His Brother's Keeper;

Or,

Christian Stewardship.

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON,

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"It is useless to discuss that point," repled Eric quietly. "But tell me, Stuart, in answer to the main question, do you believe in this strike?"

"No; I can't say I do," said Stuart, with his usual frankness.

"There! You see where the difficulty lies," replied Eric sadly. "The very nature of the situation compels a breach in our old relations with each other. Of course I believe in the strike or I wouldn't be the leader of it."

"It seems like a bad way to get at what you want," said Stuart.

"Have you studied into the details of the situation? Do you know all the facts which have led up to this movement?"

"I know what my father has told me. He says the men did not consult with the companies and went out without warning or notice of any kind."

Eric rose to his feet. "It's a lie!" he exclaimed, with a sudden passion that no one would suspect existed. It was like an explosion that transformed the man into another being.

Stuart also rose. "Do you mean to say that my father lied to me about the facts?"

"I do!" retorted Eric. "He lied, and he knows he lied!"

Stuart took one step toward Eric, and the two young men confronted each other. Suddenly Eric turned on his heel and without a word walked down the hill. For a moment Stuart seemed on the point of going after him or calling out for him to stop, but the next moment he stepped back to the stone and sat down. When Eric had disappeared behind a clump of trees, Stuart rose and went toward home by another path.

When he reached the house, Louise met him and told him his father wanted to see him at once. He went in and stood by the bed, his whole being stirred by the interview with Eric. It was the first real passion to speak of that had roused his self controlled nature. His father spoke with the bluntness that always marked his speech.

"Stuart, I want you to go to Cleveland for the company. This strike has caused complications with our local agents. There is important business that I ought to see to in person. Can you go at once? The eastern express is due at 6 o'clock."

"I am at your service, father," replied Stuart. He was still going over his recent interview with Eric.

"Here are the papers. I can explain the business to you in a few minutes."

Stuart drew up a chair, and his father gave him instructions. Then as Stuart put the papers in his pocket Ross Duncan said, his face and manner softening a little as he fell back on his pillows:

"Stuart, lad, in case anything happens to me, of course you know I have left everything to you and Louise. The mines, with other property and invested funds, besides New York property and bonds not connected with the mines, are worth over $4,000,000. I have left Louise $1,000,000 in property. You will be left in the sole charge of everything in case I die. Of course you understand that I am the company. This strike is against me. If I die, it will be against you. I believe I can depend on you to defend the millions I have worked so hard all my life to get together," said Ross Duncan. Then in his old manner he said, "You will have to hurry to get that train."

Stuart rose, and a conflict of feelings rose with him. What his father had just said moved him one way, the afternoon with Eric moved him another. He wanted to ask his father one question before he went away.

"Father," he asked almost timidly, "did you tell me that the strikers went out without giving the companies any notice or warning?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean that they gave absolutely no hint of their intentions to any one?"

Ross Duncan rose up a little, and his face changed.

"They sent their representative, as they called him, to me about two weeks before the morning of the strike to confer about wages, but I wouldn't recognize any such representative with any right to interfere with my business and tell me what wages I ought to pay."

"Who was the representative?" Stuart asked the question, well knowing the answer.

"Who was it? Who but that praying, pious friend of yours, Eric Vassall!" Ross Duncan sat up, and the wound on his forehead grew purple. Stuart was frightened at the sight. He could not say anything. His father sank down again, exhausted with his anger. Stuart went away without even a word of farewell. There was a bitterness in his heart that was new to it. Eric had been right, then, according to his view. The company had received notice. There had been an attempt at consultation. As the train whirled him on he cursed in his heart the whole social perplexity.

He reached the city, attended to the business and started back the next day to Champion. It was just dusk when he stepped out on the station platform. He thought a crowd of curious looking people was there. Something had happened. Dr. Saxon came up, seized his

"What's the matter, doctor?"

bag and grasped his hand in a strong but nervous manner. Solemn, strangely set faces looked out of the dusk at him.

"What's the matter, doctor?" asked Stuart, trembling at something, he could not think what.

"Your father, my boy"—

"Is he worse?"

"Come this way. My buggy is right here. I will drive you out to the house. Get right in."

Stuart got into the buggy mechanically. The doctor threw himself in and the horse made a plunge into the dark.

"Tell me the truth, doctor." Stuart's voice was steady, but faint.

The answer came after a moment. "Your father died, Stuart, an hour ago. He had a stroke of apoplexy. There was some heart trouble. He did not suffer."

For a moment everything in the universe reeled about Stuart Duncan. Then he found he was asking questions and Dr. Saxon was answering them. When they reached the house, Stuart met Louise first. She came to the front door and threw herself into his arms, crying hysterically. Stuart had not shed a tear yet. They led him into the room where Ross Duncan lay. The son stood and looked down at the cold face with that newly made scar on the forehead. There was no thought in his mind that he was now the owner of several millions of wealth. He was thinking of the last interview he had with that father and his parting without a word of affectionate farewell. And still the tears would not come to his relief.

