

The Ladder of Life

By P. L. BEAZLEY

CHAPTER VII.

The key was turned once more in the lock, and John the beadle, who stepped in with a lantern, came the head clerk himself.

"And you have struck the poor young man into the prison!" said he fuming as he stumbled in. "How could you have dared to do such a cruel thing against the express orders of the Chief Justice?"

"Have dared?" stammered the terrified beadle. "The master him self—"

"Be silent, you blockhead!" said the chief clerk, sternly, and then he addressed himself politely to Albert: "Be good enough to follow me, my dear young colleague. The misunderstanding which deprived you of your freedom has been cleared up. You will learn the rest from the Chief Justice, to whom I am conducting you."

Without deigning to answer him, Albert stepped out, and was at once in the office of the Chief Justice, who appeared as almost ridiculous through his vain attempt to preserve an external dignity in the presence of his inferior, who knew his worthlessness.

"It was all a mistake," said he to Albert. "I now see that you were innocent, and I will make amends for what you have suffered. Ask what you will and I will readily grant it."

"I have nothing to ask of you," replied Albert, indignantly, "but permission to leave immediately and a testimonial as to my conduct whilst in your service."

"You shall have it," said the Chief Justice, "though it pains me to lose such an industrious and clever young fellow, and also the opportunity of making amends for my over-hastiness. Prepare," said he to the head clerk, "a testimonial for this excellent young man such as he deserves."

And then, whilst the clerk was writing it, he went to his drawer, counted out a number of gold florins on the table, and politely motioned the youth to take them.

The testimonial, which credited Albert not only with all the virtues and capacities which he possessed, but also with some that he did not possess, was soon ready. Albert glanced through it, put it in his pocket, and contemptuously pushed the gold aside in a heap.

"I cannot take your money," said he, proudly; "it would soil my hands. I'll leave this house as I came into it, poor. May God change you for the better, or open the eyes of the Prince so that he may see of what sort is the person to whom he has entrusted the sacred duty of meting out justice in his capital city."

He went out defiantly, and the Chief Justice remarked: "Once and for all, I am done with people of his kind, who have punitions of honor."

CHAPTER VIII.

Albert went out with a light heart, and was rejoicing at the prospect of seeing his father, Squire Otto, again. But grey-coat met him at the door, and asked: "Whither are you off in such a hurry, my young friend?"

"I am going," replied Albert, "never to return—going back to my dear old mountain castle, which I do not intend to leave again, as I have learned how small and mean is this so-called 'great world.'"

"You know your father's handwriting?" asked grey-coat, and he handed him a letter containing, in Squire Otto's hand, the words, "My son, obey the bearer as you would myself."

"What is this new misfortune?" said Albert, in a plaintive voice. "I have hardly broken one yoke when I must bow my neck under a fresh one."

"So it is in this world," observed grey-coat playfully. "Man can never be free. Should he get rid of all masters, he still remains his own servant, and the 'Ego' is often a very impetuous ruler. You should, then, bear the common lot with patience, and accept the post of secretary to the Duke's Chancellor, which I have secured for you."

"It will all be of no use," said Albert. "The higher the man, the greater the siner. I know it in advance. I shall not be able to get on with the Chancellor. I cannot stoop to low tricks. It is against my nature, and I can tell beforehand that things which I would see there would set my blood boiling."

"The prophet Daniel had courage in the lions' den, and you must make another trial through affliction for your father," said grey-coat, laughing. "Then he led the young man back into the town."

Albert looked at him with keen curiosity, and asked: "Do tell me who you are—you who mist yourself up so strangely with my fate."

"If it is merely a name you want, mine is Ralph," replied grey-coat. "I can tell you nothing further for the present. You must trust my word and the proof of good-will I have already given you."

"It is extraordinary," muttered Al-

bert to himself, and in a minute they were standing before the Chancellor's marble palace.

"We must go in here," said Ralph, opening the door of the doorkeeper's little room. "Rardon me, my worthy friend," said he to the broad shouldered doorkeeper, with a profound bow. "I recommend this young man to your kind protection, and let me know if I can soon have the honor of paying my respects to the lady who washes the silver."

