

The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XVII—(Continued.)

"He might. On the other hand, he might plead ignorance. It is possible for him to suggest that the whole affair was merely a coincidence, so far as he was concerned."

"Yes, but he would have to explain how he burgled your house, and what business he had to get himself half murdered in your conservatory. Let us get out here and walk the rest of the way to your house. Our cabby knows quite enough about us without having definite views as to your address."

The cabman was dismissed with a handsome douceur and the twain turned off the front at the corner of Eastern Terrace. Late as it was, there were a few people lounging under the hospital wall, where there was a suggestion of activity about the building unusual at that time of night. A rough-looking fellow, who seemed to have followed Bell and Steel from the front dropped into a seat by the hospital gates and laid his head back as if utterly worn out. Just inside the gates a man was smoking a cigarette.

"Halloa, Cross," David cried, "you are out late to-night!"

"Heavy night," Cross responded, sleepily. "With half a score of accidents to finish with. Some of Palmer of Lingfield's private patients thrown off a coach and brought here in the ambulance. Unless I am greatly mistaken, that is Hatherly Bell with you."

"The same," Bell said, cheerfully. "I recollect you in Edinburgh. So some of Palmer's patients have come to grief. Most of his special cases used to pass through my hands."

"I've got one here to-night who recollects you perfectly well," said Cross. "He's got a dislocated shoulder, but otherwise he is doing well. Got a mania that he's a doctor who murdered a patient."

"Electric light anything to do with the story?" Bell asked, eagerly.

"That's the man. Seems to have a wonderfully brilliant intellect if you can only keep him off that topic. He spotted you in North Street yesterday, and seemed wonderfully disappointed to find you had nothing whatever to do with this institution."

"If he is not asleep," Bell suggested, "and you have no objection—"

Cross nodded and opened the gate. Before passing inside Bell took the rolled-up Rembrandt from his deep breast-pocket and handed it to David.

"Take care of this for me," he whispered. "I'm going inside. I've dropped upon an old case that interested me very much years ago, and I'd like to see my patient again. See you in the morning, I expect. Good-night."

David nodded in reply and went his way. It was intensely quiet and still now; the weary loafer at the outside hospital seat had disappeared. There was nobody to be seen anywhere as David placed his key in the latch and opened the door. Inside the hall-light was burning, and so was the shaded electric lamp in the conservatory. The study leading to the conservatory was in darkness. The effect of the light behind was artistic and pleasing.

It was with a sense of comfort and relief that David fastened the door behind him. Without putting up the light in the study David laid the Rembrandt on his table, which was immediately below the window in his work-room. The night was hot; he pushed the top sash down liberally.

"I must get that transparency removed," he murmured, "and have the window filled with stained glass. The stuff is artistic, but it is so frankly what it assumes to be."

CHAPTER XVIII.

David idly mixed himself some whisky and soda water in the dining-room, where he finished his cigarette. He was tired and ready for bed now, so tired that he could hardly find energy enough to remove his boots and get into the big carpet slippers that were so old and worn. He put down the dining-room lights and strolled into the study. Just for a moment he sat there contemplating with pleased, tired eyes the wilderness of bloom before him.

Then he fell into a reverie, as he frequently did. An idea for a fascinating story crept unbidden into his mind. He gazed vaguely around him. Some little noise outside attracted his attention, the kind of noise made by a sweep's brushes up a chimney. David turned idly towards the open window. The top of it was but faintly illuminated by the light of the conservatory gleaming dully on the transparency over the glass. But David's eyes were keen, and he could see distinctly a man's thumb crooked downwards over the frame of the sash. Somebody had swarmed up the telephone holdfasts and was getting in through the window. Steel slipped well into the shadow, but not before an idea had come to him. He removed the rolled-up Rembrandt from the table

and slipped it behind a row of books in the book-case. Then he looked up again at the crooked thumb.

He would recognize that thumb again anywhere. It was flat like the head of a snake, and the nail was no larger than a pea—a thumb that had evidently been cruelly smashed at one time. The owner of the thumb might have been a common burglar, but in the light of recent events David was not inclined to think so. At any rate he felt disposed to give his theory every chance. He saw a long, fustian-clad arm follow the scarred thumb, and a hand grope all over the table.

"Curse me," a foggy voice whispered, hoarsely. "It ain't here. And the bloke told me—"

The voice said no more, for David grabbed at the arm and caught the wrist in a vice-like grip. Instantly another arm shot over the window and an ugly piece of iron piping was swung perilously near Steel's head. Unfortunately, he could see no face. As he jumped back to avoid a blow his grasp relaxed, there was a dull thud outside followed by the tearing scratch of boots against a wall and the hollow clatter of flying feet. All David could do was to close the window and regret that his impetuosity had not been more judiciously restrained.

