The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(Continued.)

"Of course. Presently I am going to show you a little more of the comedy. Well, I was on the terrace pretty late when I heard dear Reginald down the cliff calling for assistance. He pretended that he had slipped down the cliff and could not get up again. By the aid of a rope that fortunately happened to be close at hand I saved our dear friend's life. I have learnt from one of the gardeners just now that Reginald placed the rope there himself—a most effective touch, you must admit."

"Very," Bell said, drily. "But I quite fail to see why——"

"I am coming to that. Don't you see that if anything happened Reginald could prove that he was not near the house at the time? But just before that I saw his accomplice come up the cliff; indeed, he passed quite close to me on his way to the house. Reginald quite overlooked this fact in his heed for his own safety. When I had effected my gallant rescue I heard an owl hoot. Now, there are no owls about here.

"I guessed what that meant—it was a signal of success. Then I went back to the corridor and the Rembrandt was gone. The stays had been cut away. At first I was dreadfully upset, but the more I thought of it the more sure I was that it was all for the best."

"But you might have raised an alarm and caught the thief, who—"

"Who would have been promptly disclaimed by Reginald. Let me tell you, sir, that I have the thief and the lost Rembrandt in the hollow of my hands. Before the day is out I shall make good my boast. And there's the breakfast bell."

It looked quite natural some time later for the three conspirators to be lounging about the gallery when Henson emerged from his bedroom. He appeared bright and smiling, and most of the bandages had been removed from his throat. All the same he was not pleased to see Bell there; he gazed uneasily at the doctor and from him to Littimer.

"You know Bell," the latter said, carelessly. "Fact is, there's been a great mistake"

Bell offered his hand heartily. It cost him a huge effort, but the slimy scoundrel had to be fought with his own weapons. Henson shook his head with the air of a man extending a large and generous need of forgiveness. He sought in vain to read Bell's eyes, but there was a steady, almost boyish, smile in them."

"I indeed rejoice," he said, unctuously. "I indeed rejoice—rejoice—rejoice!"

He repeated the last word helplessly; he seemed to have lost all his backbone, and lapsed into a flabby, jellified mass of quivering white humanity. His vacant, fishy eyes were fixed upon the Rembrandt in a kind of dull, sleepy terror.

"I'm not well," he gasped. "Not so strong as I imagined. I'll—I'll go and lie down again. Later on I shall want a dogcart to drive me to Moreton Wells. I——"

He paused again, glanced at the picture, and passed heavily to his room. Littimer smiled.

"Splendid," he said. "It was worth thousands just to see his face."

"All the same," Chris said quietly; "all the same, that man is not to leave for Moreton Wells till I've had a clear hour's start of him. Dr. Bell will you accompany me?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

Lord Littimer polished his rarely used eye glass carefully and favored Chris with a long, admiring stare. At the same time he was wondering why the girl should have taken such a vivid interest in Reginald Henson and his doings. For some years past it had been Littimer's whim to hold up Henson before everybody as his successor, so far as the castle went. He liked to see Henson's modest smirk and beautiful self-abasement, for in sooth has lordship had a pretty contempt for the man who hoped to succeed him. But the will made some time ago by Littimer would have come as a painful shock to the philanthropist.

"It is a very pretty tangle as it stands," he said. "Miss Lee, let me compliment you upon your astuteness in this matter. Only don't tell me you schemed your way here, and that you are a lady detective. I read a good many novels, and I don't like them."

"You may be easy on that score," Chris laughed. "I am not a lady detective. All the same, I have defeated Mr. Reginald Henson."

"You think he is at the bottom of the mystery of the other Rembrandt?"

"I am certain of it; unless you like to believe in the truth of his charming scheme to give you a lesson, as he called it. As a matter of fact Mr. Henson discovered the existence of the other print; he discovered that Dr. Bell possessed it—the rest I leave to your own astuteness. You saw his face just now?"

"Oh, yes. It was a fine study in emotions. If you could find the other picture——"

"I hope to restore it to you before the day has passed."