At last he went out, and the sight of his sister's grief and fear brought the tears to his own eyes. He wept with her. They talked together. The doctor remained an hour and then took his leave. The night wore on. Louise, exhausted with the shock, had gone to her room. Stuart was finally left alone. He sent the servants all away. He could not sleep. He paced the long hallway until daylight. Just as the sun rose he went in where his father lay and looked at him again. Ross Duncan's millions were of no use to him now. Of what use were they to the son? What load of responsibility had come to him now! These mines, these labor troubles, this strike, these wages—what difference if he let them all go? He had a right to do as he chose with his own. He would dispose of it all and live abroad. He would—what! He was planning all this and his father dead less than 24 hours! And, then, what responsibility did rest upon him? What difference did it make to him what wages the men received? Was he his brother's keeper? Were they his brothers? The whole thing was complex, irritating. His father's death had thrown a burden on him that he did not want to carry.

He was disturbed by a noise in the street before the house. He went to the window and drew aside the curtain. The measured tramp of heavy feet was heard coming down the road. A column of men, four abreast, came into sight, with one man a little in advance of the others carrying a banner. It contained a very rude drawing of a rich man and a poor man. The rich man was saying, "What do you want?" The poor man was saying, "*Crums* from the rich man's table." It was all very crude and one sided in every way. The column of men swung by, nearly 500 miners on their way from the upper range to join the strikers in Champion in their regular morning gathering at the park. Every man as he went by turned his head and looked up at the house where the dead mine owner lay. It is possible that they saw the son standing there. He watched the column tramp through the dust and disappear down the road. And as he turned back toward all that remained of the mortal flesh of the man who had been worth so many millions he was conscious that he was face to face with the great problem of his own existence, with which was involved the problem of thousands of other men. How will he answer that problem?

CHAPTER II.

LARGE RESPONSIBILITIES.

A week after the death and burial of Ross Duncan, Stuart and Louise were talking together of their future plans. Louise lay on a lounge, looking very pretty, dressed in mourning of a fashionable pattern. She appeared vexed at something Stuart had just said and tapped her foot smartly against the end of the lounge.

"I have no patience with you, Stuart. Why don't you talk sense?"

"I thought I was talking sense," replied Stuart, who was standing up by one of the windows of the room looking out on the front lawn. He turned and walked back to the end of the room and continued to pace up and down. He was very thoughtful and part of the time seemed not to hear all that Louise said.

"Well, you lose all your sense the minute the subject of these horrid miners comes up," continued Louise. "If I was the governor of this state, I would order out the militia at once."

"Why?" asked Stuart, with a slight smile. "The men are not doing anything. What would you order out the troops for?"

"I would get new men in to take the men's places and then order the militia. And, you know, Stuart, it will have to come to that at last."

Stuart answered nothing. He was thinking hard of that very thing.

Louise went on talking while he stood still by the window for a minute looking out at the l[illegible]s. "I regard father's death as caused directly by the miners. They frightened the horses and caused the accident that killed him. I don't see how you can side with the men in this strike."

"I don't," said Stuart without turning around.

"Then why don't you do something to start up the mines? Haven't we a right to manage our own business and hire other men? If the miners threaten to interfere, we have a right to call for state troops."

"I hope it will not come to that," replied Stuart gravely as he walked up to the lounge and sat down by his sister. "Louise, I want to talk plainly with you about this matter. I do not feel just as father did about it."

"You just said you didn't side with the men."

Louise sat up and arranged her dress. Some ribbons at her throat kept her fingers busy for a minute.

"I don't side with them in the sense that I believe they are doing the right thing to strike this way. But I believe they ought to have more wages and that the companies ought to pay them the scale they have drawn up." Stuart was talking aloud to his sister, for the first time really expressing his convictions as they had grown on him every day since his father's death had thrown the burden of ownership upon him.

Louise heard his statement with a frown. For awhile she was silent; then she rose and walked out of the room, angrily saying as she went: "Ross Duncan's son is not much like his father. That's true if you did say it."

Stuart rose and went over by the window again. He was vexed not with Louise, but with the whole situation. Since his father's death he had gone through a great many struggles, and each one had left him with the feeling of his responsibility heavier upon him. The strike was in the same condition as when it began. The different mine owners at Cleveland had conferred together and were united in their determination not to yield to the demand for higher wages. Stuart had been asked to come down to a conference to be held in the city that week. He expected to leave the next day. As he stood looking out at the stock covered hills he knew that a crisis was rapidly approaching and that within the next few days events would be precipitated that would leave their mark upon his whole life. He was not a coward, and that was the reason he could not run away from the situation. The interests of the mines at Champion were all in his hands, but the other mines on the upper and lower ranges were involved with his in the general strike. He was not at full liberty to act alone. Besides, the men had within a week formed a union and would not treat with the separate mine owners, insisting that the companies must recognize the union as a whole.

