The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER LVI.

Henson took his weary way in the direction of Brighton. He had but a few pounds he could call his own, and not nearly enough to get away from the country, and at any moment he might be arrested. He was afraid to go back to his lodgings for fear of Merritt. That Merritt would kill him if he got the chance he felt certain. And Merritt was one of those dogged, patient types who can wait any time for the gratification of their vengeance.

Merritt was pretty certain to be hanging about for his opportunity. On the whole the best thing would be to walk straight to the Central Brighton Station and take the first train in the morning to town. There he could see Gates—who as yet knew nothing—and from him it would be possible to borrow a hundred or two, and then get away. And there were others besides Gates.

Henson trudged away for a mile or so over the downs. Then he came down from the summit of the castle he was building with a rude shock to earth again. A shadow seemed to rise from the ground, a heavy clutch was on his shoulder, and a hoarse voice was in his ear.

"Got you!" the voice said. "I knew they'd kick you out yonder, and I guessed you'd sneak home across the downs. And I've fairly copped you!"

Henson's knees knocked together. Physically he was a far stronger and bigger man than Merritt, but he was taken unawares, and his nerves had been sadly shaken of late.

Merritt forced him backwards until he lay on the turf with his antagonist kneeling on his chest. He dared not struggle, he dared not exert himself. Presently he might get a chance, and if he did it would go hard with James Merritt.

"What are you going to do?" he gasped.

Merritt drew a big, jagged stone towards him with one foot.

"I'm going to bash your brains out with this," he said hoarsely. His eyes were gleaming, and in the dim light his mouth was set like a steel trap. "I'm going to have a little chat with you first, and then down this comes on the top of your skull, and it'll smash you like a bloomin' eggshell. Your time's come, Henson. Say your prayers."

"I can't," Henson whined. "And what have I done?"

Merritt rocked heavily on the other's breastbone, almost stifling him. "Wot?" he said, scoffingly. The pleasing mixture of gin and fog in his throat rendered him more hideously hoarse than usual. "Not make up a prayer! And you a regular dab at all that game! Why, I've seen the women snivellin' like babies when you've been ladlin' it out. Heavens, what a chap you would be on the patter! How you would kid the chaplain!"

"Merritt, you're crushing the life out of me."

Merritt ceased his rocking for a moment, and the laughter died out of his gleaming eyes.

"I don't want to be prematoor," he said. "Yes, you'd make a lovely chaplain's pet, but I can't spare you. I'm going to smash that 'ere wily brain of yours, so as it won't be useful any more. I'll teach you to put the narks on to a poor chap like myself."

"Merritt, I swear to you that I never——"

"You can swear till you're black in the face, and you can keep on swearing till your're lily-white again, and then it won't be any good. You gave me away to Taylor because you were afraid I should do you harm at Littimer Castle. That Daisy Bell of a girl there told me so."

Henson groaned. It was not the least part of his humiliation that a mere girl got the better of him in this way. And what on earth had she known of Reuben Taylor? But the fact remained that she had known, and that she had warned Merritt of his danger. It was the one unpardonable crime in Henson's decalogue, the one thing Merritt could not forgive.

Henson's time was come. He did not need anyone to tell him that. Unless something in the nature of a miracle happened, he was a dead man in a few moments; and life had never seemed quite so sweet as it tasted at the present time.

"You gave me away for no reason at all," Merritt went on. "I'm a pretty bad lot, but I never rounded on a pal yet, and never shall. More than one of them have served me bad, but I always let them go their own way, and I've been a good and faithful servant to you——"

"It was not you," Henson gurgled, "that I wrote that letter about, but——"

"Chuck it," Merritt said, furiously. "Tell me any more of your lies and I'll smash your jaw in for you. It was me. I spotted Scotter in Moreton Wells within a day or two. And Mr. Scotter had come for me. And I got past Bronson in Brighton by the skin of my teeth. I turned into your lodgings under his very eyes almost. Before this time to-morrow I shall be arrested. But I'm going to have my vengeance first."

