The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"There seems to be no way out of it," he said.

"I can see one," Marley suggested. "Of course, it would simplify matters enormously if you merely told me in confidence whence came those notes. You see, as I have the numbers, I could verify your statement beyond question, and——"

Marley paused again and shrugged his shoulders. Despite his cold, official manner, he was obviously prompted by a desire to serve his companion. And yet, simple as the suggestion seemed, it was the very last thing with which Steel could comply.

The novelist turned the matter over rapidly in his mind. His quick perceptions flashed along the whole logical line instantaneously. He was like a man who suddenly sees a midnight landscape by the glare of a dazzling flash of lightning.

"I am sorry," he said, slowly, "very sorry, to disappoint you. Were our situations reversed, I should take up your position exactly. But it so happens that I cannot, dare not, tell you where I got those notes from. So far as I am concerned they came honestly into my hands in payment for special services rendered. It was part of my contract that I should reveal the secret to nobody. If I told you the story you would decline to believe it; you would say that it was a brilliant effort of a novelist's imagination to get out of a dangerous position."

"I don't know that I should," Marley replied. "I have long since ceased to wonder at anything that happens in or connected with Brighton."

"All the same I can't tell you, Marley," Steel said, as he rose. "My lips are absolutely sealed. The point is: what are you going to do?"

"For the present, nothing," Marley replied. "So long as the man in the hospital remains unconscious I can do no more than pursue what Beaconsfield called 'a policy of masterly inactivity.' I have told you a good deal more than I had any right to do, but I did so in the hope that you could assist me. Perhaps in a day or two you will think better of it. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile I am in a tight place. Yes, I see that perfectly well. It is just possible that I may scheme some way out of the difficulty, and if so I shall be only too pleased to let you know. Goodnight, Marley, and many thanks to you."

But with all his ingenuity and fertility of imagination David could see no way out of the trouble. He sat up far into the night scheming; there was no flavor in his tobacco; his pictures and flowers, his silver and china, jarred upon him. He wished with all his heart now that he had let everything go. It need only have been a temporary matter, and there were other Cellini tankards, and intaglios, and line engravings in the world for the man with money in his purse.

He could see no way out of it at all. Was it not possible that the whole thing had been deliberately planned so as to land him and his brains into the hands of some clever gang of swindlers? Had he been tricked and fooled so that he might become the tool of others? It seemed hard to think so when he recalled the sweet voice in the darkness and its passionate plea for help. And yet the very cigar case that he had been told was the one he admired at Lockhart's had proved beyond question to be one purchased from Walen's.

If he decided to violate his promise and tell the whole story nobody would believe him. The thing was altogether too wild and improbable for that. And yet, he reflected, things almost as impossible happen in Brighton every day. And what proof had he to offer?

Well, there was one thing certain. At least three-quarters of those banknotes—the portion he had collected at the house with the crimson blind—could not possibly be traced to the injured man. And, again, it was no fault of Steel's that Marley had obtained possession of the numbers of the notes. If the detective chose to ferret out facts for himself no blame could attach to Steel. If those people had only chosen to leave out of the question that confounded cigar-case!

David's train of thought was broken as an idea came to him. It was not so long since he had a facsimile cigar-case in his hand at Lockhart's, in North Street. Somebody connected with the mystery must have seen him admiring it and reluctantly declining the purchase, because the voice from the telephone told him that the case was a present and that it had come from the famous North Street establishment.

"By Jove!" David cried. "I'll go to Lockhart's to-morrow and see if the case is still there. If so, I may be able to trace it."

Fairly early the next morning David was in North Street. For the time being he had put his work aside altogether. He could not have written a dozen consecutive lines to save the situation. The mere effort to preserve a cheerful face before his mother was a torture. And at any time he might find himself forced to meet a criminal charge.

The gentlemanly assistant at Lockhart's remembered Steel and the cigar-case perfectly well, but he was afraid that the article had been sold. No doubt it would be possible to obtain a facsimile in the course of a few days.

"Only I required that particular one," Steel said. "Can you tell me when it was sold and who purchased it?"

A junior partner did, and could give some kind of information. Several people had admired the case, and it had been on the point of sale several times. Finally, it had passed into the hands of an American gentleman staying at the Metropole.

"Can you tell me his name?" David asked, "or describe him?"

"Well, I can't, sir," the junior partner said, frankly. "I haven't the slightest recollection of the gentleman. He wrote from the Metropole on the hotel paper describing the case and its price and inclosed the full amount in ten-dollar notes and asked to have the case sent by post to the hotel. When we ascertained that the notes were all right we naturally posted the case as desired, and there, so far as we are concerned, was an end of the matter."

"You don't recollect his name?"