"Now, what particular thing was he after?" he asked himself. "But I had better defer any further speculations on the matter till the morning. After the fright he had my friend won't come back again. And I'm just as tired as a dog."

But there were other things the next day to occupy David's attention besides the visit of his nocturnal friend. He had found out enough the previous evening to encourage him to go farther. And surely Miss Ruth Gates could not refuse to give him further information.

He started out to call at 219, Brunswick Square, as soon as he deemed it excusable to do so. Miss Gates was out, the solemn butler said, but she might be found in the square gardens. David came upon her presently with a book in her lap and herself under a shady tree. She was not reading, her eyes were far away. As she gave David a warm greeting there was a tender bloom on her lovely face.

"Oh, yes, I got home quite right," she said. "No suspicion was aroused at all. And you?"

"I had a night thrilling enough for yellow covers, as Artemus Ward says. I came here this morning to throw myself on your mercy, Miss Gates. Were I disposed to do so, I have information enough to force your hand. But I prefer to hear everything from your lips."

"Did Enid tell you anything?" Ruth faltered.

"Well, she allowed me to know a great deal. In the first place, I know that you had a great hand in bringing me to 218 the other night. I know that it was you who suggested that idea, and it was you who facilitated the use of Mr. Gates's telephone. How the thing was stage managed matters very little at present. It turns out now that your friend and Dr. Bell and myself have a common enemy."

Ruth looked up swiftly. There was something like fear in her eyes.

"Have you discovered the name of that enemy?" she asked.

"Yes, I know now that our foe is Mr. Reginald Henson."

"A man who is highly respected. A man who stands wonderfully high in public estimation. There are thousands and thousands of people who look upon him as a great and estimable creature. He gives largely in charities, he devotes a good deal of his time to the poor. My uncle who is a good man, if you like, declares that Reginald Henson is absolutely indispensable to him. At the next election that man is certain to be returned to Parliament to represent an important northern constituency. If you told my uncle anything about him, he would laugh at you."

"I have not the slightest intention of approaching your uncle on this matter at present."

"Because you could prove nothing. Nobody can prove anything."

"But Christiana Henson may, in time."

Once more Ruth flashed a startled look at her companion.

"So you have discovered something about that?" she whispered.

"I have discovered everything about it. Legally speaking, the young lady is dead. She died last night, as Dr. Walker will testify. She passed away in the formula presented by me the night that I met her in the darkness at 218, Brunswick Square. Now, will you be so good as to tell me how those girls got hold of my synopsis?"

"That came about quite naturally. Your synopsis and proof in an open envelope were accidentally slipped into a large circular envelope used by a firm of seed merchants and addressed to Longdean Grange, sent out no doubt amongst thousands of others. Chris saw it and, prompted

by curiosity, read it. Out of that our little plot was gradually evolved. You see, I was at school with those two girls and they have few secrets from me. Naturally, I suggested the scheme because I see a great deal of Reginald Henson. He comes here; he also comes very frequently to our house in Prince's Gate. And yet I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart, that I ever touched the thing for your sake."

The last words were spoken with a glance that set David's pulses beating. He took Ruth's half-extended hand in his, and it was not withdrawn.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I shall come out all right in the end. Still, I shall look eagerly forward to any assistance that you can afford me. For instance, what hold has Henson got on his relatives?"

"That I cannot tell you," Ruth cried. "You must not ask me. But we were acting for the best; our great object was to keep you out of danger."

"There is no danger to me if I can only clear myself," Steel replied. "If you could only tell me where those bank-notes came from! When I think of that part of the business I am filled with shame. And yet if you only knew how fond I am of my home. At the same time, when I found that I was called upon to help ladies in distress I should have refused all offers of reward. If I had done so I should have had no need of your pity. And yet—and yet it is very sweet to me."

He pressed the hand in his and the pressure was returned. David forgot all about his troubles for the time; and it was very cool and pleasant and quiet there.

"I am afraid that those notes were forced upon us," she said. "Though I frankly believe that the enemy does not know what we have learnt to do from you. And as to the cigar-case: would it not be easy to settle that matter by asking a few questions?"

"My dear young lady, I have done so. And the more questions I ask the worse it is for me. The cigar-case I claimed came from Walsen's beyond all question, and was purchased by the mysterious individual now in the hospital. I understood that the cigar-case was the very one I admired at Lockhart's some time ago, and—"

"If you inquire at Lockhart's you will find such to be the case."

David looked up with a puzzled expression. Ruth spoke so seriously, and with such an air of firm conviction, that he was absolutely staggered.

"So I did," he said. "And was informed in the most positive way by the junior partner that the case I admired had been purchased by an American called Smith and sent to the Metropole after he had forwarded dollar-notes for it. Surely you don't suppose that a firm like Lockhart's would be guilty of anything—"

Ruth rose to her feet, her face pale and resolute.

