The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER LIII.—(Continued.)

"That's it," he said. "I buy it because Henson ask me to. Henson says he make it all right about the Rembrandt, and that if I do as I am told he give me £500. His money is to come on a certain day, but I pump and I pump, and I find that there is some game against Mr. Steel, who is a great novelist."

"That is very kind of you," David said, modestly.

"One against Miss Enid Henson," Van Sneck went on. "I met that young lady once and I liked her; therefore, I say I will be no party to getting her into trouble. And Henson says I am one big fool, and that he is only giving Mr. Steel a lesson in the art of minding his own business. So I ask no further questions, though I am a good bit puzzled. With the last bank-notes I possess I go to a place called Walen's and buy the cigar-case that Henson says. I meet him and hand over the case and ask him for my money. Henson swears that he has no money at all, not even enough to repay me the price of the cigar-case. He has been disappointed. And I have been drinking. So I swear I will write and ask Mr. Steel to see me, and I do so."

"And you get an answer?" David asked.

"Sir, I do. You said you would see me the same night. It was a forgery?"

"It was. Henson had anticipated something like that. I know all about the forgery, how my notepaper was procured, and when the forgery was written. But that has very little to do with the story now. Please go on."

Van Sneck paused before he proceeded.

"I am not quite sober," he said. "I am hot with what I called my wrongs. I come here and ring the bell. The hall was in darkness. There was a light in the conservatory, but none in the study. I quite believed that it was Mr. Steel who opened the door and motioned me towards the study. Then the door of the study closed and locked behind me, and the electric light shot up. When I turned round I found myself face to face with Henson."

Van Sneck paused again and shuddered at some hideous recollection. His eyes were dark and eager; there was a warm moisture like varnish on his face.

"Even that discovery did not quite sober me," he went on. "I fancied it was some joke, or that perhaps I had got into the wrong house. But no, it was the room of a literary gentleman. I—I expected to see Mr. Steel come in or to try the door. Henson smiled at me. Such a smile! He asked me if I had the receipt for the cigar-case about me, and I said it was in my pocket. Then he smiled again, and something told me my life was in danger.

"I was getting pretty sober by that time. It came to me that I had been lured there; that Henson had got into the house during the absence of the owner. It was late at night in a quiet house, and nobody had seen me come. If that man liked to kill me he could do so and walk out of the house without the faintest chance of discovery. And he was twice my size, and a man without feeling. I looked round me furtively for a weapon.

"He saw my glance and understood it, and smiled again. I was trembling from head to foot now with a vague, nameless terror. From the very first I knew that I had not the smallest chance. Henson approached me and laid his hand on my shoulder. He wanted something, he gave that something a name. If I passed that something over to him I was free, if not——

"Well, gentlemen, I didn't believe him. And I had what he wanted in my pocket. If I had handed it over to him he would not have spared me. As he approached me my foot slipped and I stumbled into the conservatory; I fell backwards. And then I recovered myself and defied Henson.

"'Fool,' he hissed, 'do you want to die?'

"But I knew that I should die in any case. Even then I could smile to myself as I thought how I could baffle my foe. Once, twice, three times he repeated his demands, and each time I was obdurate. I knew that he would kill me in any case.

"He came with a snarl of rage; there was a knife in his hand. I hurled a flower-pot at his head and missed him. The next instant and he had me by the throat. I felt his knife between my shoulders, then a stunning blow on the head, and till I woke here to-day I cannot recollect a single thing."

Van Sneck paused and wiped his face, wet with the horror of the recollection. David Steel gave Bell a significant glance, and the latter nodded

"Was the thing that Henson wanted a ring?" Steel asked, quietly.

CHAPTER LIV.

Van Sneck looked up with some signs of confusion. He had not expected a question of that kind. There was just the suggestion of cunning on his face.

"A ring!" he murmured, vaguely. "A ring! What ring?"

"Now, look here," David said, sternly. "You are more or less in our power, you know, but we are not disposed to be hard on you so long as you are quite candid with us. Henson required something that he believed to be in your possession; indeed, you have as good as said you had it with you. Henson lured you into my house to get that more than anything else. That he would have killed you even after he got it I firmly believe. But that is not the point. Now, was not Henson looking for Prince Rupert's ring that you got from him by means of a trick?"

Van Sneck dropped his hands helplessly on the bed.

"Gentlemen," he whined, "you are too much for me. The marvellous accuracy of your knowledge is absolutely overwhelming. It was the ring Henson was after."

"The one you stole from him years ago! But what did you know about it?"

Van Sneck smiled.