"I will tell her about it," said the doorkeeper, with the gracious pride of a patron. "The lad will, I think, please her as he pleases me, and if he suits us you may be sure we shall quickly get him promotion."

He went off and came back soon with a little old woman, who received in a gracious manner the respectful greeting of Albert's patron, and gazed at the youth looking young man," she remarked, beginning to pour forth a stream of talk. "He seems to belong to a good family and to deserve that something should be done for his fortune. I hope he will be grateful and will be faithful to his friends. I have put everything right with the body-servant, and if you please we shall go up together at once. This is just the best time for an audience."

And without waiting for an answer she seized Albert's hand and led him away. When they came to the great staircase he was about to go up, but his patroness pulled him back.

"No, we don't go up here," said she. "You might wait there for hours in the antechamber and at last be shown into your business."

She conducted him on into the yard and then up a narrow back stairs. Having reached the top, she knocked gently at a door, and a stately personage, whom Albert took for the Chancellor himself, opened it.

"I have brought you the new secretary," whispered she, confidentially, to the body-servant.

"The Chancellor," said he, in a friendly tone, "is just taking his morning nip, but I'll announce him at once." And then he went in.

"May God give you good luck in coming in here," said the old woman. "I have done my part, and the rest is your own affair. If you have anything to say to me after the audience and want advice for your office, you know where I am below in the court and shall be happy to offer you a bottle of Malmsay."

She tripped off, and Albert groaned.

"Oh," said he, "if I were the Duke and my Chancellor engaged his secretary through the influence of the woman who washed the silver and let him be brought up the back stairs I'd dismiss him on the spot."

The body-servant just then returned and led the young man through the Chancellor's splendid sleeping apartment into a little closet which was handsomely adorned. A tall man of majestic appearance, with a shrewd countenance, was sitting in an easy chair. A lady who sat near him was handing him a beaker of wine, and smiled so pleasantly as to make somewhat of an impression on Albert.

"A new candidate for the vacant office," observed the Chancellor, smiling at the lady. "Look at him, Bella, and see if he is fit for the post."

The lady's eyes were turned scrutinizingly on Albert's blushing face, and rested there for a considerable time. The youth, reddening all over, fixed his eyes on the ground.

"If he is not a maiden in disguise," said she playfully, "then he is a new-born seraph. I wish you good luck in your application."

"There is some work to try your capacity," said the Chancellor, pointing to a pile of petitions which lay on the ground. "Take the stuff up into your room. As soon as I come back from the Duke I'll judge of your application by what you have done."

Albert glanced uneasily at the pile, and with a shake of the head carried off a bundle of the petitions.

"Remember," said the Chancellor, "that there must be great condensation. Your servants of the sacred Theme are accustomed to be rather long-winded, and in order to make yourselves the better understood become more and more so. However, am a great lover of brevity, for my time is my most precious treasure."

He insisted to the applicant that he should withdraw. Albert obeyed, and as the door closed behind him he could hear the Chancellor merrily jesting and laughing with the fair Bella.

"That's the way in which he spends his precious time," said he to himself; "but I must allow that the lady is good-looking."

"There is a beauty that is dangerous," said a warning voice—that of Ralph, who just met him and had heard his soliloquy. You must be on your guard against it. You deserve, I think, to find purity of thought and intention in the lady of your choice, and it would be a pity if you were to exchange genuine gold for false coin."

Albert looked at his monitor with

some displeasure, put his hand to his breast, and was about to declare that none of his thoughts had been given to the lady.

"I know what you're going to say," remarked Ralph; "but sets speak better than words. Go into your room and perform the task that has been assigned to you. Meanwhile, I shall make your excuses to the silver-washer, with whom you must keep on good terms."

CHAPTER IX.

Albert came back to give his report to the Chancellor, who was now in hunting dress and kept looking to and fro impatiently in his chair. Amongst the petitions were a number of claims on the Duke's treasury which were of long standing.

"Make haste and get through," cried the Chancellor. "My decision on all these matters is that the people must wait until there is money in the treasury. You have got a facility of expressing yourself and of bringing out their torment."