"This must be looked to," she said. "The cigar-case sent to you on that particular night was purchased at Lockhart's by myself and paid for with my own money!"

(To be Continued.)

WISE THOUGHTS.

Be nobody else but you. When in doubt, don't even whisper. Be generous in thought but miserly in words.

Successful men are not of necessity good men.

Vanity is often mistaken for pride in this world.

Get the prize. Let others explain how they lost.

Every man is compelled to pay his debt to nature.

Courage is simply knowing when it is wise to be afraid.

Most of our earthly pleasures are due to our ignorance.

The less some people have to say the more talking they do.

The duties we owe ourselves are generally performed first.

The sermon that earns most flattery may win fewest souls.

A man loses force as soon as he begins to worry over his feelings.

The best way to educate a bright young man is to put him to work.

Often you can sell a worthless thing easier than you can give it away.

Useful education is a gradual elimination of knowing everything.

The men who are satisfied to take things as they come never get much.

The man who says he only wants justice is often sorry when he gets it.

Those who borrow trouble multiply it and then lend it to their friends.

All luck is sometimes better than good luck, as it may cause a reformation.

Boys make their own way better if they do not always have their own way.

When a man is working for himself he doesn't have to employ a time-keeper.

Larceny, embezzlement, and defalcation are merely misapplied business acumen.

Many people think they are living for character who are only fighting for reputation.

If your enthusiasm lasts only forty minutes, you can't expect it to do anything for you.

There is nothing makes a woman feel so proud and a man so foolish as to read old love letters.

It is easier to secure a unanimous decision that a bad thing is bad than that a good thing is good.

Children soon learn that it is father who has the money, and mother who has the generous disposition.

Fashion ...Talk

DRESS NOTES.

Conspicuous in the latest models is the gigot, or leg of mutton sleeve, as worn in 1890. This appears in the bolero and Eton coats in cloth and heavy fabrics. It is certainly admirable for fur, velvet, and very thick textures, but lacks smartness when applied to the ordinary costume. Blouses of the present fashion are impossible under these sleeves.

Skirts are still very full, and of quite moderate length, but this fashion is by no means universal, and some of the smartest modistes are making long skirts with plain hips, although the fulness starts immediately below the hip line. Pleated skirts show much variation, but the pleats seldom run high, and the skirt which appears to be pleated from the waist is really cut in small gores, the seams folded and stitched outside, and the pleats made by extensions, which are pressed and left free. Even the plain skirts in tailor style have two or three of these pleated extensions to give fulness at the hem. Evening skirts are still very long all round, but there is no shapely train, the increase in length being gradual, and does not run to a point.

Belts are of the utmost importance in the fussier type of gown, and the newest bodices and blouses are accompanied by shaped belts, which lengthen the waist and have deep points at the back.

The newest shapes in felt are the big Romney hat, with the left side of the brim tilted, and the torpedo toque in a new form, which is quite as projecting, but the sides have a deeper turn. In direct contradiction to the flat toques and soup plates of the early summer, all hats and toques are now worn high, and the tightly-drawn veil has no loose ends at the back. The loose veil obtained no favor amongst well-dressed women, but few even arrange the tight veil gracefully.

DOUBLE-BREADED COATS.

The long coats which go with tailor-made suits are very close-fitting and the fulness below the hips increases. Indeed, it is almost circular in effect. The double-breasted designs are very smart. A handsome model in dull blue velvet is trimmed with burnt leather. The skirt is stitched with wide bands of the same material, arranged vertically and these are in turn finished with strips of the leather. The lower edges of the coat at the front are also turned back and finished with burnt leather.

The sleeves are a series of winding bias folds draped over a puff of ombre cloth. At the waist there is a cuff of cloth and leather, the latter being sandwiched between stitched bands of the cloth.

SILK IN EVIDENCE.

The approach of cold weather has by no means hastened the retirement of silk gowns. Indeed, these crisp, fresh afternoons see many handsome designs in taffeta and other fashionable silks on the Bois de Bolgne drive, worn under handsome coats of the same material, or of cloth. Strikingly handsome was a design in beaver colored silk. It was all softness and long lines, with a hint of Louis quize, quatorze, Napoleon I., and probably a touch of Directoire combined. The skirt was formed of narrow groups of small plaits, each edged with white plaits its entire length separating plain panels of lace, showing a tiny bit of pale blue.

The bodice is very long in front, with a jacket effect on either side, this outlined with pipings of white. The vest is of lace jabot down the front from neck to belt, the latter being of beaver colored velvet.

EVENING GOWNS.

Amid the maze of colors which one sees, white holds its own for evening wear. This is true of gowns for afternoon receptions and coming out parties. Messelaine and liberty satin in all their seductiveness are used and combined with lace and all kinds of embroideries.

