The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XXXVI.—(Continued)

"Then let me prophesy, and declare that he will be in gaol again. Why bring him here?"

"Because it is absolutely necessary," Chris said, boldly. "That man can help me—help us, Lord Littimer. I am not altogether what I seem. There is a scoundrel in your house compared with whom James Merritt is an innocent child. That scoundrel has blighted your life and the lives of your family; he has blighted my life for years. And I am here to expose him, and I am here to right the wrong and bring back the lost happiness of us all. I cannot say more, but I implore you to let me have my own way in this matter."

"Oh!" Littimer said, darkly, "so you are masquerading here?"

"I am. I admit it. Turn me out if you like; refuse to be a party to my scheme. You may think badly of me now, probably you will think worse of me later on. But I swear to you that I am acting with the best and purest motives, and in your interest as much as my own."

"Then you are not entitled even to the name you bear?"

"No, I admit it freely. Consider, I need not have told you anything. Things cannot be any worse than they are. Let me try and make them better. Will you, will you trust me?"

Chris's voice quivered, there were tears in her eyes. With a sudden impulse Littimer laid his hands upon her shoulders and looked long and searchingly into her eyes.

"Very well," he said, with a gentle sigh. "I will trust you. As a matter of fact, I have felt that I could trust you from the first. I won't pry into your schemes, because if they are successful I shall benefit by them. And if you like to bring a cartload of convicts down here, pray do so. It will only puzzle the neighbors and drive them mad with curiosity, and I love that.

"And you'll back me up in all I say and do?" Chris asked.

"Certainly I will. On the whole. I fancy I am going to have a pleasant evening. I don't think dear Reginald will be pleased to see his friend at dinner. If any of the spoons are missing I shall hold you responsible."

Chris went off to her room well pleased with the turn of events. Brilliant audacity had succeeded where timid policy might have resulted in dismal failure. And Littimer had refrained from asking any awkward questions. From the window she could see Bell and Merritt walking up and down the terrace, the latter talking volubly and worrying at a big cigar as a dog might nuzzle at a bone. Chris saw Littimer join the other two presently and fall in with their conversation. His laugh came to the girl's ear more than once. It was quite evident that that eccentric nobleman was enjoying the ex-convict's sociesy. But Littimer had never been fettered by conventional rules.

The dog-cart came up presently and Henson got out. He had an anxious, worried look; there was an ugly frown between his brows. He contrived to be polite as Chris emerged. He wanted to know where Littimer was.

"On the terrace, I fancy," Chris said, demurely. "I guess he is having a long chat with that parson friend of yours—the brand plucked from the burning, you know."

"Merritt," Henson said, hoarsely. "Do you mean to say that Merritt is here? And I've been looking for—I mean, I have been into Moreton Wells. Why did he come?"

Chris opened her eyes in innocent surprise.

"Why," she said, "I fetched him. I'm deeply interested in brands of that kind."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Henson forced a smile to his face and a hand from his side as he approached Merritt and the rest. It was not until the two found themselves alone that the mask was dropped.

"You infernally insolent scoundrel," Henson said, between his teeth. "How dare you come here? You've done your work for the present, and the sooner you go back to your kennel in London the better. If I imagined that you meant any harm I'd crush you altogether."

"I didn't come on my own," Merritt whined. "So keep your 'air on. That young lady came and fetched me—regular gone on me, she is. And there's to be high jinks 'ere—a bazaar for the benefit of poor criminals as can't get no work to do. You 'eard what his lordship said. And I'm goin' to make a speech like as I used to gull the chaplains. Lor' it's funny, ain't it?"

Henson failed to see the humor of the situation. He was uneasy and suspicious. Moreover, he was puzzled by this American girl, and he hated to be puzzled. She had social aspirations, of course; she cared nothing for decayed or reformed criminals, and this silly bazaar was only designed so that the ambitious girl could find her way into the county set. Then she would choose a husband, and nothing more would be heard of Merritt and Co. Henson had a vague notion that all American girls are on the look-out for English husbands of the titled order.

"Littimer must be mad," he muttered. "I can't understand Littimer; I can't understand anything. Which reminds me that I have a crow to pluck with you. Why didn't you do as I told you last night?"

"Did," Merritt said, curtly. "Got the picture and took it home with me."

"You liar! The picture is in the corridor at the present time."

"Liar yourself! I've got the picture on my mantelshelf in my sitting-room rolled up as you told me to roll it up and tied with a piece of cotton. It was your own idea as the thing was to be left about casual-like as being less calculated to excite suspicion. And there it is at the present moment, and I'll take my hoath to it."

Henson fairly gasped. He had been inside that said sitting-room not two hours before, and he had not failed to notice a roll of paper on the mantel-shelf. And obviously Merritt was telling the truth. And equally obviously the Rembrandt was hanging in the corridor at the present moment. Henson had solved and evolved many ingenious puzzles in his time, but this one was utterly beyond him.