"Oh, yes. The name was John Smith. If there is anything wrong——"

David hastily gave the desired assurance. He wanted to arouse no suspicion. All the same, he left Lockhart's with a plethora of suspicions of his own. Doubless the jewellers would be well and fairly satisfied so long as the case had been paid for, but from the standpoint of David's superior knowledge the whole transaction fairly bristled with suspicion.

Not for one moment did Steel believe in the American at the Metropole. Somebody stayed there doubtless under the name of John Smith, and that said somebody had paid for the cigar-case in dollar notes the tracing of which might prove a task of years. Nor was it the slightest use to inquire at the Metropole, where practically everybody is identified by a number, and where scores come and go every day. John Smith would only have to ask for his letters and then drop quietly into a sea of oblivion.

Well, David had got his information, and a lot of use it was likely to prove to him. As he walked thoughtfully homewards he was debating in his mind whether or not he might venture to call at or write to 219, Brunswick Square, and lay his difficulties before the people there. At any rate, he reflected, with grim bitterness, they would know that he was not romancing. If nothing turned up in the meantime he would certainly visit Brunswick Square.

He sat in his own room puzzling the matter out till his head ached and the flowers before him reeled in a dazzling whirl of color. He looked round for inspiration, now desperately, as he frequently did when the warp of his delicate fancy tangled. The smallest thing sometimes fed the machine again—a patch of sunshine, the chip on a plate, the damaged edge of a frame. Then his eye fell on the telephone and he jumped to his feet.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed. "If I had been plotting this business out as a story I should have thought of that long ago. No, I don't want any number, at least not in that way. Two nights ago I was called up by somebody from London who held the line for fully half an hour or so. I've—I've forgotten the address of my correspondent, but if you can ascertain the number—yes, I shall be here if you will ring me up when you have got it. Thanks."

Half an hour passed before the bell trilled again. David listened eagerly. At the rate, now he was going to know the number whence the mysterious message came—0017, Kensington, was the number. David muttered his thanks and flew to his big telephone directory. Yes, there it was—"0017, 446, Prince's Gate, Gilead Gates."

The big volume dropped with a crash on the floor. David looked down at the crumpled volume with dim, misty amazement.

"Gilead Gates," he murmured. "Quaker, millionaire, and philanthropist. One of the most highly-esteemed and popular men in England. And from his house came the message which has been the source of all the mischief. And yet there are critics who say the plots of my novels are too fantastic!"

CHAPTER VII.

The emotion of surprise seemed to have left Steel altogether. After the last discovery he was prepared to believe anything. Had anybody told him that the whole Bench of Bishops was at the bottom of the mystery he would have responded that the suggestion was highly probable.

"Still, it's what the inimitable Dick Swiveller would call a staggerer," he muttered. "Gates, the millionaire, the one great capitalist who has the profound respect of the labor world. No, a man with a record like that couldn't have anything to do with it. Still, it must have been from his house that the mysterious message came. The post office people working the telephone trunk line would know that—a fact probably escaped the party who called me up. I'll go to Brunswick Square and see that woman. Money or no money, I'll not lie under an imputation like this."

There was one thing to be done beforehand, and that was to see Dr. Cross. From the latter's manner he evidently knew something of the charge hanging over Steel's head. Marley was evidently keeping that close to himself and speaking to nobody.

"Oh, the man is better," Cross said, cheerfully. "He hasn't been identified yet, though the Press has given us every assistance. I fancy the poor fellow is going to recover, though I am afraid it will be a long job."

"He hasn't recovered consciousness, then?"

"No, and neither will he for some time to come. There seems to be a certain pressure on the brain which we are unable to locate, and we dare not try the Rontgen rays yet. So on the whole you are likely to escape with a charge of aggravated assault."

David smiled grimly as he went his way. He walked the whole distance to Hove along North Street and the Western Road, finally turning down Brunswick Square instead of up it, as he had done on the night of the great adventure. He wondered vaguely why he had been specially instructed to approach the house that way.

Here it was at last, 219 Brunswick Square—220 above and, of course, 218 below the house. It looked pretty well the same in the daylight, the same door, the same knocker, and the same crimson blind in the centre of the big bay window. David knocked at the door with a vague feeling of uncertainty as to what he was going to do next. A very staid, old-fashioned footman answered his ring and inquired his business.

"Can—can I see your mistress?" David stammered.

The staid footman became, if possible, a little more reserved. If the gentleman would send in his card he would see if Miss Ruth was disengaged. David found himself vaguely wondering what Miss Ruth's surname might be. The old Biblical name was a great favorite of his.

"I'm afraid I haven't a card," he said. "Will you say that Mr. Steel would like to see—er—Miss Ruth for a few minutes? My business is exceedingly pressing."

The staid footman led the way into the dining-room. Evidently this was no frivolous house, where giddy butterflies came and went; such gaudy insects would have been chilled by the solemn decorum of the place. David followed into the dining-room in a dreamy kind of way, and with the feeling that comes to us all at times, the sensation of having done and seen the same thing before.