A dainty design for a debutante is of cream white messelaine. It is very simple and trimmings of silk gauze lend a delightfully fluffy effect. The lace which forms the chief decoration is set with tiny motifs of velvet in shades of yellow. The stock and corsage are draped with chiffon, set with the lace and brightened with tiny motifs of velvet. The yoke is also outlined with folds of velvet, showing three colors, toning from pale yellow to deep orange. Two deep points of lace with the orange yellow motifs cover the front of the bodice; the corsage belt is high at one side; the bodice is shirred full down the back, and the sleeves are full with a deep frill of lace outlining the outer seam, and finishing it at the lower edge. Little loops of the three shades of velvet finish the gown at different points here and there.

A BODICE TRIMMING.

A pretty way to make a bodice look very complicated, yet without great expense, is to trim it with a yoke of all-over lace, then outline circles, fleur de lis or other dainty

patterns, over the lace with a fine edging of real valenciennes lace. The edging gives the effect of separate medallions combined with the all-over lace, and frequently these bodices look as if they were trimmed with three instead of two kinds of lace.

Below the yoke little appliques of embroidery are set in at regular intervals, then finished with the Valenciennes edging. The rose and other flower embroidery bought by the yard and cut apart answer handsomely for this purpose, and nothing makes a more effective trimming.

POPULARITY OF BROWN.

Brown is holding its own wonderfully well. It is a strong favorite with all women. Certainly no color is shown in greater variety, and its rich tints make it adaptable to all sorts of combinations. A combination probably as odd as mauve and burnt orange is brown and grey. Both colors must be clear, however, to produce the best results, and this can still be improved by the selection of highly finished fabrics.

FOUR REAL BABIES IN WOOD.

Nursemaid and Four Charges Slept All Night in Open Air.

A real case of "Babies in the Wood" has occurred in North Staffordshire, England, Silverdale was the scene of the pretty little story. A young servant took four children out for a walk; they lost their way in a wood, wandered about until they were exhausted, then huddled together for warmth, and after the girl had said a prayer, went to sleep. At four o'clock in the morning they were found and taken home.

The servant's name was Lizzie Kirkham. She was sixteen years old, and her little charges varied in age from five years to eight months. Three of them belonged to a family named Boote.

The party set out in the afternoon, and as none of them returned to tea the parents began to get anxious. Their anxiety deepened as darkness came on, and there was still no sign of the missing party. Inquiries were made among relatives and friends, but no trace of the children or the girl could be found.

Meanwhile news of the affair spread throughout the mining village, and bands of sympathetic colliers formed themselves into search parties. The father of three of the children procured a trap, and other men started scouring the district around on bicycles. By ten o'clock at night the whole village was busily helping in the search. The police in neighboring pottery towns were apprised of the occurrence, and in every likely quarter a vigorous search was continued by hundreds of people for the greater part of the night.

It was feared that the children might have fallen in the dark into some dis-used pit, or into some unfenced pond. However, just before dragging operations were to have been commenced the missing party were found.

About four o'clock the next morning a Newcastle-under-Lyne man was startled while musing in Maer Woods by hearing what he thought to be the bleating of a lamb. He struck a match, and approached a white object and discovered that it was a baby. Near by he saw the nursemaid and the three little children asleep beneath a tree. He aroused Kirkham, who gave an account of their adventures.

"We got lost," she said, "when out for a walk. Instead of getting back to Silverdale, as we thought we were doing, we got further away. The children cried when darkness came on."

"We could not see anyone, and there was no house in sight. We wandered on till we were all exhausted. Then we sat down. It was very cold. We huddled together for warmth, and then went to sleep after I had said a prayer."

The man who found the children gave them some food, and wrapped his overcoat and jacket round the little ones, and led them to Silverdale, where they arrived nearly four hours later, the distance being seven or eight miles.

Beyond contracting colds the children were little the worse for their night in the wood.

THE PRESIDENT'S MOTHER.

Old Lady Still Keeps a Vegetable Stall.

President Loubet, of France, has been visiting his old home at Montelimar. He was received at the railway station, say the French newspapers, by several functionaries, and he subsequently took a drive in semi-state with one of his children. Much less ceremonious was the charming scene described by the Rev. A. N. Cooper, the "walking parson." Mr. Cooper in one of his rambles, found himself at Montelimar, and, looking out of the window at his inn in the early morning he saw the President escorting his old mother to the market-place, where she continued to sell farm produce, even though her son had become Chief Magistrate of the Republic. She drove up in a market-cart which was duly unloaded. Then the President gave her his arm, escorted her to her chair, and opened the great umbrella under which she sat. No functionaries were in attendance, and the rest of the market-people showed no signs of regarding the incident as anything remarkable. At the end M. Loubet gravely saluted his mother and went off to read State papers, while she remained to sell cabbages.