"But," replied Albert, "there are people amongst them who need their money very badly—poor people who are pressed by their own creditors, and widows and orphans."

"We cannot coin money out of leather for them," said the Chancellor, warmly. "We have no money, and cannot pay now. That's the end of the matter. Now continue."

Albert then laid slowly before him a proposal by the architect for the construction of a marble bath in the Duke's garden.

"A lot of money," said the Chancellor, considering the amount: "but he will get up a splendid building for us. We must provide the sum necessary out of the rents."

"Instead of that," remarked Albert, "wouldn't it be better to pay the poor people who are on the verge of despair and beggary?"

The Chancellor looked at the young man in astonishment.

"You are already beginning to make proposals," said he. "Now leave this affair and go on to the next, so that we may come to the end."

"Here," said Albert, in a voice which showed that he felt troubled, "Moses, the Court money changer, offers a plan for the new poll tax, and offers to farm it himself."

"Let me see, said the Chancellor, and he glanced at the figures. "The amount is really bigger than I expected. We have a treasure in this Moses; the plan is good. I saw up an outline of the scheme at once, so that I may lay it before the Duke to-day."

"This tax appears to me to be very oppressive," observed Albert; "and, moreover, it is most wretchedly arranged. Should it not be first examined by unprejudiced experts?"

"Draw up the outline," said the Chancellor with emphasis. "What next?"

"Seven complaints of the injustice and oppression of the Chief Justice," replied Albert, impressively.

"The Chief Justice is going too far," muttered the Chancellor. "He'll take the pitcher so often to the wall that it will be broken at last. Make out a report of the complaints for him and warn him in a confidential note to close the mouths of the complainants so that I shall not have to take measures against him."

"The informations which accompany the complaints," observed Albert, "leave no room for doubt. The case should certainly be investigated."

"You are right, young man," said the Chancellor, "but you don't understand. I know the Chief Justice. If I once held an inquiry into his case I should make more than I could like."

"And out and should have to dismiss him from his office—a thing which is not to be done for important reasons."

"Here is another proposal from the rent collector," said Albert. "It is one for setting the Duke's finances right by means of economies."

"Economies!" repeated the Chancellor, laughing. "The rent collector knows more than we do."

"The proposal seems to me quite practicable," remarked Albert. "Allow me to state the chief points."

"Well, go on, you wearisome young man," said the Chancellor, yawning. The blast of a hunting horn, and the barking of dogs were just then heard from the yard, and the huntmen entered and announced that all the preparations had been made for the chase.

"We must not abandon the pleasures of the chase," said the Chancellor, springing up, and seizing his cap. "This evening we shall do some work. If I come back too late we shall do it in the morning. Adieu, you fond of the hunt?"

"It has often been a means of pleasant recreation for me after labor," replied Albert, unaffectedly.

"You must accompany me some time," said the Chancellor. "I am curious to see how you ride."

And with a merry halloo he hurried out, surrounded by his bounding dogs and followed by the huntmen.

CHAPTER X.

When Albert next morning entered the ante-chamber of the Chancellor's apartment he found there three petitioners very different in character. One was a pale man with a stoop, the holder of a judge's post. He was dressed in black, and on his countenance there was an expression of deep melancholy. The second was a dandy with gleaming buckles on his shoes

and a fur-trimmed overcoat. The third was a stout, red-faced gentleman, whose clothes shone with gold-lace. All of them insisted on a personal interview. The Chancellor, being informed of their presence by Albert, came out to meet them.

"What do you want?" said he to the judge, in an unfriendly tone.

"I have served the Duke for the past thirty years," replied the judge, with modest self-consciousness. "The salary of my office is small and is not sufficient to meet the wants of my family. The district judgeship here is vacant, and I have become a candidate for it. But the Count of the district is unfavorable to me, and on his recommendation my request has been refused. I now apply for the post in person. Can you do nothing for me?"

"To glance at the papers I have brought with me they will convince you that I deserve this advancement as much as I need it."

"I have long known that you are a useful official," said the Chancellor, somewhat embarrassed. "But the post you are applying for is really superfluous and can for the present remain unfilled."

