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His Brother's Keeper;
or
Christian Stewardship.

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON,
Author of "In His Steps," "The Church as of Philip Strong," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," "Mail from Kirk," etc.

CHAPTER X.
THE CONFERENCE.

It was two weeks after the fire and the accident to Stuart. Eric was sitting by the bed, for Stuart was still in Eric's cottage. His accident had been so serious that there had been no thought of his removal. During the anxious days and nights Eric had hardly left Stuart's side. Andrew had begged to be allowed to watch, but Eric had insisted upon his prior right and had refused to give way to any one else.

There was another watcher who more than Andrew regarded Eric jealously, and that was a woman who stole into the cottage often with the doctor's coming and remained, dry eyed and pale, with the heart's hunger of love starting out of great eyes that burned over Stuart as if by very force of compelling affection they would rouse him into knowledge and life again. Rhena did not try to hide the feeling she now had. The doctor came in quietly that day while Eric was sitting asleep at the side of Stuart, exhausted by his great vigil, and found Rhena on her knees praying. The intensity of her desire for Stuart's life broke out into an audible petition.

"O Lord, my God, save him! What has he done to die? Oh, how can I say, 'Thy will be done?' I never loved him before. Spare him, God of all goodness! He is so needed in the world! Surely there are others who would be less—God, what am I saying? But he is my lover! And he does not know that I love him!"

"Beg pardon," interrupted the doctor, "but you're mistaken about that. He knows it perfectly well. Just tell him four or five times more if you think it necessary."

Rhena turned her head toward Stuart. He lay there with his eyes open for the first time in days, really conscious and with a smile on his face which was heaven to her. She simply turned on her knees and bowed her head over Stuart's hand and put her lips to it, and then, to the doctor's surprise, she fell over and fainted.

"It beats all creation what these women can spring in the way of surprises on a man!" said the doctor as he picked Rhena up and carried her over to a couch at the other end of the room.

Eric had started out of his doze, and Stuart had shut his eyes again, lapsing into his former stupor, but still with a smile on his lips. "But if any lass has a right to faint this one has. Are you going to tumble off again, ma'am?" he asked as Rhena began to come to. "You can if you want to. Do you want to cry? Come, that's a good girl! Cry a little. It'll do us all good. Want a handkerchief? Here's mine."

Rhena sat up suddenly and seized Saxon's hand. "Oh, doctor, he will get well, won't he? He is better? There is hope? He knew me for a moment. You do believe my prayer will be answered?"

Rhena was crying softly. She was broken and nervous with the great strain of the last two weeks.

"I've heard worse prayers get attended to," replied the doctor shortly. "But do you think—oh, doctor, it is death to me to think—tell me, what do you fear? Is he—will he live?"

The doctor shut his lips tight. Rhena watched him, with her hands clinched hard over his. She did not know it, but her slim fingers hurt even the doctor's rugged, knotty fists. Finally he answered her. "I think, yes, I am quite sure, now that he knows that you care for him a little, there is a fighting chance."

"Care for him a little?" replied Rhena.
"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?"

na, with a smile that melted the doctor completely. "Doctor, were you ever in love?"
"No," replied the doctor, "but if I was I'd have to put up still another band stand in the square. One spice wouldn't be too much for three such fools as you and Stuart and me."
"What's that nonsense he's talking?" asked Eric, coming over to the end of the room where they were.

"It was not nonsense," said Rhena, with more color in her face than it had since the day Stuart had first spoken to her. She went over to the side of Stuart and sat down there watching him. She had a great hope now. The doctor also told the truth. And indeed, he afterward said, nothing but love brought Stuart out alive.
"I've heard that people who were in love could live on nothing," the doctor said, "but I do believe if Stuart hadn't come to himself long enough that day to hear that little prayer I'd have had two funerals on my hands pretty quick. Well, I never understood these women. There she was one minute as limp as a dead fish, and the next she was as lively as a Salvation Army tambourine. If I could get this article they call love fixed up in a prescription and deal it out in severe cases, I believe it would do more good than all the microbes killers on earth."

Those were wonderful days when Stuart was declared out of danger. Andrew celebrated by bringing over his choicest blossoms. He ranged two pots of roses on a table where Stuart could see them and laid a beautiful white carnation on the bed within reach of Stuart's fingers.
"It's the only one I've been able to get this winter, Stuart. Isn't it a beauty? It's a new variety. Do you know what I've called it? I took the liberty to call it the 'Rhena Dwight.'"

When Rhena came in a few minutes after, Andrew and Eric pretended to be busy talking at the other end of the room.

Stuart picked up the carnation and spoke feebly, but the light of life was in his eyes. "This blossom is called the Rhena Dwight, so Andrew says. Will you take it because of the love I bear you?"
Rhena took the flower and kissed it. Then she shyly placed the blossom against Stuart's lips. Then she laid it down again in his hand.
"No," she said; "you keep the Rhena Dwight for the love I have for you."