The last words came with intense deliberation. There was no mistaking their significance. Henson deemed it wise to try another tack.

"I was wrong," he said, humbly. "I am very, very sorry; I lost my nerve and got frightened, Merritt. But there is time yet. You always make more money with me than with anybody else. And I'm going abroad presently."

"Oh, you're going abroad, are you?" Merritt said, slowly. "Going to travel in a Pullman car and put up at all the Courts of Europe. And I'm coming as chief secretary to the Grand Panjandrum himself. Sounds an alluring kind of programme."

"I'll give you a hundred pounds to get away with if you will——"

"Got a hundred pounds of my own in my pocket at the present moment," was the unexpected reply. "As you gave me away, consequently I gave you away to his lordship, and he planked down a hundred canaries like the swell that he is. So I don't want your company or your money. And I'm going to finish you right away."

The big stone was poised over Henson's head. He could see the jagged part and in imagination feel it go smashing into his brain. The time for action had come. He snatched at Merritt's right arm and drew the knotted fingers down. The next instant and he had bitten Merritt's thumb to the bone. With a cry of rage and pain the stone was dropped. Henson snatched it up and fairly lifted Merritt off his chest with a blow under the chin.

Merritt rolled over on the grass and Henson was on his feet in an instant. The great stone went down perilously near to Merritt's head. Still snarling and frothing from the pain Merritt stumbled to his feet and dashed a blow blindly at the other.

In point of size and strength there was only one in it. Had Henson stood up to his opponent on equal terms there could only have been one issue. But his nerves were shattered, he was nothing like the man he had been two months ago. At the first onslaught he turned and fled towards the town, leaving Merritt standing there in blank amazement.

"Frightened of me," he muttered. "But this ain't the way it's going to finish."

He darted off in hot pursuit; he raced across a rising shoulder of the hill and cut off Henson's retreat. The latter turned and scurried back in the direction of Longdean Grange, with Merritt hot on his heels. He could not shake the latter off.

Merritt was plodding doggedly on, pretty sure of his game. He was hard as nails, whereas good living and a deal of drinking, quite in a gentlemanly way, had told heavily on Henson. Unless help came unexpectedly Henson was still in dire peril. There was just a chance that a villager might be about; but Longdean was more or less a primitive place, and most of the houses there had been in darkness for hours.

His foot slipped, he stumbled, and Merritt, with a whoop of triumph, was nearly upon him. But it was only a stagger, and he was soon going again. Still, Merritt was close behind; Henson could almost feel his hot breath on his neck. And he was breathing heavily and distressfully himself, whilst he could hear how steadily Merritt's lungs were working. He could see the lights of Longdean Grange below him; but they seemed a long way off, whilst that steady pursuit behind had something relentless and nerve-destroying about it.

They were pounding through the village now. Henson gave vent to one cry of distress, but nothing came of it but the mocking echo of his own voids from a distant belt of tress. Merritt shot out a short, sneering laugh. He had not expected flagrant cowardice like this. He made a sudden spurt forward and caught Henson by the tail of his coat.

With a howl of fear the latter tore himself away, and Merritt reeled backwards. He came down heavily over a big stone, at the same moment Henson trod on a hedge-stake. He grabbed it up and half turned upon his foe. But the sight of Merritt's grim face was too much for him, and he turned and resumed his flight once more.

He yelled again as he reached the lodge-gates, but the only response was the barking and howling of the dogs in the thick underwood beyond. There was no help for it. Doubtless the deaf old lodge-keeper had been in bed hours ago. Even the dogs were preferable to Merritt. Henson scrambled headlong over the wall and crashed the thickets beyond.

Merritt pulled up, panting with his exertion.

"Gone to cover," he muttered. "I don't fancy I'll follow. The dogs there might have a weakness for tearing my throat out, and Henson will keep. I'll just hang about here till daylight and wait for my gentleman. And I'll follow him to the end of the earth."

