

[COPYRIGHT.]

The Dead Line.

By GIDEON LAINE, D. D.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN OLD SOLDIER'S REWARD.

Law is a bottomless pit; it is a cormorant, a harpy that devours everything.

—ARBUETHNOT.

Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.

—BURNS.

Sam Cotterell's life hung by a fragile thread. At first Dr. Carlington believed the old man's spirit had left its weary mortal tenement forever; but he liked Kate, and knowing how she loved her father and how the news of his death would smite her, the Doctor, who pitied, also, the moaning wife, put forth with unusual vigor and perseverance every means his science knew for restoring suspended animation; and observing at last some faint but unmistakable signs of vitality, he spoke for the first time since he had begun his examination, and spoke hopefully:

"I think likely that snow-drift saved him; but it was a close call."

At these words, Mrs. Cotterell sprang instantly to the Doctor's side; for she understood that they meant her husband was not dead. She now aided the Doctor's efforts, and they soon had the satisfaction of hearing Cotterell's voice, though feeble as yet:

"Mother, you ain't been a-worryin' of Kate and John about it, have you?"

"No, Sam," replied Mrs. Cotterell tenderly. "I knowed you wouldn't want me to, and they don't know nothin' at all about it. I—"

"You must not talk now, Mr. Cotterell," said the Doctor kindly, "nor allow anything to worry you. Everything will be looked after by kind friends."

"If I only knew the critters—"

"Your stock will be all right; it will be looked after as well as if you were around, so don't worry. Everything depends on your keeping perfectly quiet now."

"You want me to keep my flapper shut a spell? Well, I'll try to do it, Doctor. My off leg's givin' me hail Columby, but I'll have to grin and bear it, I reckon."

This latter remark led the Doctor to make another careful examination of Cotterell's frozen limbs, which, at first, he had feared might have to be amputated. Cotterell having, in answer to questions, described in his own characteristic way the nature of his sensations, the doctor deemed the indications favorable to complete recovery. When he started away at last, Mrs. Cotterell followed the medical man out into the front yard to inquire:

"What do you think of him, Doctor? Is he goin' to get well?"

"Yes, I hope he will, Mrs. Cotterell," said the Doctor, who was no longer the man of easy selfishness we met in our first chapter; that mortgage on his opera house had changed him for the better, and he could work from sympathy now as hard as he once did for money alone. "But we must be very careful of him for several days—perhaps for two or three weeks. No one must be allowed to mention to him the experience he has been through, nor must he be permitted to talk about it. He must keep very quiet, and must not be allowed to worry. Persuade him that everything is being looked after all right. Unless complications which I do not now foresee should arise, I hope to see him up again soon. But he will require good care; he is getting old, you know. I shall return to-morrow. Good-day."

For some days Cotterell was "out of his head" and "flighty," as Mrs. Cotterell remarked to an inquiring neighbor; and although she greatly wished to learn how he came to be in the snow-drift, Mrs. Cotterell did not acquire that coveted information until it reached her through some neighbors who were making free with the barn one day. Cotterell's team had not come home, and this strange conduct on the part of those well-known quad-

ters, till one of the old man's friends, being in town for all day, put up his team at the feed stable and recognized Cotterell's horses there. Inquiry of the stable-keeper developed the whole affair; and Cotterell's sub-Alliance and some People's party men made up a purse, paid off the chattel mortgage, and brought the team out in triumph, and put it in Cotterell's barn, much to the delight of the old dog who barked himself hoarse on that occasion. The horses seemed happy to get back, also; for animals get homesick as do the rest of us. Mrs. Cotterell went to the barn to see what was going on, and was told what had been done. She was "mortified to death" that their poverty had thus become known; but it was a God-send, for now the farmers and farmers' families in the neighborhood were assiduous in their endeavors to help the stricken household in its dire emergency. One good, benevolent old mother came to talk with Mrs. Cotterell in order to "keep her from feelin' hurt about bein' help'd;" for Mrs. Cotterell's "pride" was well known.

