The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XXXV.—(Continued).

The quaint and somewhat exclusive town of Moreton Wells was reached in due course and the street where the Rev. James Merritt resided located at length. It was a modest two-storeyed tenement, and the occupier of the rooms was at home. Chris pushed her way gaily in, followed by Bell, before the occupant could lay down the foul clay pipe he was smoking and button the unaccustomed stiff white collar round his throat. Merritt whipped a tumbler under the table with amazing celerity, but no cunning of his could remove the smell of gin that hung pungently on the murky atmosphere.

Merritt dodged his head back defiantly as if half-expecting a blow. His eyes were strained a little anxiously over Bell's shoulder as if fearful of a shadow. Bell had seen the type before—Merritt was unconsciously looking for the police.

"I am so glad to find you at home," Chris said, sweetly.

Merritt muttered something that hardly sounded complimentary. It was quite evident that he was far from returning the compliment. He had recognised Bell, and was wondering fearfully if the latter was as sure of his identity. Bell's face betrayed nothing. All the same he was following Merritt's uneasy eye till it rested on a roll of dirty paper on the mantelshelf. That roll of paper was the missing Rembrandt. and he knew it.

"Won't you offer me a chair?" Chris asked, in the sweetest possible manner.

Merritt sulkily emptied a chair of a pile of cheap sporting papers, and demanded none too politely what business the lady had with him. Chris proceeded to explain at considerable length. As Merritt listened his eyes gleamed and a broadening grin spread over his face. He had done a great deal of that kind of thing, he admitted. Since Henson had taken him up the police had not been anything like so inquisitive, and his present pose was fruitful of large predatory gains. The latter fact Merritt kept to himself. On the whole the prospect appealed to his imagination. Henson wouldn't like it, but, then Henson was not in a position to say too much.

"I thought perhaps if you came over with us and dined at the castle," Chris suggested. She spoke slowly and thoughtfully, with her eyes on the ground. "Say to-night. Will you come?"

Merritt grinned extensively once more. The idea of his dining at the castle appealed to his own peculiar sense of humor. He was at his ease, seeing that Bell failed to recognise him. To dine at the castle, to note the plate, and get a minute geographical knowledge of the place from personal observation! His mouth watered at the thought.

"They ought to be more careful yonder," he suggested. "There's plate and there's pictures."

"Nothing has ever been stolen from Littimer Castle," Bell said, crisply. He read the leer in Merritt's eyes as he spoke of pictures. "Nothing whatever."

"What, not lately?" Merritt asked. "Didn't hear tell of a——"

He paused, conscious of saying too much. Bell shook his head again. An utterly puzzled expression crept over Mr. Merritt's engaging countenance. At the present moment an art treasure of price stood in that very room, and here was a party from the castle utterly innocent of the robbery. Chris glanced at Bell and smiled.

"I love the pictures," she said. "especially the prints. That Rembrandt, 'The Crimson Blind,' for instance. I found a fresh light in it this morning and called Lord Littimer's attention to it before we started. I should lock that up if it were mine."

Merritt's eyes fairly bulged as he listened. Had he not half-suspected some deep "plant" he would have been vastly amused. But then he had got the very picture these people were speaking about close to hand at the very moment.

"Tell you what," he said, suddenly. "I ain't used to swell society ways, but I'm always ready to sacrifice myself to the poor fellows who aint't found the straight path like me. And if you gets up your bazaar, I'll do what I can to 'elp."

"Then you will dine with us to-night?" Chris asked eagerly. Don't say no. I met a man once with a past like yours at Lady Roslingham's, and he was so interesting. We will call for you in an hour's time with the wagonette. Then we can settle half our plans before dinner."

Merritt was graciously pleased to be agreeable. Moreover, he was utterly puzzled and absolutely consumed with an overpowering curiosity. It seemed also to him to be a sheer waste of providence to discard such an offer. And the plate at Littimer Castle was superb!