Littimer applauded, gently. He was charmed, he said, with the whole comedy. The first two acts had been a brilliant success. If the third was only as good he would regard Miss Lee as his benefactor for ever. It was not often that anybody intellectually amused him; in fact, he must add Miss Lee to his collection.

"Then you must play a part yourself," Chris said, gaily. "I am going into Moreton Wells, and Dr. Bell accompanies me. Mr. Henson is not to know that we have gone, and he is not to leave the house for a good hour or so after our departure What I want is a fair start and the privilege of bringing a guest home to dinner."

"Vague, mysterious, and alluring," Littimer said. "Bring the guest by all means. I will pledge my diplomacy that you have a long start. Really, I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much. You shall have the big wagonette for your journey."

"And join it beyond the lodge-gates," Chris said, thoughtfully. "Dr. Bell, you shall stroll through the park casually; I will follow as casually later on."

A little later Henson emerged from his room dressed evidently for a journey. He looked flabby and worried; there was an expression very like fear in his eyes. The corridor was deserted as he passed the place where the Rembrandt hung. He paused before the picture in a hesitating, fascinated way. His feet seemed to pull up before it involuntarily.

"What does it mean?" he muttered. "What in the name of fate has happened? It is impossible that Merritt could have played me a trick like that; he would never have dared. Besides, he has too much to gain by following my instructions. I fancy——"

Henson slipped up to the picture as a sudden idea came to him. If the picture had not been removed at all the stays would still be intact. And if they were intact Merrit was likely to have a bad quarter of an hour later on. It would be proof that—

But the stays were not intact. The heads had been shaved off with some cutting instrument; the half of the stays gleamed like silver in the morning light. And yet the Rembrandt was there. The more Henson dwelt upon it the more he was puzzled. He began to wonder whether some deep trap was being laid for him.

But, no, he had seen no signs of it. In some way or another Bell had managed to ingratiate himself with Littimer again, but not necessarily for long, Henson told himself, with a vicious grin. Nor was Littimer the kind of man who ever troubled himself to restrain his feelings. If he had got to the bottom of the whole business he would have had Henson kicked out of the house without delay.

But Littimer suspected nothing. His greeting just now showed that Bell suspected nothing, because he had shaken hands in the heartiest manner possible. And as for Miss Lee, she was no more than a smart Yankee girl, and absolutely an outsider.

Still, it was dreadfully puzzling. And it was not nice to be puzzled at a time when the arch-conspirator ought to know every move of the game. Therefore it became necessary to go into Moreton Wells and see Merritt without delay. As Henson crossed the hall the cheerful voice of Littimer hailed him.

"Reginald," he cried, "I want your assistance and advice."

With a muttered curse Henson entered the library. Littimer was seated at a table, with a cigarette in his mouth, his brows drawn over a mass of papets.

"Sit down and have a cigar," he said. "The fact is I am setting my affairs in order--I am going to make a fresh will. If you handn't come down last night I should probably have sent for you. Now take my bank-book and check those figures."

"Shall we be long?" Henson asked, anxiously.

Littimer tartly hoped that Henson could spare him an hour. It was not usual, he said, for a testator to be refused assistance from the chief benefactor under his will. Henson apologized, with a sickly smile. He had important business of a philanthropic kind in Moreton Wells, but he had no doubt that it could wait for an hour. And then for the best part of the morning he sat fuming politely, whilst Littimer chattered in the most amiable fashion. Henson had rarely seen him in a better mood. It was quite obvious that he suspected nothing. Meanwhile Chris and Bell were bowling along towards Moreton Wells. They sat well back in the roomy wagonette, so that the servants could not hear them. Chris regarded Bell with a brilliant smile on her face.

"Confess," she said, "confess that you are consumed with curiosity."

"It would be just as well to acknowledge it at once," Bell admitted. "In the happy old days your sister Enid always said that you were the clever and audacious one of the family. She said you would do or dare anything."