Meanwhile Henson blundered on blindly, fully under the impression that Merritt was still upon his trail. One of the hounds, a puppy three parts grown, rose and playfully pulled at his coat. It was sheer play, but at the same time it was a terrible handicap, and in his fear Henson lost all his horror of the dogs.

"Loose, you brute," he panted. "Let go, I say. Very well, take that!"

He paused and brought the heavy stake down full on the dog's muzzle. There was a snarling scream of pain, and the big pup sprang for his assailant. An old, grey hound came up and seemed to take in the situation at a glance. With a deep growl he bounded at Henson and caught him by the throat. Before the ponderous impact of that fine free spring Henson went down heavily to the ground.

"Help!" he gurgled. "Help! help! help!"

The worry teeth had been firmly fixed, the ponderous weight pressed all the breath from Henson's distressed lungs. He gurgled once again and gave a little shuddering sigh, and the world dwindled to a thick sheet of blinding darkness.

(To be Continued.)

LONDON'S CIVIC PALACE

SCHEMES INVOLVING MILLIONS OF POUNDS.

Ratepayers Think the County Council Is Spending Too Much Money.

By a majority of 62 votes the London County Council has decided to spend £1,700,000 of the ratepayers' money in the erection of a stately home for themselves and the Council staff on the banks of the Thames.

The site decided upon consists of 5.6 acres abutting on Westminster Bridge, on the side opposite the Houses of Parliament. For the acquisition of the site the estimated cost is £600,000; for the building and foundations, £1,056,000; and for the construction of a public river embankment in front of the members' terrace, £44,000. The charge on the county rate involved by an expenditure of £1,700,000 is about £84,000 a year, decreasing by about £935 a year as the debt is paid off.

SAVING EXPECTED.

Against this has to be set the saving—which is quite problematical—to be effected by the abandonment of the present offices now occupied by the Council and the staff at an annual cost of £38,765 10s. The Finance Committee estimates that the ultimate increase on the net charge beyond what is now paid will be £50,000 a year.

Apparently because two other costly schemes involving millions—the condemning of 92 non-provided schools and the electrification and re-acquisition of the lease of the Council's northern tramways—were adjourned until after the Easter vacation, the majority of members felt free to indulge in the luxury of a new home for themselves.

HIGH TAX RATE.

The London ratepayer is actually showing signs of resentment at the crushing weight of taxation that threatens to submerge him. The Borough of Camberwell Municipal Association has decided to issue invitations to the entire ratepayers' societies of London to attend a conference to discuss means for putting a check to the alarming growth of local taxation.

Whatever the cause of the present state of things, the outlook is undoubtedly very serious.

In Camberwell, a man who is trying to live decently upon an income of, say, £3 a week—quite a big income, unfortunately, by comparison with the average—would scarcely pay less than £32 a year for his house. To this his accumulated rates would add £14 8s., bringing his rent bill up a periously near £1 a week. And the results are, of course, more disastrous still to the man with the laborer's income of 25s., or the skilled artisan's wage of £2 a week—when in work! The conclusion is irresistible; the rates now prevailing are directly responsible for overcrowding and all its attendant evils!

MOUTH ORGAN FACTORIES.

The principal factories of the mouth organ, or mouth harmoniac, as it is perhaps more correctly termed, are at Trossingen, in the Black Forest, Germany. These instruments, it appears, are sold in greater quantities in the United States than in any other country. At Trossingen one firm alone has fifteen branch factories, employs 2,000 hands, and turns out 6,000,000 mouth harmoniacs every year.

THE FRENCH BAR.

The Bar is not unduly paid in France. Fees, in comparison with the English courts, are remarkably small. One or two conspicuous gain from $35,000 to $40,000 a year, but the great majority even of those in the front rank have to be content with much smaller incomes. The practice of the law is not nearly so remunerative as that of medicine, or, rather, of surgery. Leading operators make their $100,000 or $150,000 a year.

BABYLON WAS A FRAUD

ITS SPLENDOR WAS LARGELY IN THE IMAGINATION.

Excavations Prove That If Adornments Did Exist They Were Very Portable.

