

STAIRS OF SAND

A TALE OF A MYSTERY

BY ERNEST DE LANCEY PIERSON

AUTHOR OF

"THE SECRET OF THE MARIONETTES," "A DANGEROUS QUEST," ETC.

Copyright, 1901.
By STREET & SMITH

CHAPTER XIII.

James Ellison was so surprised at the sudden turn of events, and the thought of how neatly he had been tricked, that he could only stare at the door through which Hendricks had taken his triumphant departure.

He had been congratulating himself on his cleverness in securing possession of the agreement, only to find out that it was but a copy.

He was roused from his moody thoughts by the clicking of a door latch, and his brother entered the room, waving a paper gayly in the one hand, while he hummed a song.

"Well, James, my boy, you see that I am good for something after all. How neatly we tricked the old fellow," dancing up and down the room.

"You are an ass!" exclaimed his brother, sententiously, turning with a scowl, as if he resented his companion's ill-timed hilarity. The other came over to him and looked at him in wonder. He was much younger than his brother, and good looking in a reckless way. In his smart clothes and smooth-shaven cheeks, it would have been hard to recognize him as the wild and ragged being who a few days before had claimed his brother's hospitality at Exton.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" he asked, fumbling the paper in his hands nervously.

"Matter enough!" growled the older. "The rogue fooled us with a copy, and that is what you are now holding in your hand. He had evidently made arrangements to fool us."

"The deuce!" and the brother unrolled the document and examined it carefully.

"Bless me if you ain't right!" and then, tearing it up with a gesture of rage, tossed the pieces in the grate. This done, he dropped down silently into a chair near his brother, and for some minutes neither of the men said a word. Finally James Ellison rose, and coming over to where his brother was seated, said in an earnest voice:

"I tell you what it is, Frank: this fellow annoys me, and I wish you would take steps to relieve me of such an incubus—that is, I mean to get possession of that paper. I don't want him harrassed."

"He is a cunning rogue, whoever he is," replied the other, thoughtfully.

"Cunning; of course he is, and for that reason I am interested in clipping his claws. Actually, I have not enjoyed a good night's sleep since he appeared. I thought, when Briggs arrived with the interesting news that he was an escaped convict, that I had him sure. From the way he acted, I am convinced that Briggs simply concocted the story in order to have something to show, since he blundered when I set him to watch the man."

"That may have been bravado," said James Ellison, "but that is true, he is the best actor I ever saw, or the cunningest rogue. Now, you have had experience with such people—"

Frank Ellison adjusted a gold monocle and stared at his brother with well-affected astonishment.

"Really, my dear boy, I am at a loss to know what you mean by such vulgar insinuations."

James Ellison knocked over a vase on the table as he made an angry gesture. "Don't provoke me—you are not performing—just remember your audience, if you please. Now, I never bothered my head about the people you consorted with."

His brother arose and said, with a sneer:

"Are you trying to show me how much more respectable you are than I? Well, we both started out in life to gain a living by our wits. You were lucky enough to marry an heiress, while I was forced to live as I could, brought up to no trade or profession, with a good education and a taste for a luxurious life, and no means to gratify it."

"There, there," said James, soothingly. "I had no intention of hurting your feelings, but I simply stated the case that I wanted you to do what you could to get possession of this paper. Don't you see that this impudent scoundrel holds me fast?"

"But suppose he is the escaped convict?"

"Bah! I believe that is all moonshine, invented by that smug rascal, Briggs. I don't put any faith in what he may say in the future."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to find out, if you can, who this fellow really is. If it is true, as Briggs says, that he is that celebrated criminal, you can get some of your 'the going to say' friends, but be careful! Police friends to identify him. For the fellow seems careless and moves around in broad daylight as if he had nothing to fear."

"And what do I get out of this?" asked Frank, as he eyed his brother keenly.

"Get out of it?"

"Yes."

"Why, anything you want," replied James Ellison.

"That's rather a broad statement, isn't it?" and Frank laughed.

"No, it is not. I don't want this matter hanging over me, and I would give half what I own to be rid of the incubus."

"Indeed?" skeptically.

length, with long-drawn emphasis. "I want you to stop protecting this young man, Barnett. Why on earth do you want to mix in on that affair, anyway?"

It was James Ellison's turn to be surprised.