Meanwhile matters were
crisis very fast. Stuart
hands tightly and bit his lip
as he turned again from
and paced the room. H
more than $2,000,000 in
and yet the possession
caused him little real
all the rest he was ba
revolution of education toward the entire problem. And he could not avoid the feeling that before the week was gone he might come face to face with the greatest fact of his life.

As he stood there thinking it all over the bell rang, and one of the servants came and said that Eric was at the door. Stuart went himself out into the hall.

"Come in, Eric," he said quietly.

Eric came in, and the two men shook hands silently. Since Ross Duncan's death these two had met several times, and it seemed as if the old family relation between them might be possible again. There was, however, still a serious barrier, caused by the conditions that surrounded the two men.

"I came up this morning," began Eric, with his usual directness, "to tell you that the men want you to speak to them at the park today at noon."

Stuart was surprised. "I thought the men would not admit any one to the speaking stand except those of their own number."

"They haven't so far. You are the only one, or you will be if you come to the meeting today."

"What do the men want?" Stuart asked the question not feeling just sure that he cared to go.

Eric did not reply immediately. He seemed to be waiting for Stuart to say something more.

Stuart sat looking at Eric with that quiet gaze peculiar to him. "Do the men want me to make a speech on the situation?"

"I do not know just what they expect. They simply voted to ask you to come this noon. It may be an opportunity for a settlement."

Eric spoke slowly. Stuart suddenly rose and went over and put a hand on his old acquaintance's shoulder.

"Eric," he said, while a sad smile crossed his face and died out in its usual thoughtful quiet, "doesn't it seem strange to you that we should be making so much out of such an affair as a difference of a few cents more for a day's work? Is life worth having if it must be spent in serious quarrels over such little matters?"

"Do you call this a little matter?" Eric spoke almost bitterly. And then he added bluntly, "A few cents a day may be a little to a man who has plenty of money, but it may mean the difference between comfort and suffering to the man who has almost nothing."

Stuart colored, but answered quietly: "No, Eric, you do not just understand me. I am ready to pay this difference in the men's wages. I think their demand is just."

"Come to the park this noon and tell them so."

"Well, I will. I am going to Cleveland tomorrow, Eric."

"If all the owners were like you, the strike would not hold out long," said Eric as he rose to go. He had a great deal to do to prepare for the noon meeting, and in spite of Stuart's urging him to remain longer he went away. There was still a gap between the two. They did not feel easy in each other's presence. Eric had not spoken of the first meeting they had, and Stuart, while feeling differently about it, had not approached the subject.

He told Louise of his invitation to speak to the men at the park and went out after a little while, intending to go up on one of the hills and think for himself. But as he drove out into the road he changed his mind and went down into the town and up into Dr. Saxon's office. He thought he would ask his advice in the matter.

The doctor was alone, which was a rare circumstance with him. He greeted Stuart with the familiarity which came from a lifelong acquaintance.

"Well, you aristocrat, are you going to trample on the feelings of the poor downtrodden masses much longer? Are you going to withhold from them their rightful dues?"

"Doctor, I am going to speak to the men at the park this noon."

"Are you? Well, give 'em a dose that'll put 'em on the sick list for a month. They're the most ungrateful, obstinate, pigheaded, senseless crowd of human animals I ever saw. I've

"I am ready to pay this difference in the men's wages," said Stuart.

made up my mind, Stuart, not to do another thing for 'em. I'm not in the pay of the companies any more, am I, since this strike set in?"

"No, I suppose not—that is, the contract the mines made with you is good only while the mines are in operation."

"Just so. Well, here these wild Cornishmen expect me to doctor 'em just the same whether I am getting anything for it or not. I have made up my mind that I won't do it any longer."

Just then there were a sound of steps outside and a shuffled noise, followed by a thump on the door that might have been made by the thick end of a club.

"Come in!" shouted the doctor. "Here's one of 'em now," he said to Stuart in a low tone. "Watch me deal with him."

The door opened, and in shambled a man of enormous build. He had a great mass of tangled yellow hair on his head, and his beard was of the same color. He was fully 6 feet 4 inches in height and had astonishingly long arms and large feet. Stuart sat back in the window seat looking on, and, although he was running over in his mind what he would say to the men, he could not help smiling at the scene that followed.

"I come to fill the bottle, doctor," was the quiet remark of the big miner.

The doctor made no motion to take the bottle which the man pulled out of his vest pocket and stood holding awkwardly between his two hands.

"You can move out of here with your bottle, Sanders. I'm not filling any bottles any more."

"Since when?" asked Sanders slowly.