"So says the Count," remarked the judge with warmth. "It is reported that his opposition is due to the fear of an investigation."

"I must believe the high State officials rather than you," said the Chancellor, impatiently. "And if the post were to be filled the man it has already been found. I regret that I can do nothing for you at this time. But we shall remember you when the next vacancy occurs."

"I am fifty years of age," said the judge. "I have sacrificed the best of my life and strength in the service of the Duke. I am not to be blamed if I wish to reach my goal whilst I have yet strength to be of use to my country. And I think that a man who has done his duty so well in his own little sphere has shown his fitness for promotion."

"You harp upon your zeal and fidelity," said the Chancellor abruptly, "and you become wearisome. What you did was your duty, and you must wait for your reward and not try to get it by obstinate pressure."

The judge looked up to Heaven appealingly, bowed, and withdrew.

The Chancellor looked after him, wiped his forehead as if he wished to wipe away an unpleasant thought, and turned to the dandy, who made some artistic bow and lip: "I have come again to pay my compliments to your lordship."

"I much regret, sir, that I can do nothing for you," replied the Chancellor, graciously. "Put the idea of the district judgeship out of your head. Knowledge and long experience are necessary, and you know how deficient you are in both."

"My mother will be inconsolable," stammered the young man, sadly, "if this path to honor is closed to me."

"I am very sorry," said the Chancellor, decisively. "I should like to lift you up, but I cannot do it in this way."

"Perhaps the pledge contained in this will plead for me," said the dandy, and with manifest confidence he handed the Chancellor a letter bearing a coat of arms.

"From Count Ubaldo!" cried the Chancellor with surprise, and he broke the seal and read the contents of the letter. "Why," asked he, "have you importuned the gentleman, and through him? It is really stupid of you to try and thrust yourself into a post for which you are utterly unqualified."

"If it is given to me," observed the dandy, "I shall keep a clever clerk."

"Go, then, and tell the Count you are appointed," said the Chancellor in a tone of annoyance. "I shall see him later to-day. But mind; play no stupid tricks, or you will have to kiss your hands," said the dandy, and gleefully went out.

"This Count will be the death of me with his applications," remarked the Chancellor; and then, with dignified bearing, he went up to the stout, red-faced gentleman.

"My contract for farming the revenue will come to an end next month," said the man humbly. "And I have come to beg that it should be renewed."

"Of course," replied the Chancellor, "for you have found it very profitable. The terms you got were too easy."

"The times are bad," said the stout man, with a wee-bone countenance. "I can assure you I have been hard pressed for the past five years. But there will, perhaps, be an improvement in the corn, and I may be able to make good my losses."

"We cannot come to an arrangement on the old terms," declared the Chancellor.

"I trust your worship will be more considerate. I shall appeal to you again to-morrow," said the contractor.

"At present I have a duty to discharge. I was fortunate enough to have you for the thousand florins which you sent me the thousand florins with the receipt."

"How!" cried the Chancellor. "I have sent you—?"

He looked at the receipt with surprise, and then at the man, who nodded at him, smiling significantly. Suddenly a light appeared to break in on him. He smiled graciously in return and said:

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Liquor and Drug Habits.

We guarantee to every victim of the liquor and drug habit, no matter how long the case, that when our new vegetable medicine is taken as directed, all desire for liquor or drugs is removed within three days, and a permanent cure effected in three weeks. The medicine is taken privately and without interfering with business duties. Immediate results—normal appetite, sleep and clear brain, and health improved in every way. Indispensable testimony sent sealed. We invite strict investigation. Address The Dixon Cure Co., 40 Park Avenue (near Milton Street), Montreal.

Why is a piteer full of water like a man throwing his wife in the river? Because one is water in the piteer and the other is piteer in the water.

FIRESIDE FUN.

Bobby: "Pa, what is an heir-at-law?" Pa: "Usually the lawyer, Bobby."

Why is a telephonist like a blind man? Because he listens to the voices of those he cannot see.

Why is a man proposing like a hen hatching? One is in earnest, and the other is in her nest.