"I don't exactly understand you," and he watched his brother, as if wondering what he should hear next.

"I believe I talk plainly enough," and Frank lit a cigarette and blew a smoke ring in the air, watching it fade into nothingness with a dreary expression, as if in deep thought.

"Well, it is an enigma to me," replied James Ellison. "Why shouldn't I do what I can to help a young man whom I have protected, and who certainly is not guilty of the crime they accuse him of?"

"If I were as impolite as you, I should address the same remark to you as you applied to me but a moment ago," replied Frank, with a drawl. "If you want me to do what you have directed—to find this fellow who calls himself Hendricks, to get possession of the document of adoption—I have but this to say: I will do it on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you leave matters as they are, and don't attempt to interfere with the course of the law."

James Ellison leaned over the table and eyed his brother for a moment anxiously.

"What on earth are you trying to get through your head, I should like to know?"

Frank Ellison shook the ashes of his cigarette, and responded, with a smile:

"I believe you are the thick-headed one in this instance. I say that you must stop your interference in this affair. I acknowledge that, as the betrayed husband, you are anxious to protect the accused, and to find the real—er—unfortunate who secured you the fortune."

James Ellison laid his hand on his brother's shoulder, and the look on his face was far from pleasant as he said:

"You know that I had nothing to do with that."

"Nobody said that you had, and yet it has turned out well for you, after all," and Frank blew a big puff of smoke into the air. "I believe the late Mrs. Ellison had a tight fist, and that it was hard to get her to sign checks—there—there," as he saw that his brother appeared to be deeply moved. "I don't want to open a fresh wound, but at the same time, I am stating cold facts. I am a cold, unfeeling person, as you have probably discovered before this."

"In heaven's name, what do you want, man? I wish you would be quick about it."

The other coolly tossed his cigarette in the grate before answering, then he looked at his brother a moment, and gave vent to a loud laugh.

"Why, I never saw you so much moved in my life," said he.

"I want to know what you mean?"

"You mean you want to know what my terms are for securing that document and otherwise suppressing in a gentlemanly manner the little man who has been annoying you?"

"Yes."

"The renunciation of all attempts to help young Barnett."

"Anything else?" and James Ellison eyed his brother, as if he was in fear of what he would say next.

"I think that is about all for the present," said the other, calmly.

"In fact, I should like things to go against him, if possible," continued Frank. "I would like him out of the way."

"You puzzle me more and more," murmured James Ellison.

"Why not come out flat with what you mean?"

"Ah," replied the other, with a laugh. "I surprise you, do I? Well, I am a fellow of infinite variety, as you might have discovered long ago. If misfortune had not separated us—or, rather, fortune in your case divided us."

"I am waiting to hear what you have to say," replied James, who now had become sullen through the references to his fortune.

"Well, I have taken a great fancy to your daughter, and I don't mean, if I can help it, that this young clochopper shall have her."

Ellison rose, and while his lips moved, not a word came from them. Frank, seeing how perturbed he was, broke into a noisy laugh.

"Oh! Willie, you are all battered up again. How did you do it?"

LET US ALL LAUGH.

JOKES FROM THE PENS OF VARIOUS HUMORISTS.

Pleasant Incidents Occurring the World Over—Sayings that are Cheerful to Old or Young—Funny Selections that You Will Enjoy.

Hiram—Where's your son John now? Silas—Oh, he's down to the city doing literary work.

Hiram—Is he makin' anything out of it? Silas—Yes, I guess so. At least I have to send him money every time he writes.

She Knew a Thing or Two. She—And am I really and truly the first girl you ever loved? He—Certainly. And am I the first man you ever loved? She—The idea! Don't I look to be more than 7 years of age?

Egotistical. Green—I understand you are looking for a donkey. I've got one for sale. Brown—I bought one yesterday, but I may want another soon. Green—Well, any time you can use a good one, don't forget me.

Might Return. City Editor—See here, in your obituary of this prominent club woman you say she "is a good wife." You mean "was," of course.

Reporter—No, I mean "is." Mr. Henpeck, her husband, told me if I wanted to be absolutely truthful that was the way to put it.—Philadelphia Press.

Sad Sea-Doggedness. The ship groaned. But the Giddy Young Thing who was talking to the Captain was a good sailor and didn't mind a bit of rough weather.

