.

"Well, here's a copy of the latest issue of Pick-Me-Up," suggested the newsdealer.

There being nothing else on the counter she bought it.

But she tore off the conspicuous title of it before she carried it into the car.

She was no giddy young thing.—Chicago Tribune.

The Rich Turkish Beggar.

Beggars are never suppressed in Turkey. The story is told (and they say it is true) about an American lady who by mistake gave a beggar of Constantinople a goldpiece. The man had left his post when she returned, but one of his colleagues told her where he "resided." It was a fine house, and at the door was a servant, who politely informed the lady that "my master is dressing. He will be down soon." And then the well groomed beggar, dressed for dinner, appeared and gladly returned the gold piece, explaining in the meanwhile that such mistakes were highly embarrassing.—Charities and Commons.

Recalled Them Distinctly.

"What were your sensations when the automobile struck the tree and threw you out? I presume, though, you didn't have time to think."

"O, yes, I did. I distinctly remember thinking, as I flew through the air, 'Gee! What a repair bill I'll have to foot!'"

HOWARD E. BURTON.—Assayer at Chemist, Leadville, Colorado. Specimen prices: Gold, Silver, Lead, $1; Gold, Silver, Zinc, Gold, Silver, Copper, $1. Cyanide tests. Mailing envelopes and full price list sent on application. Control and Umpire work solicited. References: Carbonate National Bank.

BORAX A SAFE PREVENTIVE FOR LICE IN POULTRY—SIMPLE, CHEAP, HARMLESS.

"20-Mule-Team" Borax was a good thing to rid poultry of lice. I had used as much inflammable Lice killers that my Poultry Houses were regular fire traps. I gave my S. C. W. Leghorn house a good spraying just two months ago. Since I have caught several hens and I found no lice. I am rid of lice and shall continue to use "20-Mule-Team" Borax as a spray, also as a wash.

MRS. B. R. BUFFHAM, Roswell, New Mexico.

All dealers. ½, 1, 5 lb packages. Free sample to prove above, Booklet and Lace Design, 10 cents.

Pacific Coast Borax Co., Oakland, Cal.

MAPLEINE A Flavoring. It makes a syrup better than Maple. Sold by grocers.