"I used to imagine so," Chris said, more quietly. "But the life of the last few years tried one's nerves terribly. Still, the change has done me a deal of good—the change and the knowledge that Reginald Henson regards me as dead. But you want to know how I am going to get the Rembrandt?"

"That is what is consuming me at present," Bell said.

"Well, we are going to see the man who has it," Chris explained, coolly. "I have his address in Moreton Wells at the present moment, and for the rest he is called the Rev. James Merritt. Between ourselves he is no more a reverend than you are."

"And if the gentleman is shy or refuses to see us?"

"Then he will be arrested on a charge of theft."

"My dear young lady, before you can get a warrant for that kind of thing you have to prove the theft, you have to swear an information to the effect that you believe the property is in the possession of the thief, and that is not easy."

"There is nothing easier. I am prepared to swear that cheerfully."

"That you actually know that the property is in the possession of the thief?"

"Certainly I do. I saw him put it in his pocket."

Bell looked at the speaker with blank surprise. If such was the fact, then Chris's present statement was exactly opposed to all that she had said before. She sat opposite to Bell with a little gleam of mischief in her lovely eyes.

"You saw that man steal the Rembrandt?" Bell gasped.

"Certainly not. But I did see him steal my big diamond star and put it in his pocket. And I can swear an information on that."

"I see that you have something interesting to tell me," Bell said.

"Oh, indeed, I have. We will hark back now to the night before last. when Reginald Henson made his personal attempt to obtain the Rembrandt and then played the trick upon you that was so very near to being a brilliant success."

"It would have been best for you," Bell murmured.

"Well, really I am inclined to think so. And perhaps Lord Littimer would have given you in custody on a second charge of theft. If he had done so it would have gone hard with you to prove your innocence. But I am wandering from the point. Henson failed. But he was going to try again. I watched him carefully yesterday and managed to see his letters and telegrams. Then I found that he had telegraphed to James Merritt, whose address in Moreton Wells I carefully noted down. It did not require much intellect to grasp the fact that this Merritt was to be the accomplice in the new effort to steal the picture. Mr. Merritt came over and saw his chief, with whom he had a long conversation in the grounds. I also forced myself on Mr. Merritt's notice.

"He was introduced to me as a brand plucked from the burning, a converted thief who had taken orders of some kind. He is a sorry-looking scoundrel, and I took particular note of him, especially the horrible smashed thumb."

"The what!" Bell exclaimed. "A thumb like a snake's head with a little pink nail on it?"

The same man. So you have met him."

"We met on our way here," Bell said, drily. "The rascal sent the dogcart away from the station so that I should have to walk home, and he attacked me in the road. But I had expected something of the kind and I was ready for him. And he was the man with the thumb. I should have told you this before, but I had forgotten it in watching your fascinating diplomacy. When the attack was defeated the rascal bolted in the direction of the cliffs. Of course, he was off to tell Henson of the failure of the scheme and to go on with the plot for getting the other picture. If he had stolen my Rembrandt then the other would have remained. I couldn't have turned up with a cock-and-bull story of having started with the picture and being robbed of it by a total stranger in the road—— But I am interrupting you."

"Well, I marked that thumb carefully. I have already told you that the thief passed me on his way to the house when he came up the cliff. I was leaning over the terrace when I saw him emerge into a band of light caused by the big arc in the castle tower. I forget that I was in deep shadow and that he could not possibly see me. I jerked my head back suddenly and my diamond star fell out and dropped almost at the feet of the intruder. Then he saw it, chuckled over it—placed it in his pocket. I was going to call out, but I didn't. I had a sudden idea, Dr. Bell—I had an idea that almost amounted to an inspiration."

Chris paused for a moment and her eyes sparkled. Bell was watching her with the deepest interest and admiration

"I let the man keep it," Chris went on, more slowly, "with an eye to the future. The man had stolen the thing and I was in a position to prove it. He would be pretty sure to pawn the star—he probably has done so by this time, and therefore we have him in our power. We have only to discover where the diamonds have been 'planted'—is that the correct expression?—I can swear an information, and the police will subsequently search the fellow's lodgings. When the seacrh is made the missing Rembrandt will be found there. Mr. Merritt would hardly dare to pawn that."