Nothing had been altered. The same plain, handsome, expensive, furniture was here, the same mahogany and engravings, the same dull red walls, with the same light stain over the fire-place—a dull, prosperous square-toed-looking place. The electric fittings looked a little different, but that might have been fancy. It was the identical room David had run his quarry to earth, and he began to feel his spirits rising. Doubtless he could scheme some way out of the difficulty and spare his phantom friends at the same time.

"You wanted to see me, sir? Will you be so good as to state your business?"

David turned with a start. He saw before him a slight, graceful figure, and a lovely, refined face in a frame of the most beautiful hair that he had ever seen. The grey eyes were demure, with just a suggestion of mirth in them; the lips were made for laughter. It was as if some dainty little actress were masquerading in Salvation garb, only the dress was all priceless lace that touched David's artistic perception. He could imagine the girl as deeply in earnest as going through fire and water for her convictions. Also he could imagine her as Puck or Ariel—there was rippling laughter in every note of that voice of hers.

"I—I, eh, yes," Steel stammered. "You see, I—if I only knew whom I had the pleasure of addressing?"

"I am Miss Ruth Gates, at your service. Still, you asked for me by name."

David made no reply for a moment. He was tripping over surprises again. What a fool he had been not to look out the name of the occupant of 219 in the directory. It was pretty evident that Gilead Gates had a house in Brighton as well as one in town. Not only had that telephone message emanated from the millionaire's residence, but it had brought Steel to the philanthropist's abode in Brighton. If Mr. Gates himself had strolled into the room singing a comic song David would have expressed no emotion.

"Daughter of the famous Gilead Gates?" David asked, feebly.

"No, niece, and housekeeper. This is not my uncle's own house, he has merely taken this for a time. But, Mr. Steel——"

"Mr. David Steel—is my name familiar to you?"

David asked the question somewhat eagerly. As yet he was only feeling his way and keenly on the look-out for anything in the way of a clue. He saw the face of the girl grow white as the table-cover, he saw the lurking laughter die in her eyes, and the purple black terror dilating the pupils.

"I—I know you quite well by reputation," the girl gasped. Her little hands were pressed to her left side as if to check some deadly pain there. "Indeed, I may say I have read most of your stories. I—I hope that there is nothing wrong."

(To be Continued.)

Fashion ....Talk

LIGHT COLORS IN VOGUE.

For the next few months, at least, light shades will prevail. The bright greens, tans, oranges and heliotropes are shown in all the newest wool materials. A charming costume is made of heliotrope voile over the same color silk. The skirt has a circular yoke rounding away at either side of the front panel which is laid in two box plaits and stitched almost to the knees. Below the hip-yoke the fulness of the skirt is laid in tiny plaits and two deep tucks at the bottom form the only other trimming.

The girdle is the distinguishing feature of the jacket. This is made very narrow at the back and sides, but at the front it broadens into a high square shaped band reefed together with lavender silk cords. Where the girdle is narrowest the jacket is stitched in tiny tucks about four inches high, then released to blouse over the figure. The shoulder has a yoke composed of five tuck-like folds extending in one piece with the tall collar. Pointed revers, also of the folds, turn back from a lace vest lined with chiffon. The sleeves are shirred at the top and gauged into two puffs below the elbow. The wristband is of heliotrope cloth, embroidered with black and purple silk threads.

NEW DESIGNS IN WRAPS.

The highest art of the courturieres and tailoress is manifested in the new wraps. For dressy occasions these are almost always long, with an intricacy rather than a profusion of decoration. The effect, however, is about the same. Equally fashionable for gowns and wraps is mohair because it comes in so many weights and smart effects. Then it has the advantage of wearing well and shedding dust readily. The expensive qualities of this fabric are shrunken—and in the end it pays to get the best for rain is likely to play strange pranks with mohair, shrinking it in spots and making it shrivel lamentably along its hems.

Nothing smarter could be imagined than a fall coat of bronze-colored mohair, almost an Empire effect, so high is the belt line. Despite this, though, several scalloped flaps are piped in the seams to define the real waistline. These are ornamented top and bottom with big brown silk buttons. Over the shoulders, there are two capes of brown silk, stitched and edged with fancy braid, but very narrow. There is a tall collar of the same material and the full sleeves have turn-back cuffs of stiffened mohair trimmed with the large buttons.

Like mohair, voile makes handsome afternoon wraps. It is soft and graceful, lending itself admirably to the tab and battlement effect which form so important a part of fashionable trimmings. Heavily finished and stitched with a little hand embroidery or braiding at the throat, voile wraps are distinctly attractive. They will take the place of pongees, which have been so popular.

PLAIDS TO BE LARGER.