"Some trick of Dr. Bell's, perhaps," Merritt suggested.

"Bell suspects nothing. He is absolutely friendly to me. He could not disguise his feelings li e that. Upon my word I was never so utterly at sea before in all my life. And as for Littimer, why, he has just made a fresh will more in my favor than the old one. But I'll find out. I'll get to the bottom of this business if it costs me a fortune."

He frowned moodily at his boots; he turned the thing over in his mind until his brain was dazed and muddled. The Rembrandt had been stolen, and yet there was the Rembrandt in its place. Was anything more amazing and puzzling? And nobody else seemed in the least troubled about it. Henson was more than puzzled; deep down in his heart he was frightened.

"I must keep my eyes open," he said. "I must watch night and day. Do you suppose Miss Lee noticed anything when she called today?"

"Not a bit of it," said Merritt, confidently. "She came to see me; she had no eyes for anybody but your humble servant. Where did she get my address from? Why, didn't you introduce me to the lady yourself, and didn't I tell her I was staying at Moreton Wells for a time? I'm goin' to li e in clover for a bit, my pippin. Cigars and champagne, wine and all the rest of it."

"I wish you were at the bottom of the sea before you came here," Henson growled. "You mind and be careful what you're doing with the champagne. They don't drink by the tumbler in the society you are in now, remember. Just one or two glasses and no more. If you take too much and let your tongue run you will find your stay here pretty short."

Apparently the hint was not lost on Merritt, for dinner found him in a chastened mood. His natural audacity was depressed by the splendour and luxury around him; the moral atmosphere held him down. There were so many knives and forks and glasses on the table, such a deal of food that was absolutely strange to him. The butler behind made him shiver. Hitherto in Merritt's investigations into great houses he had fought particularly shy of butlers and coachmen and upper servants of that kind. The butler's sniff and his cold suggestion as to hock slightly raised Merritt's combative spirit. And the champagne was poor, thin stuff after all. A jorum of gin and water or a mug of beer was what Merritt's soul longed for.

And waht a lot of plate there was on the table and sideboard! Some of it was gold, too. Merritt's greedy professional eye appraised the collection at some hundreds of pounds—hundreds of pounds—that is, after the stuff had been disposed of. In imagination he had already drugged the butler and was stuffing the plate into his bag.

Henson said very little. He was too busily engaged in watching his confederate. He wished from the bottom of his heart now that Chris had never seen Merritt. She was smiling at him now and apparently hanging on every word. Henson had seen society ladies doing this kind of thing before with well-concealed contempt. So long as people liked to play his game for him he had no objection. But this was quite different. Merritt had warmed a little under the influence of his fifth glass of champagne, but his eye looked lovingly and longingly in the direction of a silver spirit-stand on the sideboard.

The dinner came to an end at length, to Henson's great relief, and presently the whole party wandered out to the terrace. Bell dropped behind with Chris.

"Now is your time," he whispered. "Henson dare not lose sight of Merritt before he goes to bed, and I'll keep the latter out here for a good long spell. I've muffled the striker of the telephone so that the bell will make no noise when you get your call back from Brighton, so that you must be near enough to the instrument to hear the click of the striker. Make haste."

Chris dropped back to the library and rapidly fluttered over the leaves of the "Telephone Directory." She found what she wanted at length and asked to be put on to Brighton. Then she sat down in an arm-chair in the darkness close under the telephone, prepared to wait patiently. She could just see the men on the terrace, could catch the dull red glow of their cigars.

Her patience was not unduly tried. At the end of a quarter of an hour the striker clicked furiously. Chris reached for the receiver and lay back comfortably in her chair with the diaphragm to her ear. "Are you there?" she asked, quietly. "Is that you, Mr. Steel?"

To her great relief the answering voice was Steel's own. He seemed to be a little puzzled as to whom his questioner was.

"Can you guess?" Chris replied. "This is not the first time I have had you called. You have not forgotten 218, Brunswick Square, yet?"

Chris smiled as she heard Steel's sudden exclamation.

"So you are my fair friend whom I saw in the dark?" he said. "Yes, I recognise your voice now. You are Miss Chris—well, I won't mention the name aloud, because people might ask what a well-regulated corpse meant by rousing respectable people up at midnight. I hope you are not going to get me into trouble again."

"No, but I am going to ask your advice and assistance. I want you to be so good as to give me the plot of a story after I have told you the details. And you are to scheme the thing out at once, please, because delay is dangerous. Dr. Bell——"

"What's that? Will you tell me where you are speaking from?"

"I am at present located at Littimer Castle. Yes, Dr. Bell is here. Do you want him?"