"Even if he knew its real value, which I doubt," Bell said, thoughtfully. "Henson would not tell his tool too much. Let me congratulate you upon your idea, Miss Chris. That diamond star of yours is a powerful factor in our hands, and you always have the consciousness of knowing that you can get it back again. Now, what are we going to do next?"

"Going to call upon Mr. Merritt, of course," Chris said, promptly. "You forget that I have his address. I am deeply interested in the welfare of the criminal classes, and you are also an enthusiast. I've looked up the names of one or two people in the directory who go in for that kind of thing, and I'm going to get up a bazaar at Littimer Castle for the benefit of the predatory classes who have turned over a new leaf. I am particularly anxious for Mr. Merritt to give us an address. Don't you think that will do?"

"I should think it would do very well indeed," Bell said.

(To be Continued.)

KAISER TAKES CREDIT.

But Other Men Are the Authors of His Productions.

"He has talents, undoubtedly, but they are creative only in giving work to others, the product passing for his own in the end. As Herren von Moltke and Philip Eulenberg are the real authors of his 'Song to Aegir," so Professor Knackfuss, in Cassel, composes his cartoons, though being credited only with their technical execution.

"The late Court Chaplain Frommel used to write the Imperial sermons delivered with so much eclat on the deck of the yacht Hohenzollern; officers of the military household prepare William's lectures, and the artist Karl Saltzmann paints his landscape and marine views."

This remarkable passage from a book lately published will cause a good deal of unkind gossip in the capital of the Kaiser.

Written by a lady-in-waiting, "The Private Lives of William II. and his Consort," professes to give the inner history of the German court up to the present day.

Their Majesties intensely dislike seeing servants about the palace. Here is a sidelight:—

Her Majesty being so fastidious about girls in her room (when the Kaiser is present) as William is about man-servants, she is now obliged to make her own fire in the grate on chilly mornings whenever her husband is at home. What a parody on royal state this—the Empress-Queen getting up in her "nightie," and in the cold and damp, to light her own fire! Verily, truth is stranger by far than fiction.

WHY HE FAILED.

He was an elder of a chapel in a little Glamorganshire town. He was also a tradesman, and he fell upon evil days. His creditors pressed him and he was forced to file his petition in bankruptcy.

His failure was the talk of the town. He felt his position acutely, and kept as much as possible within doors.

Then the brethren decided to hold a meeting, and the unworthy elder was summoned to attend. The pastor spoke first. He urged his people to be considerate and tender.

He was followed by a man who made an eloquent speech on honesty in trade, and concluded by moving that the elder be suspended from office for a period to give him time to purge himself of his heinousness. A seconder and supporter spoke to the same effect.

The brethren looked severe. their countenances were set with the sternness of a righteous wrath, a deep silence pervaded the room.

Slowly and humbly the elder arose. "I want," he murmured meekly, "to say a few things based on my ledger. The mover of the resolution owes me £16. I offered him three weeks ago to settle it for £12. to save myself from my present position. The seconder owes me £13. I told him I would accept £10 to prevent this exposure. The supporter of the resolution is indebted to me to the amount of £9."

A brief pause. "And now, with your permission"—turning to the pastor—"I will read out the sums the others present owe me."

He read them out, calmly and deliberately, but long ere he had finished the brethren had fled.

BULL THAT CHEWS TOBACCO.

The donkey who was a connoisseur in tobacco must look to his laurels. "In Aden," says a correspondent, "I once saw a young Somali bull that not only chewed lighted cigarettes, but also washed his meal down with half a pint of neat rum. Tommy (the bull's name) was the property of Capt. Craig, the skipper of the local steamer Falcon. He was liked on board and was, despite his dissipated habits, a great favorite with the native crew."