The well-equipped expedition under Dr. Koldwey has now been working for five years upon the excavations of the immense mounds which mark the site of the Babylonian capital, says Mr. W. St. C. Boscawen in The London Globe. With every modern appliance required for excavation, including a light railway, it must be said that, taken as a whole the results have been disappointing. The discovery of the great processional street leading from the Temple of Bitodach, to the Istar Gate, certainly brought with it many interesting historical associations, for it was along this way that most of the great conquerors, from the days of Khammurabi must have passed. The encaustic decorations of the Istar Gate, in blue, yellow and green tiles, are of much importance to students of Oriental art, for i them, no doubt, we have the works which inspired the ceramic artists who decorated the palaces of the Persian Kings at Susa. From an architectural point of view, the excavations have considerable value, for they have shown the very shallow foundation on which the traditional splendor of the Temple of Belno rested.

The Babylonian Kings, especially Nebuchadezzar, weary us with the descriptions of the gold, silver and precious stones which they lavished in the decoration of the great temple—"making it bright as the day." Shrines plated with gold, walls inlaid with silver and precious stones and doors covered with shining bronze are among the objects of adornment specified. The very extensive explorations of the site of this great temple have shown that, if these adornments did exist, they must have been of a very portable character, for all that remained was an immense group of more than a hundred monotonous brick rooms. No sculptures lined the walls, as in the palaces of Nineveh and Kalar, and no winged bulls or lions guarded the doors. Even more remarkable than the disappointing results in relation to archaeology has been the astonishing absence of inscriptions.

NO GREAT LIBRARY.

No trace whatever has been found of any great library attached to the temple. This is not surprising, however, for it was the Temple of Nebo at Borsipha that, from B-C. 2000 until a few centuries before the Christian era, was the chief centre of light and learning, not only of Chaldea, but of all western Asia. Still, however, if no university libraary was found, we should have expected to find some royal records, foundation cylinders and tablets. Of course, many cylinders of Nebuchadnezzar have been found, with the usual uninteresting inscription full of piety and empty of historical information. In the last report issued by the German Oriental Society there are published two inscriptions, however, one of which is of more than ordinary interest, for it differs from the majority of royal inscriptions of the later Babylonian Kings in giving some historical information. The first inscription is on a cylinder placed as a foundation record by Assur-bani-pal, King of Assyria, and records his accession, for the installation his foster-brother, Samassamukin as King of Babylon. The most interesting passage in the inscription is that in which the King states that he confirmed the "rights and privileges of the people of Babylon." He records the gifts he made to the Temple of Marduk, and concludes with the usual pious prayer.

THE SECOND INSCRIPTION

is of much greater interest, for both in style and matter it differs from all other Babylonian texts—its nearest approach in style being the coronation inscription of Nabonidus, engraved upon a black stone pillar now in the Imperial Ottoman Museum at Constantinople. The inscription in question was written by order of the usurper, King Nabupalassar, the founder of the New Babylonian Empire, who, in B.C. 625, revolted against the Assyrian and proclaimed himself King of Babylon. The text is engraved upon a barrel cylinder of terra cotta, and contains forty-one lines of very clear writing.

Being a usurper, the King opens the inscriotion with no elaborate pedigree, and is, indeed, sweetly candid in speaking of himself. The opening lines seem to indicate that the King was a priest and scribe as well as a General, for he exhibits special devotion to Nebo, the god of learning, and his consort Tasmit. He commences thus: "Nabupalassar, the righteous King, the Prince proclaimed by Merodach, the offspring of Niri-mena, the noble Princess, the Queen of Queens." We now come to a very candid passage: "During my youth I was as the son of a nobody (parvenu)." He then states the wise knowledge of Nebo and Merodach sought for him and instructed him in law and justice, and then conferred upon him the government of all nations. He says that the gods to rule countries and men proclaimed his name and established his rule.

MILITARY EXPLOITS.