Meanwhile Chris and Bell walked down the street together. "He was puzzled over the Rembrandt," Chris said. "Seeing that he has our picture——"

"No doubt about it. The picture was rolled up and stood on the mantelshelf. I followed Merritt's gaze, knowing perfectly well that it would rest presently on the picture if it was in the room. At the same time, our interesting friend in chuckling over the way he has deceived us clean forgot the yellow pawnticket lying on the table."

"Dr. Bell, do you mean to say that——"

"That I know where your diamond star was pledged. Indeed I do. Merritt had probably just turned out his pockets as we entered. The pawnticket was on the table and related to a diamond aigrette pawned by one James Merritt—mark the simple cunning of the man—with Messrs. Rutter and Co., 117 High Street. That in itself is an exceedinly valuable discovery and one we cab afford to keep to ourselves for the present. At the same time I should very much like to know what Rutter and Co. are like. Let me go down to the shop and make some simple purchase."

Rutter and Co. proved to be a very high-class shop indeed, despite the fact that that there was a pawnbroking branch of the business. The place was quite worthy of Bond Street, the stock was brilliant and substantial, the assistants quite above provincial class. As Bell was turning over some sleeve-links Chris was examining a case of silver and gold cigarette-cases and the like. She picked up a cigar-case at length and asked the price. At the mention of fifty guineas she dropped the trifle with a little moue of surprise.

"It looks as if it had been used," she said.

"It is not absolutely new, madam, the assistant admitted, "therefore the price is low. But the gentleman who sold it to us proved that he had only had it a few days. The doctor had ordered him not to smoke in future, and so——"

Chris turned away to something else. Bell completed his purchase, and together they left the shop. Once outside Chris gripped her companion's arm excitedly.

"Another great discovery," she said. "Did you see me looking at that cigar-case—a gun-metal one set with diamonds? You recollect that Ruth Gates purchased a case like that for that—that foolishness we thought of in connection with Mr. Steel. The case had a little arrow-shaped scratch with the head of the arrow formed of the biggest diamond. Enid told me all this the night before I left Longdean Grange. Dr. Bell, I am absolutely certain that I have had in my hand just now the very case bought by Ruth from Lockhart's in Brighton!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Bell was considerably impressed with the importance of Chris's discovery, though at the same time he was not disposed to regard it in the light of a coincidence.

"It's a useful discovery in its way," he said; "but not very remarkable when you come to think of it. Somebody with an eye to damaging Steel changed that cigar-case. How the change affected Steel you know as well as I do. But the cigar-case purchased by Ruth Gates must be somwhere, and we are as likely to find it near Reginald Henson as anywhere else, seeing that he is at the bottom of the whole business. That change was made either by himself or by somebody at his instigation. Once the change was made he would not bother about the spare cigar-case. His ally probably came here to see Henson; the latter as likely as not threw him over, knowing that the fellow would not dare to talk; hence the thing is turned into money. I am merely speculating, of course, under the assumption that you are quite sure of your facts."

"Absolutely," Chris cried, eagerly. "Two long, irregular scratches leading up in arrow-headed shape to the big diamond in the centre. Ruth told Enid all about that the very last time they discussed the matter together."

"How came Ruth Gates to remember it so clearly?"

"Well, she did it herself. She was rubbing some specks off the case at the last moment, and the scratches were made accidentally with the stones in one of her rings."

Bell was fain to admit that the discovery was an important one. "We'll leave it for the present," he said. "In a small place like this so valuable an article is likely to remain in stock for some time. I'll call in again to-morrow an the pretence of getting further goods and obtain all the information there is to be gained as to who sold the case and what he was like.

There is just time for a little lunch before we take up our reverend friend. Where shall we go?"

Chris would like to see the Lion There was a marvellous coffee-room there with panelled walls and a ceiling by Pugin, and an ingle-nook filled with rare Dutch tiles. They had the beautiful old place to themselves, so that they could talk freely. Chris crumbled her bread and sipped her soup with an air of deep abstraction.

"A great idea is forming in my mind," she said.