"There is no living man who knows more about those things than I do," he said. "It is a passion and a study with me. And some seven years ago, in Holland Henson gave me the description of a ring he wanted me to copy. Henson never told me what the ring was called, but I knew it was the Prince Rupert ring. I made the copy, and Henson was pleased with it. Some time later he came to me with the original, and asked for another copy. I meant to be honest, but my love for those things got the better of me. I made him two copies; the one good, and the other an exact facsimile of the Prince Rupert. These I handed over to Henson, and he went away perfectly satisfied that he had a good copy and the original. I chuckled to myself, feeling pretty sure that he would never find out."

"But he did find out?" David said.

"Only lately. Probably he took it to an expert for valuation or perhaps for sale. Lately his idea was to offer the ring to Lord Littimer for a huge sum of money, but when he discovered he had been done he knew that Lord Littimer would not be so deceived. Also he had a pretty good idea that I should keep the ring about me. You see, I dared not sell an historic gem like that. And, as usual, Henson was perfectly right."

"Then you had the ring in your pocket the night you came here?" asked Steel, with a commendable effort at coolness. "Did Henson get it?"

"No, he didn't," Van Sneck chuckled. "Come what might, I had made up my mind that he should never see that ring again. You see, I was frightened and confused, and I was not properly sober, and I did something with the ring, though to save my life I couldn't say what I did. Do you know, Dr. Bell, I have lost my sense of smell?"

Steel wriggled impatiently about on the chair. The interruption was exasperating. Bell, however, seemed to take a different view of the matter altogether.

"Quite naturally," he said. "The blow on your head held all your senses suspended for a time. After the operation I should not have been surprised to have found you half blind and stone deaf into the bargain. But one thing is certain—your smell will come back to you. It may remain in obeyance for a few days, it may return in a few moments."

"What on earth has this to do with our interview?" David asked.

"I fancy a great deal, Bell said. "The sense of smell has a great deal to do with memory. Doesn't the scent of flowers bring back vivid recollections of things sometimes for years forgotten? Van Sneck was going to say the air was heavy with the fragrance of some particular blossom when he was struck down by Henson in your conservatory.

"Very clever man, Dr. Bell," Van Sneck said, admiringly. "He seems to see right through your mind and out at the other side. To a great extent I recollect all that happened that eventful night. And just at the very last I seem to smell something powerful. That smell came to my nostrils just like a flash and then had gone again. Gentlemen, if I could have a good long scent at that flower I tell you what I did with that ring."

"Sounds rather complex," David said.

"Not a bit of it," Bell retorted. "Our friend is talking sound common sense, and our friend is going to rest now late into the afternoon, when we'll put him into an arm-chair with some pillows and let him sit in the conservatory. Associating with familiar surroundings frequently works wonders. Van Sneck, you go to sleep."

Van Sneck closed his eyes obediently. He was somewhat tired with the interview. But, on the whole, Bell decided that he was doing very well indeed. And there was very little more to be done for the present. The two men smoked their cigars peacefully.

"We have got to the end." Bell said.

"I fancy so," David murmured. "But we can't save the scandal. I don't see how Reginald Henson is going to get out of the mess without a prosecution."

Any further speculation as to the future of that engaging rascal was cut short by a pleasant surprise, no other than the unexpected arrival of Ruth Gates and Chris Henson. The latter was beaming with health and happiness; she had discarded her disguise and stood confessed before all the world like the beautiful creature she was.

"What does it all mean?" David asked. "What will Longdean village say?"

"What does Longdean village know?" Chris retorted. "They are vaguely aware that somebody was taken away from the house a short time ago to be buried, but that is all their knowledge. And there is no more need for disguise, Lord Littimer says. He knows pretty well everything. He has been very restless and uneasy for the past day or two, and yesterday he left saying that he had business in London. Early to-day I had a characteristic telegram from him saying that he was at Longdean and that I was necessary to his comfort there. I was to come clothed in my right mind, and I was to bring Mr. Steel and Dr. Bell along."

"It can't be managed," said Bell. "We've got Van Sneck here."

"And I had forgotten all about him," said Chris. "Was the operation successful?"

Bell told his budget of good news down to the story of the ring and the mysterious manner in which it had disappeared again. David had followed Ruth into the conservatory, where she stood with her dainty head buried over a rose.

She looked up with a warm, shy smile on her face.

"I hope you are satisfied," she said, "you are safe now?"

"I was never very much alarmed, dearest," Steel said. "If this thing had never happened I might never have met you. And as soon as this business is definitely settled I shall come and see your uncle. I am a very impatient man, Ruth."

"And you shall see my uncle when you please, dear," she said. "You will find him quite as charming as you say your mother is. What will she say?"

"Say? That you are the dearest and sweetest girl in the world, and that I am a lucky fellow. But you are not going off already?"

"Indeed, we must. We have a cab at the door. And I am going to brave the horrors of Longdean Grange and spend the night there. Only, I fancy that the horrors have gone for ever. I shall be very disappointed if you don't come to-morrow."