"Are you taking sins with your professional work, Chumpley?" "No. Never had an ache in my life."

What is the difference between a married man and a widower? One kisses his missis, and the other misses his missis.

What is the different between a high-spirited horse and a piece of lead? One is mettlesome, and the other is some metal.

The Absent-minded Professor: "Do you know, my dear, I was so busy remembering what you asked me to buy you that I forgot to stop and get it."

Why may a professor without students be said to be the most attentive of all teachers? Because he has only two pupils, and they are always in his eyes.

"Hungry Higgins?" said the kind lady. "Of course that is not your real name?" "None," answered Mr. Higgins; "it's wot might be called a empty title."

"Before a man is thirty he falls in love with every pretty girl he looks at." "Yo?" "And after he is thirty he falls in love with every pretty girl who looks like him."

"Well, the widow sued the editor for libel. Get anything?" "One thousand pounds. But she didn't have it long." "Why?" "The editor married her."

"Terrible tragedy at the museum to-day. Hear about it?" "No. What happened?" "Countryman came in with his twin boys, and the cannibal got loose and ate philopona with them."

Jinks: "Got a case in court, eh?" Winks: "Yes, and I'll win, too." "Both law and justice on your side, I suppose?" "Um! I don't know as to that, but I've got the highest-priced lawyers."

Grignon: "It was great fun sitting there and passing remarks upon the people as they came in." Barton: "Ah, but, talking of fun, you should have heard the remarks of some of the people after you went out."

Dashaway: "I just got a notice from my bank that I can't draw out any money for 60 days." Cleverton: "What are you going to do?" Dashaway: "Well, old man, that's what I wanted to see you about."

Papa: "So Emily now stands at the head of her class in French?" Mamma: "Yes. She and another girl were exactly even in the written exercises, but it was decided that Emily shrugged her shoulders the more correctly."

Mr. Uplown: "Suppose we go skating this afternoon? There ought to be good skating. Ice two inches thick will support a man." Mr. West-side: "I suppose so. In midsummer ice no thicker than that supports the team and his entire family."

"So you were bound and gagged by bandits while in Italy, were you?" asked the garrulous person; "regular comic-opera bandits, eh?" "Yes, sir," said the traveller; "there was nothing of the comic-opera style about them. The gags they used were all new."

A certain farmer, who is by no means noted for his resemblance to Apollo, has a son of seven who possesses more wit than pedigree. One day a stranger came to the farm and, seeing the lad, said: "Sonny, where's your father?" "In the pig-pen," was the reply. "In the pig-pen? Thanks." And as the man moved in the direction indicated, the boy shouted: "I say! You'll know him, 'cause he's got a hat on."

William: said the editor of the "Big Creek" "Riposte" to his foreman, "I shall be away from the office for the next two weeks. In a day or two I shall pass through Chicago, and if there is anything you need for the mechanical department—" "Who is to edit the paper while you are absent?" inquired William. "My wife will attend to that." "We shall need," said the experienced foreman, "about forty pounds of italics."

Sealing Dispute.

LONDON, January 18.—Great Britain has again declined to re-open the sealing question. It seems that her previous refusal gave as its reason that while negotiations were pending between the United States and Canada, Great Britain could not re-open the matter. To this the United States replied that no negotiations were pending and renewed the request, but the Foreign Office sends its regrets that the Government does not see its way to re-open the question.

Consumption Cured.

An old physician, retired from practice, having had placed at his hands by an eminent mineralogist the formula of a simple vegetable remedy for the speedy and permanent cure of Consumption, Hoop, Catarrh of the Bladder, and all those and long Affections, also a positive and radical cure for Nervous Debility and all Nervous Complaints, after having tested his formula with uncounted thousands of cases, has felt it his duty to make it known to his suffering fellow-men. Actuated by this motive and a desire to relieve human suffering, I will send free of charge, to all who desire it, this medicine, in French, Spanish or English, with full directions for preparing and using. Sent by mail, addressing with stamp, enclosing this paper, to W. J. S. Morse, 250 Broadway Block, Rochester, N.Y.