"What, another one?" Bell smiled. "Is it the air of the place or what? Really, there is a brilliancy about you that is striking."

Chris laughed. She was full of the joy of life to-day.

It is the freedom," she said. "If you only knew what it is to feel free after the dull, aching, monotonous misery of the last few years. To be constantly on the treadmill, to be in the grasp of a pitiless scoundrel. At first you fight against it passionately, with a longing to be doing something, and gradually you give way to despair. And now the weight is off my shoulders, and I am free to act. Fancy the reward of finding Reginald Henson out!"

"Reginald Henson is the blight upon your house. In what way?"

"Ah, I cannot tell you. It is a secret that we never discuss even among ourselves. But he has the power over us, he has blighted all our lives. But if I could get hold of a certain thing the power would be broken. That is what I am after, what I am working for. And it is in connection with my endeavor that the new idea came to me."

"Can't you give me some general idea of it?" Bell asked.

"Well, I want to make Merritt my friend. I want him to imagine that I am as much of an adventuress as he is an adventurer. I want to let him see that I could send him to prison——"

"So you can by telling the police of the loss of of your star."

"And getting Merritt arrested and sent to gaol where I couldn't make use of him? No, no. The thing is pretty vague in my mind at present. I have to work it out as one would a story; as David Steel would work it out, for instance. Ah!"

Chris clapped her hands rapturously, and a little cry of delight escaped her.

"The very thing," she exclaimed. "If I could lay all the facts before Mr. Steel and get him to plan out all the details! His fertile imagination would see a way out at once But he is far away and there is no time to be lost. Is there no way of getting at him?"

Chris appealed almost imploringly to her companion. She made a pretty picture with the old oak engravings behind her. Bell smiled as he helped himself to asparagus.

"Why not adopt the same method by which you originally introduced yourself to the distinguished novelist?" he asked. "Why not use Littimer's telephone?"

Chris pushed her plate away impetuously.

"I am too excited to eat any more," she said. "I am filled with the new idea. Of course, I could use the telephone to speak to Mr. Steel, and to Endid as well. If the scheme works out as I anticipate I shall have a long conversation with Enid, a dangerous thing so long as Reginald Henson is about."

"I'll keep Henson out of the way. The best thing is to wait till everybody has gone to bed tonight and call Steel up then. You will be certain to get him after eleven, and there will be no chance of your being cut off at that hour of the night in consequence of somebody else wanting the line. The same remark applies to your sister."

Chris nodded radiantly.

"Thrice blessed telephone," she said. I can get in all I want without committing myself to paper or moving from the spot where my presence is urgently needed. We will give Mr. Steel a pleasant surprise to-night, and this time I shall get him into no trouble."

The luncheon was finished at length, and an intimation sent to Merritt that his friends were waiting for him at the Lion. As his powerful figure was seen entering the big Norman porch Henson came aiong the street driving a dog-cart at a dangerous rate of speed.

"Our man is going to have his trouble for his pains," Bell chuckled. "He has come to interview Merritt at dinner-time."

Merritt shambled in awkwardly, obviously suppressing a desire to touch his forelock. There was a sheepish grin on his face, a suppressed triumph in his eyes. He had been recently shaved and his hair cut, but despite these improvements, and despite his clerical garb, he was not exactly the class of man to meet in a dark lane after sunset.

Chris, however, showed nothing of this in her greeting. Long before Littimer Castle was reached she had succeeded in putting Merritt quite at his ease. He talked of himself and his past exploits, he boasted of his cunning. It was only now and again that he pulled himself up and piously referred to the new life that he was now leading. Bell was studying him carefully; he read the other's mind like an open book. When the wagonette finally pulled up before the castle Littimer strolled up and stood there regarding Merritt quietly.

"So this is the gentleman you were going to bring to dinner?" he said. grimly. "I have seen him before in the company of our dear Reginald. I also——"

Chris shot Littimer an imploring glance. Merritt grinned in friendly fashion. Bell, in his tactful way, piloted the strange guest to the library before Littimer and Chris had reached the hall. The former polished his eyeglass and regarded Chris critically.