Without being what is commonly expressed as "loud" the new plaid materials may be called conspicuous. They may not be affected by ultra-conservative women, yet there is nothing about them that is undesirable. In so many instances they are subdued by sombre braids and stitchings that one forgets the size of the checks. The approved color combinations are black and white, brown and white, blue and white and blue and green. Black and white, however, enjoy an unquestionable lead. A costume exceedingly simple in its outlines shows the skirt with a plain hip yoke, fitted smoothly by goring; this yoke dips down at both the front and back, ending each side of the front pannel that extends from belt to hem. The jupe is set on to this hip-yoke by the finest and scantiest of "scratched" gathers, each line of gathering being held securely in place.

THE BACK OF JACKETS.

The jacket is short enough in the back to permit a glimpse of the white silk underblouse. It has a short yoke-piece across the back, from which the back descends in a slightly outward flaring squared section, a trifle wedge shaped at the bottom. The centre-back is formed of one wedge-like extension, finished at its side by a stitched edge three-quarters of an inch wide, in plait or wide tuck effect. This centre section is apparently an extension of the yoke. At the bottom the coat is merely stitched. The points drop low to cover the belt and slant downward a little from the under-arm seams, with something of a repetition of the wedge-like back; the lower centre front swings out a bit from the skirt belt, the latter being of the plaid material.

Short coats of taffeta will be very much worn this Fall. Of course these have not the wearing qualities of cloths and are prone to split or become glossy when worn constantly; but if soft taffeta is selected, it will wear much better and is both modish and serviceable. The new designs have tall straight collars and show little trimming besides bands of the same meterials. If capelets are used they are also of taffets. If the present efforts of modists succeed, the very prevalent lace collars will give away to extensive embroidered effects. This should not be bad news for the lace makers, for lace will be in greater demand than ever for house gowns and evening dresses.

AUTUMN HATS.

So far a very few fall hats have been seen, but it is expected that another week will bring out many new models. The designs which have appeared are in white and pale blue felts, very silky and soft in appearance. The sailor and broad gypsy shapes are exemplified in these models. These are wreathed with one kind of flower and set in a close garland without foliage, with still another flower at the front.

A blue hat which commends itself to all lovers of the beautiful is of pressed felt, very light in weight, with broad flat crown and straight brim. The latter is edged with brown bands and two shades of soft brown silk ribbon are shirred around the crown and finished with a bow at the front. From either side of the bow evolve paradise plumes of dark brown shading to white. The colors are combined perfectly and the effect is beautiful.

KNITTED COATS.

Knitted jackets for outdoor wear are being shown in many new designs. Designed rather for style than real service is a white Eton of knitted wool. The excuse for its abbreviation is that it will protect the chest and back until the very cold weather demands a change to the longer Norfolk design. White and red will be the fashionable colors for these jackets.

MOULDER AND LINQUIST.

Mr. John Tinz, a German, Speaks Six Languages.

A twentieth century rival to Elihu Burritt, the poly-lingual blacksmith, is at present an employe at the Gurney Foundry Works, Toronto. John Tinz is an iron-moulder and a good one. Six feet two in his boots, he is built to correspond, the beau ideal of a man to handle masses of iron. But Tinz is a man of culture, for he can speak six languages, English, German, Russian, Finnish, Erthish and Lattish, and write three of them, which makes him valuable as an interpreter round the Gurney works, where a large proportion of the employes are foreigners.

Mr. Tinz was born in Stettin, Germany, near the border. At an early age he went to Scotland to learn the iron trade. He worked 12 years there, and it was there that he began his linguistic studies which made him a useful man as interpreter among the sailors. Like Burritt at his bellows he delved into books while engaged as an iron-moulder.

Mr. Tinz has visited Russia three times, and has been practically all over the Russian Empire from St. Petersburg to Vladivostock. In '99 he made his last journey through the land of the Czar as interpreter for Mr. Ballantyne, a Scotchman in search of iron ore. They spent several months in the Ural Mountains so familiar to our school-book geography days. Here they drove hundreds of miles in sledges over the narrow trails, drawn by three horses in a string.

"And you ought to see a Russian driver hit the lead horse, with his long whip," he said, "the handle of the whip is only a foot long, but the lash is ————!" giving a graphic description of how the lash cuts the horse on the ear on its backward stroke.

"Did you see any Nihilists in Russia?" asked the reporter.

"No, we had no trouble with politics," he said gravely. "We went for iron ore. We had passports. No trouble to travel."

"How did you like Russia?"

"Very well, thank you," he replied. "My trade is good there. Lots of iron workers and plenty of ore."

"Then you are not a Russian rabbi?"

"No. I am just a moulder. Sometimes I go down to the York street mission to help them interpret. That is all."

"How did the Russians write your name."

And the burly linguist good-naturedly wrote for the reporter "John Tinz" as it is in Russian.