"I should think so," Steel exclaimed. "Please tell him at once that the man who was found here half dead—you know the man I mean—got up and dressed himself in the absence of the nurse and walked out of the hospital this morning. Since then he has not been seen or heard of. I have been looking up Bell everywhere. Will you tell him this at once? I'll go into your matter afterwards. Don't be afraid; I'll tell the telephone people not to cut us off till I ring. Please go at once."

The voice was urgent, not to say imperative. Chris dropped the receiver into its space and crept into the darkness in the direction of the terrace.

(To be Continued.)

IN THE BLACK FOREST.

The Black Forest of Germany, a region famous for centuries, is hundreds of years behind the present age in methods of living and conducting simple industries. This fact is strikingly exemplified in the primitive ways the natives follow in making leather and shoes. When a farmer kills his beef he takes the hide to the local tanner, who will keep it for two years before he considers it fit for the shoemaker. When the hide is leather the shoemaker is informed of the fact. Then some morning the shoemaker comes to the farmer's house with his kit of tools, and for the time being is one of the family. Every Katrina and every Johann is marched before him and measured, and the work of making shoes for the family begins. It may take a month, more or less, but he sticks to his job until every one is properly shod, when he is away to the next customer needing his services.

SURPRISED THE BARBER.

The barber had been so voluble and persistent that the bald-headed little man upon whom he was operating had, in sheer desperation, purchased a bottle of his "Sprout Instanter" hair producer.

Two days later the little man bounced into the saloon with a glare in his eyes that caused the proprietor to pick up the machine-brush as a weapon of defence, and to retreat precipitately to a position of safety behind the counter.

"That 'Sprout Instanter,'" commenced the little man, in a tone that made all the razors shiver——

"But, sir, you must have patience," interrupted the barber. "Why it war only two days ago——"

"Patience!" broke in the irate one. "Great Togo! there ain't enough patience in the world to fit my case! That muddle-headed girl of ours has mistaken the hair-producer for furniture-polish!"

"Ah, I see!" smiled the barber, "and you want another bottle?"

"No I don't!" snapped the bald-headed gentleman. "I want to know how much you'll charge to shave our new dining-room suite?"

YOUNG FOLKS

MOLLIE'S BUTTERFLIES.

"How is my Mollie girl to-day?" asked Aunt Helen, as she came in one sunny, windy winter day.

Mollie was in the big rocking-chair, made all comfortable with pillows and blankets. She was wearing the pretty pink kimono that mama had made for her as soon as Mollie was able to sit up a little while each day. Now she could sit up for three hours every day, and once she had even walked across the room, holding mama's hand, "just to see if she could."

The doctor said she was doing finely, and told her to hurry up and get well, so as to have rosy cheeks again to match the new kimono.

"O aunty, I'm so glad to see you!" said the little girl, stroking the soft fur of aunty's muf. "You seem so kind of fresh and outdoorsy."

"Well, Mollie, I'm going to stay and be indoorsy a while," said aunty. "Grandma told me to tell you that her biggest geranium is almost ready to blossom, and that she can see the color peeping out of the buds now. She is going to send them to you just as soon as they're open, you know."

"I s'pose it is so nice and warm in grandma's house the plants don't know it isn't summer," said Mollie. "But when the flowers open they'll be so s'prised to see all the snow outside."

Then Mollie and aunty began to talk about the summer, how lovely it was to see all the green trees, and the daisies and buttercups in the grass, and to heer the birds singing.

"And, O, aunty, don't you remember the lots and lots of butterflies we used to see when we rode over to Cousin Eva's house? Wouldn't it be nice if we could have some butterflies in the house in winter, same as grandma's flowers?"

"I'm afraid the winter butterflies wouldn't be quite happy," said aunty. "They would rather wait until the real outdoor summer comes, I'm sure."

Aunt Helen thought very hard for a minute; then she said, "But we might make some butterflies, even if they're not real ones—and I think I know how to make them fly just a little, too."

Aunt Helen got some pretty tissue-paper, very thin, and of different colors—red, white, yellow and light green. She cut out some gay butterflies. Then she took several pieces of very fine sewing silk, and tied one to each butterfly. Mollie was very much interested in the gay bits of paper, and tried to decide if the red butterflies or the yellow ones were the prettiest.

"But I don't see how you are going to make them fly, aunty."

Aunty went over to the big register. The heat was coming up very fast, for it was a cold day outside, and papa had to keep a hot fire in the furnace, so that Mollie's room might be warm and comfortable.

Aunt Helen took the paper butterflies and tied one end of each silk thread to the back of a chair. The butterflies all hung straight down. Aunty moved the chair very near to the register, and gave the butterflies a little toss into the middle of the hot air.

Puff! Up they went, higher and higher, carried by the warm, rising air. They wavered about, now dropping a little, then going higher than ever, swaying about from side to side. Red and yellow and white and green, dancing up and down, they really seemed like a flock of gay butterflies hovering over a field of flowers.