"My dear young lady," he said, smoothly, 'originality is a passion with me, eccentricity draws me as a magnet; but as yet I have refrained from sitting down to table with ticket-of-leave men. Your friend has 'convict' writ large upon his face,"

"He has been in gaol, of course," Chris admitted cheerfully.

(To be Continued.)

COLORS TO WEAR.

Afternoon gowns are among the most characteristic clothes in a woman's wardrobe. Almost anyone can manage to plan a good-looking tailor suit, and the very lightness and grace of evening gowns make every woman look her best. But afternoon gowns require a different sort of consideration.

Most of them are made with long skirts— and full skirts, too. This is, full to a great extent about the feet, and treated so as to suggest the idea of fullness, without being actually very full, about the hips.

Broadcloth is the favorite material for them, being a stuff that carries a pretty little air of formality and dignity in its smooth surface, but only the softer, more supple broadcloths—the kinds that drape into statuesque folds—are used.

Velvet is good—especially in gray —but the richest of colors in cloth is a clear, beautiful red, with a strong hint of coral in its color-quality, and that red comes in a dozen varying tints.

For the rest, light colors are worn even more than white, with a strong tendency to the pale, exquisite blue that the texture of broadcloth seems especially lovely in. But a certain soft rose-color is extremely popular, too.

Everything is trimmed a good deal, but not, by any means, with the amount of trimming that an evening gown seems to require. For the little touch of severity that belongs to broadcloth, no matter how light weight it may be, is best set by a simpler, less profuse amount of trimming.

Irish crochet has carried styles by storm this season, especially the new Irish crochet, which is the old dominated by French ideas, and rich with new designs. A touch of it seems to be on almost everything.

In strong contrast are the fine, light laces—as airy and delicate almost as veils—which come in every color of a very delicate rainbow.

Furs are used, by way of trimming too, in little rows that give a rich, wintry touch to the costume.

Five out of every ten gowns (perhaps more) are made with elbow sleeves, with a deep frill of lace, or of the material—tucked and tricked out prettily—to end them off. But all sorts of cuffs are evolved, too. for the woman who isn't content with that long stretch of glove to her elbow.

And tuckers have come in, too—modest little affairs of lace that come only half-way between throat and shoulder, and are too shallow to pose as yokes.

The Napoleon rosette is a favorite with the milliners for the fur hat. for the plainness and a certain degree of stiffness that inevitably accompanies the use of fur in millinery favors the military designs. A smart ermine turban shows a military rosette, just three rows of stiff quillings with a button centre, and three stiff loops about a finger depth each dangling at the side.

TO KEEP YOUTHFUL.

Expect a good, long, useful life.

Hold your thoughts persistently.

Simply refuse to grow old by counting your years and anticipating your old age.

Refrain from all kinds of stimulants and sedatives. They will shorten your life.

One of the best preventives of age is enthusiasm and interest in affairs of the day.

Keep in the sunlight. Nothing beautiful or sweet grows or ripens in the darkness.

Avoid fear in all its varied forms of expression; it is the greatest enemy of the human race.

Nature is the great rejuvenator; her spirit is ever young. Live with her, study, her, love her.

Contemplate beauty in all its forms, and you will drive everything that is ugly out of your life.

Don't allow yourself to think on your birthday that you are a year older, and so much nearer the end.

Cultivate the spirit of contentment; all discontent and dissatisfaction bring age furrows prematurely to the face.

Keep your mind young by fresh, vigorous thinking and your heart sound by cultivating a cheerful, optimistic disposition.

OPENING FOR A YOUNG MAN.

"Yes," said Mrs. Malone, to the old friend who was picking up the threads of family history, "my Bobby, he's travelling with a circus now,"

"Pretty hard work, isn't it?" inquired the interested caller.