"Lida Cotterell, said the old mother, "you ain't got no business tryin' to be a worryin' along here all by your own self when your old man's a most took from you. Don't talk no nonsense now. What would you do, I'd like to know, if you knowed any of the rest of us was situated this way? And what fools you'd say we be if we was to refuse to let you do all you could? What's the use, Lida? Who 'spects any farmer to be so forehanded these hard times, with wheat a sellin' for just nothin' at all and corn for less, that his family won't want for nothin' if he's laid up for a spell like Cotterell here? The Good Book says we're to do as we'd be done by, and you ain't doin' right—you're actin' sinful, Lida—if you don't do by us as you'd want us to do by you if we was in trouble and you'd come and wanted to do somethin' for us. You've got enough to stand without havin' to look after everything, and there's plenty of likely girls amongst us that ain't got nothin' but a little milkin' to do and they'd be glad to come and take turns helpin' round the house. The 'Liance is goin' to look after things out doors whether you'll let 'em or not. What's the use of havin' neighbors and 'Liances if you ain't goin' to let 'em do nothin' when they're needed. Charity? Who's sayin' anything about charity? Nobody ain't goin' to give you nothin'. They'll get sugar'n coffee and sich like things for you or Cotterell to pay for when he get's 'round again. We all have to go in debt to the store-keepers, and I reckon farmer folks ain't no worse to get in debt to than other folks."

Though with much hesitation, Mrs. Cotterell was persuaded at last to permit her neighbors to be her friends, and the way having been thus opened, supplies poured in. Coal was brought in one wagon, and groceries came in another; the "idle" girls came to take turns doing housework; and by some odd coincidence, it came each young man's turn to do outdoor work while the "idle" girl he liked best was acting, in her turn, as housekeeper *pro tem*.

The two months grace allowed him in which to leave his old homestead had about expired when Cotterell became convalescent after an attack of pneumonia which had succeeded at once his almost miraculous restoration to life and sanity, and one day the sheriff came to inquire how soon the ruined and broken farmer proposed to move. Mrs. Cotterell was with her husband at the time and heard the blunt inquiry which manifested the delicacy of feeling of the official representative of that noble institution which, as I have previously tried to impress upon my readers, exists for the philanthropic purpose of protecting the weak against the strong. In dazed astonishment she inquired what the representative of the benevolent institution aforesaid, meant; whereupon, he

gave still further evidence of his great delicacy of feeling by blurting out—

"You don't expect to live here everlastingly, do you, when you have been sold out?"

"Sold out?"

"Yes, sold out. I suppose you don't remember I sold your place at the court house door two months ago! Is your memory failing? The sale was confirmed and the deed made long ago, but the court gave Cotterell here two months time to get out, and the time is about up, and you will have to get ready and go."

"Go? Oh, Sam, have we lost the place?"

But Sam Cotterell's gray head was buried in his hands, his elbows resting upon the patches on his poor, old trembling knees. The old man was silent. Mrs. Cotterell burst into tears and left the room.

"Well, what have you got to say, old man? I have got to go. Come—when are you going to get out? You don't want me to have to throw you out—do you?"

Still the old man did not speak. Soon there was a sudden, convulsive movement of his whole body, and the weak, convalescent old farmer fell to the floor and lay as if dead. It was toward sundown. Dr. Carlington, receiving no response to his knock, opened the front door and entered, just as Mrs. Cotterell rushed furiously in at the back door with an uplifted axe in her frenzied hands. The terrified sheriff flying from Mrs. Cotterell's axe almost upset the Doctor in mad haste to get out of the house. But at sight of her prostrate husband, she dropped the axe and sought to raise him; the Doctor hastened to her assistance, and together they lifted to the bed the wreck of what had been Sam Cotterell. Their efforts revived him at last, but his eyes wore a vacant look and for the time at least, the old man's reason had abdicated its throne. The sheriff returned to town with the determination to evict his old soldier comrade as soon as the court's order would permit such recreation.

Yes, veteran soldiers, his comrade. The sheriff wore conspicuously upon his coat lapel the badge of the Grand Army of the Republic. He had served in the same corps with his victim. What say you, men? Would you have done to a comrade the inhuman deed that sheriff was content to do? or would you rather have resigned your office? Look at your ruined comrade as he lies there a physical and mental wreck; see his patched garments—the best he has see poverty conspicuous upon him and all about him; old now, and no longer able to cope with adversity even should he recover; just snatched back from the brink of the grave—look, and answer it—what, had you been sheriff, would you have done? The government he fought for has decreed that he and his old, worn-out wife shall take each other by the hand and go out into homeless poverty, leaving behind them forever the prairie eden which they had made by long, weary years of toil. An atmosphere of tenderest associations surrounds the old homestead. There three children had been born; there one had died; there Mrs. Cotterell had waited her young husband's return from the war; there she had run to meet him at last that glad day when she saw him coming; out in the yard are the trees and bushes Kate had planted while yet at home; every holy association that can bind the human heart to a spot of earth clustered about that homestead whence the government, to whose defense Cotterell had given four years of his young manhood, had decreed he in his old age should be driven. And a man wearing the badge of the Grand Army was to execute that unholy decree—was to wreck thus a comrade's home, and life, and hopes! Would you have done it? Take heed how you answer. Be sure you have not done—are not doing—worse than that. Let us look further before you answer.