LAWS FROM OTHER LANDS

$500 FOR OFFERING A FRIEND A CIGARETTE.

Norway's Sensible Law — married Men Have a Double Vote in Belgium.

The Bill which is before the British Parliament for the prevention of juvenile smoking cannot well be considered severe in its proposals by those who are familiar with similar legislation in other countries.

In Arkansas, for instance, so severely is smoking frowned upon by the law that the penalty for selling cigarettes even to an adult cannot be less than $500, and may be as much as $5,000; while similar fines hang over the head of a man who in an oblivious moment offers a cigarette to a friend. In Norway the sale of tobacco in any form to boys under sixteen is absolutely forbidden under heavy penalties; and the stranger who offers a cigarette to a boy, and the boy who accepts it, are equally liable to punishment.

In Heligoland no boy under the age of sixteen may enter a public-house for any purpose whatever; and in the City of Roanoke, in Virginia, woe to the boy or girl under that age who is seen in the streets alone after nine o'clock in the evening in summer-time and eight o'clock in winter; unless they have a written permission from their parents or are going in search of a doctor they will be arrested, and the parents must expect to pay

A HEAVY FINE.

Norway has recently passed a very sensible law—which might well be adopted by other countries—to the effect that any woman who wishes to wed must first present to the authorities a certificate showing that she is skilled in the arts of cooking, sewing, knitting, and embroidery; and until she can satisfy them that she is an adept in these domestic arts she may, metaphorically, "whistle" for a husband. No wonder the young men of Norway are jubilant.

Lucerne has upon its statute-book a law, by no means beloved of ladies, which forbids the wearing of hats more than eighteen inches in diameter, and of foreign feathers and artificial flowers; while even to wear ribbons of silk and gauze a license of forty pence a year must be taken out. Germany has an excellent method of her own for dealing with brutes who beat their wives. They are not, as here, sent to prison for a consecutive term, in which case the wife and family must lose their means of subsistence. In Germany they are arrested on Saturday, at the end of their week's work, and kept in durance until Monday, when they are set free to begin work again. And this week-end incarceration is continued until the sentence is completed, the man's earnings being handed over

INTACT TO HIS WIFE.

In Belgium, if a man wants to pose as a full-blown voter, he must qualify for the privilege by taking to himself a wife. So long as he remains single he is only entitled to a single vote, but from the day he makes a trip to the altar his political value is doubled. In Madagascar you take your choice between being father of a family and paying a substantial tax. If, at the age of twenty-five, a man is unmarried or childless he must make up his mind to pay $3.75 a year for his default; while every girl who remains single or without chick, after passing her twenty-fourth year, must pay an annual tax of $1.12.

In Western Australia the minimum penalty for serving drink on a Sunday is $250, and the keeper of an inn or hotel must not absent himself from his house for more than four weeks in the year without special permission from a stipendary magistrate. In Austria any actor who wears a military or ecclesiastical costume on the stage is liable to a heavy fine, while in Germany such costumes are permitted on the stage, but woe to the wearer if they are not correct down to a button.

AN AWFUL REVELATION.

"I wish you hadn't had your hair cut so short, Harold!" exclaimed the young woman, turning from him involuntarily.

"What difference does it make, dearest?" asked Harold, with tender anxiety.

"You—you have destroyed an illusion," she sighed. "That is all."

"You didn't think I was a poet, did you, Clara, because I wore my hair long?"

"No; I never suspected you of being a poet."

"Nor an artist?"

"No."

"Then what illusion have I destroyed?" he demanded.

"Perhaps I should say, Harold," she answered, with tears in her voice, "that you have unconsciously revealed a fact I never suspected, dear. Your ears don't match!"

BOTH BOTHERED.

The neighbor leaned upon her garden-rake and called over the fence.

"I noticed a light in your house last night, Mr. Bimley," she said. "Are your baby's teeth bothering him again?"

"Don't know how much they're bothering him," he answered, drily; "but they're bothering the out of me."