"Never a bit of it," returned the proud mother of Bobby. "He's living like a gentleman, he is—hands in his pockets, as ye might say,—for it's a handsome salary he gets, and every blessed thing he has to do is to lay his head in the lion's mouth a matter o' some two or three times a day or thereabouts!"

HEALTH

BRIGHT'S DISEASE.

From the Health Bulletin, of Chicago, we copy the following significant item:

"It is not reassuring to learn that nearly 6 per cent. of Chicago's male population in early manhood is afflicted with Bright's disease; and yet such is the inference warranted by the results of the examination made during the week by Department physicians of 489 applicants for appointment to the City Fire Department. Of this number 29 (or 5.9 per cent.) were rejected for kidney trouble. When it is reflected that the principal cause of such trouble is exposure to cold and wet 'after a drinking bout,' the figures do not speak well for the habits of Chicago's young men."

But we feel compelled to add that there are many other causes of Bright's disease and other affections of the kidneys than "exposure to cold and wet after a drinking bout." The everlasting habit of guzzling of beer, "orange phosphate" mineral waters of every grade of sloppy fizziness, is no doubt chargeable with much of the universal crop of renal complaints. If everybody would get back to simple drinks as well as to a "simple life," we should hear less about Bright's disease.

HOW TO STAND.

You can make or mar your figure yourself. Do not lay all the blame at Nature's door, for it is more your own fault than hers that you are not a good figure, be it of the stout or slim order.

The minute a woman stands lightly on her feet, with knees straight, chest well out, stomach flat, shoulders back, and the body from waist up tilting ever so lightly forward, she has acquired at once a certain smartness of effect, that no amount of beauty or fine clothes could give.

The smart girl is never round-shouldered or hollow-chested, and by standing properly she breathes properly. Every full, deep breath she draws straightens the muscles of her sides and abdomen. She is bound not to grow into a fat, ungainly woman, who can never catch her breath or a train, for a proper poise of the body means good digestion and good health.

How many women sink into a little heap the minute they sit down—shoulders drooping, chest sunken, the whole weight of the body thrown on the end of the spine. The smart girl sits in the same erect, alert way that she stands, and if she wishes to rest she leans back against her shoulders, and not the middle of her back.

In bending, whether at a desk or a dishpan, or a dinner-table, she bends from her waist, not from her shoulders, and she not only looks well, but avoids fatigue and the actual injuries that come from any strain on misplaced muscles.

USEFUL ODDS AND ENDS.

If you do not try to make yourself look as pretty as you can you neglect one of your duties. It is worth while to make the most of all the good looks you possess; but that does not mean that you should revel in powder or purchased bloom, or spend hours in frivolous decoration.

To have a clear skin, remember that you must have good health, and to have good health and a rosy complexion you must wear thick-soled shoes, and spend a part of every day out of doors.

To keep your skin from roughening, find by trial what kind of soap suits you best, and use no other. Frequent changes of soap are bad for the complexion. Beware of those which are highly scented; as a general thing they are of poor quality, the scent being used to destroy odour of the other ingredients used.

If you would keep your face and hands unwrinkled use tepid water; very hot or cold water is injurious. Also avoid burying the face in a soft pillow at night, which always produces wrinkles round the eyes.

Keep your combs and brushes sweet and clean Wash them in tepid water containing a few drops of ammonia. The grease and oil will disappear, as if by magic. Place the brushes down, to dry, and the handle will not be injured.

HUNGER FOR HEALTH.

A prolific cause of chronic indigestion is eating from habit, and simply because it is meal-time and others are eating. To eat when not hungry is to eat without relish, and food taken without relish is worse than wasted. Without relish, the salivary glands do not act, the gastric fluids are not freely secreted, and the best of foods will not be digested. Many perfectly harmless dishes are severely condemned, for no other reason than they were eaten perfunctorily, and without relish and due insalivation. Hunger makes the plainest foods enjoyable. It causes vigorious secretion and outpouring of all the digestion fluids, the sources of ptyalin, pepsin, trypsin, etc., without a plentiful supply of which no foods can be perfectly digested.