Mollie was delighted. It was certainly a pretty sight. She watched them for a while, until she fell asleep. She dreamed that she was lying in a hammock under the trees, and that a flock of butterflies were flying all about, and that they soon turned into some bright blossoms of sweet peas and red geraniums, and dropped into her lap.

The next day when Aunt Helen came, she brought some more bits of tissue-paper—this time they were pink and blue and lavender and crimson and white and purple.

She cut out little petals of the colored paper, and with a few skilful touches made them into pretty blossoms. Then she fastened the blossoms to long green stems, made of tiny wire covered with a twisted bit of green paper. Aunt Helen put a dozen of the pretty flowers into a slender glass vase, and set them on the little table.

"Why, aunty, they're just 'zactly like the sweet peas I dreamed of! I can almost smell them," said Mollie.

Then aunty made more of the dainty flowers, this time with no stems. She tied a silk thread to each one, and fastened the sweet peas to a chair, as the butterflies had been fastened the day before. The chair was placed near the register, and the sweet peas waved about and fluttered up and down like dancing blossoms.

They were a pretty sight, and Mollie enjoyed watching them. After a while she begged aunty to "let the butterflies play, too," so aunty brought out the butterflies again, and soon the butterflies and sweet peas were nodding and dancing together as if they were having lovely summer fun. Mollie told Aunt Helen she always thought of the nicest things to do, and it was not half so hard to be sick when she came.

WHAT A BOY SHOULD KNOW.

A very successful man, in speaking of what a young man should know to begin a business life in the right way, summarized the qualifications about as follows:

He should be able to write a good, legible hand.

To spell all the words that he knows how to use.

To write an ordinary receipt.

To speak and write good English.

To write a good social or business letter.

To add a column of figures rapidly.

To make out an ordinary account.

To deduct 16½ per cent. from the face of the account.

To receipt an account when it is paid.

To write an advertisement for the newspaper.

To write an ordinary promissory note.

To reckon the interest or the discount on the note for years, months or days.

To draw up an ordinary bank cheque.

To take it to the right place in the bank to get the money.

To make neat and correct entries in day-book or cash-book.

To tell the number of yards of carpet required for the parlor.

To tell something about the great authors, statesmen and financiers of the present time.

If, says the successful business man, a boy can do all this it is probable that he has enough education to make his way in the world.

SENTENCE SERMONS.

Kindness is catching.

One sin bears many seeds.

A ledger makes a hard pillow.

Red blood is always better than blue vision.

None are so poor as those who do not love people.

A poor man does not need to be a poor sort of a man.

Living for one's land is greater far than dying for it.

He has made no great gains who has never lost anything.

A man never gets much hold on heaven when he grasps humanity with just two fingers.

More enemies have been slain by mercy than by malice.

Chance is one of the most profane words in our language.

Real religion never has to advertise for a chance to do good.

A man's title to glory does not depend on the glory of his title here.

Men who are always on the make never make much of anything.

An open denial of God may be better than an empty definition of him.

Small men do not gain great truths and great men do not retain them.

The light of one life shines farther than the brilliance of a century's logic.

The rainbow of love always looks best against the black clouds of hate.

When religion is a matter of business, business is never a matter of religion.

The church is not at all sacred when it thinks that the street is wholly secular.

SHE TAUGHT HIM TACT.

The late Louis Fleischmann, the millionaire baker, of new York, not only distributed food to poor men in the "bread line" he had established in that city, but he also got these men employment. He went among them and conversed with them, and the delicacy of his questions to them, the care he took not to hurt their feelings, was remarkable. One day he said:

"The more unfortunate and wretched people are the more sensitive they are—the more easily they are wounded. The public does not bear this fact enough in mind.

"And yet it is a fact that is continually being proved—sometimes pathetically, sometimes humorously. It was proved humorously to a friend of mine last summer in Scotland.

"He was making a walking tour. He was climbing mountains and viewing lakes and torrents. One morning on a quiet road he met a young woman, tall and comely, who walked barefoot.

"Surprised, my friend stopped the young woman and said:

"'Do all the people hereabouts go barefoot?'

"She answered: 'Some of them do, and the rest mind their own business.'"

NATURAL GAS IN ENGLAND.

While boring for water at Calvert, a village near Aylesbury, a feeder of natural gas was tapped, which issued at a pressure of about 48 lbs. per square inch. The precaution was taken to reduce the size of the outlet pipe from 7 inches to 1½ inches, and then, in order to prevent the fumes spreading about the adjoining works, the gas was ignited. So great was the velocity with which the gas rushed up the drill that the flames stood 15 inches above the surface pipe and rose several feet in the air, presenting an extraordinary spectacle.