Is it any wonder Stuart grew well with great rapidity after that? In a week he was almost well. He was able to take part in the discussions 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 300 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.
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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 serious mixture of workmen 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 conviction 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 dying 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 heaven that is necessary to heaven 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 nupture 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 Cornlishtown. 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 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 won-

der, 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!"
"Oh, get out for plans for relief! I have no sympathy with them! The more you give those ungrateful, obstinate old— I tell you, Stuart, you'd better keep your money. You'll need it when you begin housekeeping. Every time when you go down town your wife will want you to bring home a mouse trap and a lemon squeezer or a barrel of pepper or something. Eric,

f you try to stop me I'll throw you through the window."
The doctor rushed out of the door and slammed it shut. The next minute he opened it, and, looking in, he said gravely, "If you mean to do anything worth while about the draining or building new houses, I'll give you a hint or two when I get time."
The next minute he was gone, and Stuart could see from the little window a vision of Ajax and the cutter as they tore up the hill.
"I wonder if the doctor will ever get time?" said Andrew. "I wonder what he will do when he gets to the other country, where there is to be no more pain nor crying nor death?"

"I declare it puzzles me to guess what he'll do. I can't imagine him sitting on the edge of a rose colored cloud taking it easy," replied Stuart. "I have no doubt there will be some arrangements made for his special benefit."
"Do you think we shall all be as busy there as we are here?" asked Rhena.
"Of course," Andrew answered. "Only we shall have plenty of time to do things as we want. I love to believe that I can raise roses of all sorts and have, say, a thousand years to experiment on new varieties without feeling all the time that I ought to be making that parish call or writing that sermon or getting ready for that committee meeting."

"You don't believe there will be roses in the other world, do you?" inquired Eric quizzically.
"I don't!" exclaimed Andrew. "What would heaven be without roses and little children?"
"I'm not quarrelling with your idea, I like it," replied Eric. "I hope there will be roses there without the thorns. Meanwhile we are living in the town of Champion, where the thorns outnumber the roses two to one. If we make this little spot on earth more like heaven, perhaps we'll be in a condition to enjoy the other place better when our turn comes to go to it."
"There's no doubt of it!" Stuart spoke, with an emphasis that meant a word of action. "As certain as the Lord raises me up from this weakness in body I will render him an account of my stewardship. Eric, you and Andrew can arrange the details of this work. Our duty is imperative. It is as clear as light to me. Those houses shall be built as fast as money can do it, and the other cabins shall be torn down and new ones put up in their places."
"How about that hall dedicated to the interests of labor?" asked Eric, smiling.
"Up it goes as soon as we can get at it. I don't like the idea of calling it a hall for labor interests. I tell you, Eric, the rich need preaching to more than the poor. They need to be taught their duties and privileges. The hall will be built, but it shall be called the Hall of Humanity. It shall be dedicated to the entire community, and whatever is said or preached or sung in it shall be for the union of men, for their good as members of the human family. Every unselfish, Christ-like word and deed we can think of shall be given a place within its walls. Oh, I've done some thinking since I began to get well! But first to the house building. Rhena, you can help us in the details of this important work."

Stuart never spoke a truer word. Rhena entered into the plans for the building with all her enthusiasm. She outlined the most satisfactory and sensible arrangement for the structure of the new houses, and during the next few weeks she was the life of the project, her great common sense and practical knowledge of the needs of the occasion assisting Eric and Andrew wonderfully as the entire work grew under their hands.

Two days after this conference in Eric's cottage Stuart was able to go home. The evening of the day he returned was the scene of a conversation between him and Aunt Royal and Louise that is necessary to relate. Both his aunt and Louise had been several times to see him while he was at Eric's. It was clear to Stuart that no course he could take on the lines now laid out by his new definition of life could possibly meet with the approval of these women.
The conversation started with a statement Stuart made concerning his coming marriage.
"We shall be married as soon as Miss Dwight can get ready," Stuart had referred to her Salvation Army duties and the work necessary to the building of the houses.
"I suppose she is ordering her trousseau from Paris? I should love to see a Salvation Army gown made after the latest European style," said Louise, with a sneer.
"Do you expect to be married in the army hall?" asked Aunt Royal, with a frigid look at her nephew.
"My wife," said Stuart, with a distinctness that ignored all this, but made one point very plain, "will be the undisputed mistress of this house. She is the peer of any woman living in education, accomplishment and grace, and she is the superior of most of them in her spiritual refinement and self sacrifice."

"Are you going to bring her here?" asked Louise, with a curious look.
"Where else should I bring the woman I marry?" asked Stuart, turning to Louise.
"I didn't know but that Miss Dwight would prefer to live in a humber fashion after all her talks and prayers about giving up this and that and the other. But of course if she decides to enjoy the sinful luxuries of life after her roughing it in army halls you know what I shall do?"
Stuart did not answer. Aunt Royal watched him closely.
"I shall simply leave, that is all," continued Louise. "I don't live under



"I mean to prove it by joining both,"

G. M. SHINDEL, Clerk.
Middleburg, Pa., April 8, 1901.