"Since this strike, this nonsensical, foolish business of yours and the rest of you. Do you think I'm going to go to all the expense of keeping up my drugs and medicines and sew you fellows up and fill you up with costly preparations while I'm not getting anything from the companies? So get out with your bottle!"

Sanders without a word backed toward the door. The doctor wheeled around toward his desk and began to hum a tune. Just as the miner laid his hand on the doorknob the doctor turned his head and shouted, "What was in the bottle, anyway?"

"Cod liver oil," replied Sanders, scratching his head and slowly turning the doorknob.

"When did you get it filled?"

"Last week, sir."

"Last week! It was three days ago, or I'm a striker! What on earth did you do with half a pint of cod liver oil in that time?"

Sanders shook his head and smiled faintly, but did not venture to say anything.

"Have you been greasing your boots with it? I'd be willing to swear that you have, only half a pint wouldn't oil more than one of 'em. Well, bring it here. I'll fill it this once and that's all. What did I give it to you for? Do you remember?"

Sanders kept discreet silence, and the doctor said to Stuart: "It isn't cod liver oil exactly; it's a new preparation that I have just had sent up from Chicago, and it has been of some use in lung troubles. I think perhaps I'll let him have another bottle. He has a bad cough." As if to second the doctor's statement, Sanders gave utterance to a hoarse rumble that was on the same large scale as himself and shook the bottles on the doctor's dispensary shelves. The doctor measured out a quantity of the medicine, picked out a new cork and as he handed the bottle over said cheerfully: "Now, Sanders, of course you will forget everything I tell you, but I want you to remember that if you don't follow the directions on the bottle you are liable to fall down dead any minute. Well, is there anything more?"

The miner was shuffling his hand down in his pocket among a lot of loose change.

"How much is it?" he finally asked.

"Oh, well, that's all right," said the doctor, turning red. "Keep it to remember me by. I'll make you a birthday present of it. But, mind you, no more medicine from this office till the strike is over. I can't afford to doctor a thousand men for nothing."

Sanders went out, and the doctor turned to Stuart and said: "I thought I might as well let him have it. Pshaw! I'm too easy. But Sanders has got consumption. Awful queer how these big fellows catch it."

Just then there was a tap on the door, and before the doctor could call out the door opened, and a little old woman came in. She had a very sad face and looked like one of those persons who know life mainly through its troubles.

"Doctor," she said after bowing to Stuart, "me old man is sufferin terrible this mornin. I want ye to send he somethin to ease the pain a bit."

"Where is his pain?"

"Eh?"

"I say where is his pain—in his head or feet?"

"In his back, doctor, an he is howlin like murder for somethin to ease him. I come right down here. The doctor, he said, would give me anything I needed."

"Yes, that's it. The beggars don't care if I go into bankruptcy and ruin through giving them anything they need."

The doctor rose and went over to his dispensary shelves. After a very careful search he selected a bottle and poured from it into a small one, wrote directions, pasted them on and gave the medicine to the woman.

"Here, now, Mrs. Binney, I know just what your husband's trouble is. He strained the muscles of his back that time he got caught between the timbers in the De Mott mine."

"Yes"—the woman's face lighted up with some pride—"Jim held up the timbers until the other men crawled out."

"That's so. Well, I don't mind helping him. Use this as I have directed, and it will give him some relief."

The woman thanked the doctor, and as she turned to go she wiped her eyes with her sleeve. The doctor followed her out into the hall, and Stuart could not help hearing him say to her, "I'll be out to see Jim this afternoon, tell him, Mrs. Binney."

He came back and sitting down at his desk thumped it hard with his fist.

"That's the last case I'll take till the strike ends. The only way to bring these people to terms is to treat them sternly. I tell you, Stuart, I can't afford to go on giving medicine and service this way. It will ruin me, and, besides, it isn't professional"—

There was a timid knock at the door, and the doctor caught up a medical magazine, opened it bottom side up and turned his back to the door. There was another rap, and then, as the doctor made no sound, the door opened, and a boy about 12 years old came in timidly and stood with his cap in his hand, looking first at Stuart and then at the doctor's back.

"Father's been hurt. He is pump man at Davis' mine. He wants you to come right up."

"Up where?" asked the doctor without turning around.

"Up where we live."

"Where's that?"

"The same place."

"What's his name?"

"Why, you know his name, doctor. You have seen him before."

The doctor wheeled around and roared: "Well, do I know the names of a thousand different men like that? Who is your father?"

"Pump man in the Davis mine."

"Well, there are six different pump men up there. Which one is he?"

The boy began to get scared and backed toward the door.

"What's the matter with your father?" asked the doctor more gently, rising and reaching out for his black case and putting on his hat.

The boy began to sob. "I don't know. He's hurt."

"Well, you run down and get into my buggy and sit there till I come. Hur