We now come to a part of the inscription which refers to the military exploits of Nabupalassar. "He caused a favorable guardian spirit to stand beside me and made perfect whatsoever work I did—Nugal, the war god, the most mighty one of the gods, went beside me to destroy my foes, and smite down my enemies." We now come to a really valuable historical passage, although, unfortunately, there is much that we would wish to learn missing. The King says: "The Assyrian who from ancient times ruled all men and caused them to submit to his heavy yoke, I who pity the weak, directed by the lord of lords, and by the great strength of Nebo and Merodach my lords, I swept their feet from the land of Akkad (Babylonia) and lifted their yoke." Here, then, we have a brief reference to the revolt which broke out either at the end of the reign of Assurbanipal, B.C. 625, or during the reign of Sinsariskum, the Saracus of the Greeks, and of the expulsion of the Assyrians from Babylonia.

THE TEMPLE OF NINIP.

There is a certain amount of sarcasm in the words of Nabupalassar, when the King uses the general term, "the Assyrian" instead of Kings of Assyria. The remainder of the inscription relates to the building of the temple of Ninip, the god of war and hunting, of which the King says: "The temple of Ninip, which was within Suanna, the sacred quarter of Babylon, which in remote time a former King had caused to be built, but had not completed, to restore that house I collected the workmen of Bel-Samas and Merodach." Then follow the usual details of the construction, ending with the words: "That temple which I renewed and gave to Ninip my lord I made to be brilliant as the day." The inscription concludes with the usual request that those come after him will respect his records and be obedient to the gods. The last words are very poetic: "When this temple grows old repair thou its decay, and the writing of my name which I have written place with thy inscription, then the word of Merodach the great lord, which changes not by his word the renown of thy name will establish to all time." Meagre as it is, this little glimpse of the last days of the Assyrian empire and of the usurper who compelled its downfall will be welcomed by all students of Oriental history. It is to be hoped that the explorations on which so much labor and expense are being expended may yet meet with better results than hitherto have been attained.

WONDERFUL OPERATION.

Child Without Bone in Right Arm Has One Inserted.

At the annual gathering of the Glasgow University Club at Sunderland recently Sir William Macewen, who was concerned in an extraordinary operation upon a child over 20 years ago, introduced the patient, now a full-grown man, to the medical men present, and explained the nature of the remarkable case.

The child was born without a bone in the right arm, the boneless limb hanging helpless by its side. The mother, who took the child to the Glasgow Infirmary, assumed that the arm must necessarily be amputated. But the surgeons determined to make an attempt to save the limb.

Small sections of the bone taken from the tibia, or lower portion of the legs, of other patients, who were under treatment for the cure of bow-leggedness, were transferred to the boneless arm, there to continue their growth and to become amalgamated—in fact, eventually supplying the place of the missing humerus.

Sir William Macewen kept in touch with the boy, who, at the age of 14, left Glasgow for Sunderland, where he had worked since. The young man (says the Yorkshire Post), bared his arm to the guests present, and gave the company abundant proof of the sustained serviceableness of the limb, despite several accidents, including a compound fracture, which had befallen it.

SNEEZING COMPETITION.

A sneezing competition between half-a-dozen old women took place recently in a certain Lancashire town. The competitors were at liberty to use any means of bringing about a sneeze, a tin of the best snuff being actually provided for the purpose. Everybody present at the unique contest went into convulsions at the sneezing feats of the contestants, one of the old dames keeping up the performance until she fell down exhausted. She was awarded the prize, consisting of a sovereign and a silk handkerchief.

BUILT BY ONE MAN.

At Stivichall, near Coventry, England, may be seen a church that, among English churches, at all events, possesses the unique distinction of having been built by the unaided efforts of one man alone. The name of this persistent and assiduous workman was John Green, a stonemason, of Coventry, who laid the first stone in 1810 and completed his self-imposed task seven years later.

FOREIGN PARLIAMENTS.

The name of the lawmaking power in the United States is the Congress, in France the Assembly, in Germany the Reichstag, in Holland the States General, in Spain the Cortes, in Greece the Boule, and in Denmark the Landsthing.