Behind a friendly palm David bent and kissed the shy lips, with a vow that he would see Longdean Grange on the morrow. Then Chris caught up Ruth with a whirl, and they were gone.

It was after ten that Bell and Steel managed to convey Van Sneck to the conservatory. The place was filled with brightness and scent and color and the afterglow of the sunshine. The artistic eye of the Dutchman lighted up with genuine pleasure.

"They say you islanders are crude and cold, and have no sense of the beautiful," he said. "But there are no houses anywhere to compare with those of the better-class Englishman. Look at those colors blending——"

"Hang those colors," said Bell, vigorously. "Steel, there is nothing like moisture to bring out the full fragrance of flowers. Turn on your hose and give your plants a good watering."

"It's the proper time," David laughed. "Turn on the tap for me."

A cooling stream played on the flowers; plants dropped their heads filled with the diamond moisture; the whole atmosphere was filled with the odour of moist earth. Then the air seemed laden with the mingled scent.

"I can smell the soil," Van Sneck cried. "How good it is to smell anything again! And I can just catch a suggestion of the perfume of something familiar. What's that red bloom?"

He pointed to a creeper growing up the wall. David broke off a spray.

"That's a kind of Japanese passion flower," he said. "It has a lovely full-flavored scent like a mixture of violets and almonds. Smell it."

Van Sneck placed the wet dripping spray to his nose. Just for an instant it conveyed nothing to him. Then he half rose with a triumphant cry.

"Steady there," said Bell. "You mustn't get up, you know. I see you are excited. Has it come back to you again?"

"That's the scent,' Van Sneck cried. "The air was full of that as I fell backwards. And Henson stood over me exactly by that cracked tile where Mr. Steel is now. Give me a moment and I shall be able to tell you everything. Oh, yes, the first time I slipped on purpose. I told you I stumbled. But that was a ruse. And as I fell I took the ring from my waistcoat pocket. Let me have another sniff of that bloom. Yes, I've got it now quite clear."

"You know where the ring is?" David asked, eagerly.

"Well, not quite that. I took it from my pocket and pitched it away from me. I saw it fall on to a pot covered with moss, but I can't say which pot or in which corner. I only know that I threw it over my shoulder, and that it dropped into the thick moss that lies on the top of all the pots. I laughed to myself as it fell, and I rejoiced to see that Henson knew nothing of it."

"And it is still here?" Bell demanded.

Van Sneck nodded solemnly.

"I swear it," he said. "Prince Rupert's ring is in this conservatory."

(To be Continued.)

NEW ZEALAND BIRDS.

A Traveller Says They Are Wonderfully Tame.

It is not a little strange that in New Zealand and Australia, as well as in Canada and South Africa, the word "bush" is used in the same sense as "forest" in the mother country. This, however, is by way of quoting from "Sport in New Zealand" some remarks by the author, Col. Montagu Cradock, on the birds of those islands.

"It is curious how extraordinarily tame are the parrots, pigeons and flightless birds as soon as you penetrate into one of these dense bushes—they have no fear whatever of man, and they regard him simply as a curiosity. The small birds—the New Zealand robins and fantails, for instance—will actually perch on you if you keep perfectly still; and it is very comical to see the robin—which, by the way, is almost exactly like our British robin, except that he wears a white waistcoat instead of a red one—put out a wax match.

"The trick invariably comes off. Just light a match and put it down near you and stand still, and the robin, which is almost certain to be near you, will invariably fly down to it and put it out with his beak, or fly away with it. He is a delightful little bird, and his little bold black eyes twinkle every bit as brightly as those of his British compatriot. If you chirp with your mouth in the same way that you persuade a weasel to look out of a stone wall into which you have seen him run, the little fantail gets desperately excited, and after flying close round you a minute or so, will just light on your head or shoulder for a moment, and then dart off, to return directly and repeat the process."

SENTENCE SERMONS.

Love makes loyal.

Less work, more weeds.

Work gives zest to rest.

It is hard to be happy in a hurry.

Love is always looking for a load.

It takes a fool to appreciate a fad.

Reverence is the foundation of lasting love.

The sense of duty is a sign of the divine in man.

Righteousness is a lot more than respectability.

Killing time is a sure way of spoiling character.

He can never teach a man who cannot learn of a child.

No words of faith have force until they become flesh.

It is hard for the leek to see why people prefer the lily.

Hatred often comes from only knowing half a man.

The only sure thing about a lie is that it will never die.

The defense of the devil usually hides some share in his dividends.

Many mistake their dreams about heaven for deeds to lots up there.

It takes the touch of love to pick even the mote out of another's eye.

There is nothing prouder than ignorance or more ignorant than pride.

When his goods are his chief good a man is likely to find little lasting good

The saddest people are the only ones who are always fleeing from sorrow.