What had Sam Cotterell done? For what was his government punishing him thus? Had he been idle? He had worked, he and his household, as few slaves do. Had he been extravagant? Alas! he was not even decently clad, nor is his wife, and his children were away from home stinting themselves to help support their parents instead of being supported by them. What had the old soldier done, then? Nothing! The financial legislation of his govern-

ment had so depressed agriculture that he was forced to put a mortgage on his homestead, which perseverance in that legislative policy made it impossible for him to pay when it was due. He had been guilty of no wilful default; he was the helpless victim of general conditions deliberately brought about by wholesale corruption of congress and the legislature of his state. Heartless, pitiless, greedy wealth had deliberately plotted his ruin. He could not pay his mortgage; his government had made payment impossible. Yet his home is to be torn from him! The law treats him as harshly as if he were a criminal whose heinous deeds had shown him unfit to live among men. What hand had you, my old veteran, in wreaking the ruin you see? Listen! Some men whose hearts have been touched by such scenes, whose indignation has been aroused at such atrocities perpetrated in the name of justice, have urged that the law should be so changed that no man could be thus driven from his home while general conditions made payment of debts impossible. They have contended that it would be but just that the consequences of a public calamity should be shared by mortgagees, and not be borne alone by unfortunate mortgagors. They have said, "Let the mortgages on the homes of Sam Cotterells remain in force; let no man lose a dollar of these mortgage debts; but stay for a while the rapacious hand that would drive out the unhappy households—stay it till those responsible for this general distress shall have ceased that distress to cease. Men with warm hearts—many of them old soldiers—have proposed this humane policy; and would it not be a just policy, too? How have you greeted these men—this proposal? Scheming wretches, through their suborned orators and newspapers, have cried, "Re-pudiation! These calamity howlers are ruining the credit of the state! Stand up for Kansas!" To retain the good opinion of Eastern Shylocks you were asked to ruin the homes and blight the lives of the Kansas Cotterells; and oh, the shame of it! thousands of old soldiers have said by their votes, "We consent! Throw the Cotterells out! Let us win the applause of the beneficent usurers, no matter for the fate of our comrades." Within two years I have seen a mob assemble at the capitol of Kansas and threaten with death these humane men whose only crime was that they sought control of the state government in order to protect Kansas homes; and among the members of that mob were men who wore the badge of the Grand Army of the Republic! Their feeling of comradeship for the veterans living in mortgaged homes should have made the soldiers of Kansas rally long ago to protect these victims of usury, instead of mobbing others who were seeking to do this patriotic deed. Cast no stones at that sheriff, my old veteran. Down on your knees, rather, and pray heaven's forgiveness of your yet greater sin. Better still, bring forth fruits meet for repentance by henceforth joining the "calamity howlers" you have hitherto ignorantly denounced while 20,000 homes have been desolate. Say what you will of the People's party, is it not to-day the *only* hope of the poor? Organized greed has seized the name and the machinery of the once noble republican party, and having expelled its soul, now deceives the people with Satan in an angel's guise. With its interest, profits and dividends it robs you of the just value of your labor, and then, to keep you still, gives back a tithe in the form of a pension! What a trick! But let us return to Sam Cotterell's affairs.

When Dr. Carlington returned to Cobden that night, he learned that the sheriff had made arrangements to go with his deputies and evict Cotterell the day after the morrow. The next day the Doctor employed an attorney in Cotterell's name, and, having sworn to a petition stating that to disturb the old man in his then condition would almost certainly kill him, went with the attorney to the probate judge and applied for an injunction to prevent temporarily the sheriff's proposed inhuman proceeding. But the probate judge remarked:

"The district court ordered this man to get out two months ago, and he could have moved before this. The credit of the state has been injured enough in the East without my inter-