The happiness that comes from ignorance of the sorrows of this world may be sin.

Some people never know that the devil has been feeding them stones until all their teeth are broken.

A CAREER FOR ELEPHANTS.

Elephants that pile teak logs as evenly as coolies do, and take care of children more tenderly than some human beings, and do other clever and remarkable things, have been made known to us by travellers in India. Now an English-woman tells of one, who is what may be called a general deudge in a hospital in Ceylon. One day a patient dropped a pill, which rolled beyond his reach. The elephant picked it up, and placing it in the man's open mouth, blew it down his throat. This story will go with that about the man who was ordered by his veterinary to blow a certain powder through a tube down his horse's throat. The horse blew first.

POWERFUL ALCOHOL LIGHTS.

The utilization of alcohol as an illumininant is growing in France and Germany, and the subject attracts much attention in England. On the Continent alcohol lamps are now made with incandescent mantles capable of yielding 1,000 candle-power. Two hundred and fifty candle-power is very common with these lamps. It is claimed that they vitiate the atmosphere sensibly less than any other illuminant except incandescent electric lamps. In Germany potatoes, and in France beets, are now largely used in the production of alcohol for industrial purposes.

YOUNG FOLKS

SOME RULES.

There are some rules
Not taught in schools
That every girl should know;
Don't fuss and fret,
Your wrongs forget,
Each day some kindness show;
Keep fresh and neat,
Be kind and sweet,
Don't force your friends to wait
For church or play
Because your way
Is always to be late.
Be patient when
You're ill and then
This truth I need not tell—
Through all the year
Your friends most dear
Will learn to love you well.

A BRAVE BIRD.

"Another story!" exclaimed Aunt Julia, as little Elanor climbed into her lap and laid her curly head contentedly on her aunty's shoulder. "Well, this is the fourth story you have had to-day, so this time it must be a really, truly story, and it happened last year in a pretty little town down East, where your Uncle Charles and I were spending the summer.

"I was sitting on the piazza with my sewing, and your uncle was reading, when all at once the dearest little gray bird, with pale yellow spots on its wings and tail, flew down on the piazza and hopped round in a very friendly way. A few moments later I went into the house to get my scissors, and while there your uncle called to me to look out of the window. There was the dear little bird up on the table, pulling at my work and trying to fly off with it.

"I brought out some ravelings of cloth, bits of cotton wool and thread and laid them near my work on the table. Very soon down came birdie again, and seemed delighted to find so many nice bits for the nest.

"All that day she flew back and forth with the pieces of string, wool and cotton, often lighting on my chair, and seeming not one bit afraid. The next day she came again, getting better and better acquainted each time, until she hopped into my lap, pecking at my work and picking up any loose threads she could find, and carrying them off to her nest in the tree near by.

"The third day some friends came over to see our new pet, and to watch her, busy at her task of nest-building.

"For a long time after they came birdie watched them from her perch in the tree, but did not offer to fly down near us, and we feared we had frightened her away; but in a little while down she came again, flying on the table, and then into the lap of one of the ladies sitting near.

"Off she went again with the scraps of wool she found there, then back again, perching on the shoulder of a little girl, and pecking at her hair ribbon, evidently thinking it would make a fine, soft lining for her nest.

"Next she lighted on Uncle Charles' arm, and tried to pull his handkerchief out of his pocket. We wanted very much to laugh at the dear little thing, she was so cunning and amusing, but we kept very quiet, fearing we should frighten her away.

"She hopped about the piazza for some time, then finally flew back to her nest, which by this time I think must have been finished, for although we often saw her flying about near the house, she never came on to the piazza again."

HOW TO ROLL AN UMBRELLA.

How many men know how to roll an umbrella so that it will look as neat and compact as when it leaves the store? Not many of those you meet have the secret. Nearly every one who rolls an umbrella takes hold of it by the handle and keeps twisting the stick with one hand and folds and rolls with the other hand. The proper way is to take hold of the unbrella just above the points of the cover ribs; these points naturally are even around the stick. Keep hold of these, pressing them closely against the stick, and then roll up the cover. Holding the ribs prevents them from getting either twisted out of place or bent out of shape. Then the silk will fold evenly and roll smooth and as close as the first time unfolded.

WANTED A REMEDY.

"There is a fortune awaiting the man who invents a remedy for sea-sickness," said a physician.

"My brother is chief surgeon of an Atlantic liner, and he tells me that some people have offered him as much as $500 to keep them well during their Transatlantic passage. A sea voyage, if one's health remains good, is the most delightful thing in the world, but if sea-sickness comes on it is a dreadful agony.

"A millionaire and his young wife crossed on my brother's ship during their honeymoon. They had a $1,000 suite on the upper promenade deck, and they were not out of sight of land before sea-sickness seized