"Doesn't it seem unnecessarily cruel, Captain," she said, "to box a compass?"

"Not any more so, miss," he replied, grimly, "than to paddle a canoe." And the ship groaned some more.—Chicago Tribune.

Quite Remarkable. Gushington—Ah! your wife is a most remarkable woman. Henpeck—Think so? Gushington—Indeed I do. Don't you? Henpeck—Well, she certainly is able to make more remarks than any other woman I know.—Philadelphia Press.

Remnant Sale. "How's this?" asked the customer in the bookstore. "Last week the prices on Bacon and Lamb were only \$1.25, and now you have marked them up to \$3."

"Well, you see," explained the bookseller, "since the Meat Trust began cornering supplies—"

But the customer hurried away to secure matinee seats for "A Texas Steer" before the prices went up at the theater, also.—Baltimore American.

Covered the Ground. "De Sheriff only had me one time in my life," said the colored witness. "And what did he do with you then?"

"He didn't do nuthin' wid me, sub; I outrun him."—Atlanta Constitution.

Various Possibilities. "There is something fascinating about a crowd," said the alert person.

"Yes," answered the languid philosopher; "there is always the charm of uncertainty about a crowd; you can never tell from a distance whether it is caused by a prince, a politician, a prize-fighter or a pianist."—Washington Star.

Some One Else Did It. "Oh! Willie, you are all battered up again. How did you do it?"

"Please, ma'am, I didn't do it!"

Properly Announced. "Well, why don't you announce me?" demanded the pompous lady.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," stammered the new butler, "but I can't quite make out the name. His it 'Mrs. Jonesmith'?"

"No, stupid! 'Mrs. Jones-Smythe.'"

"Oh!" said the butler, and then bowed: "Stupid Mrs. Jones-Smythe."—Philadelphia Press.

The Real Thing. "And have you no home ties?" asked the sympathetic lady.

"No, ma'am," replied the tramp. "All tie ties I hev any connection with is de railroad ties."

Now They Don't Speak. Nell—The last thing Jack did before going away was to kiss me. Bess—That's just like him. He always would postpone a disagreeable task until the very last minute.

Declining Faith. "In my young days," said the Mere hief, bitterly, "everybody believed that a man who fell in battle had a passport to heaven."

"And is it not so now?"

"Evidently not. I have seen heroes kulking behind rocks and throwing way-first-class chances of getting shot."—Puck.

Stopped the Game. "What broke up the ping-pong social down at your church last night?" asked the young man with the clerical garments.

"Some unregenerate son of Bellal," said the second man in church garb, "substituted eggs for the balls."—Judge.

As It Appeared. Diggs—Did you buy that piece of bronze at an auction sale? Biggs—No. But why did you think I did?

Diggs—Because it looks like it had been under the hammer.

Proof Positive. He—Do you believe the widow's grief is really sincere? She—I do. Why, she spent half the insurance money for a mourning suit and the other half for a tombstone.

It All Depends. Bess—Don't you dislike to hear a young man talk shop? Nell—Oh, not necessarily. My beau does it every time he calls.

Bess—Indeed! Nell—Yes. You see, he's a street-car conductor, and I suppose it comes natural for him to say, "SH closer, please."

The Husband Knew. City Editor—See here, in your obituary of this prominent club woman you say she "is a good wife." You mean "was," of course.

Reporter—No, I mean "is." Mr. Henpeck, her husband, told me if I wanted to be absolutely truthful that was the way to put it.—Philadelphia Press.

Sad Sea-Doggedness. The ship groaned. But the Giddy Young Thing who was talking to the Captain was a good sailor and didn't mind a bit of rough weather.

"Doesn't it seem unnecessarily cruel, Captain," she said, "to box a compass?"

"Not any more so, miss," he replied, grimly, "than to paddle a canoe." And the ship groaned some more.—Chicago Tribune.

Quite Remarkable. Gushington—Ah! your wife is a most remarkable woman. Henpeck—Think so? Gushington—Indeed I do. Don't you? Henpeck—Well, she certainly is able to make more remarks than any other woman I know.—Philadelphia Press.

Remnant Sale. "What are you hanging around here for, waiter?"

"I'm waitin' for you to get fru wild dat chicken 'cause a gemman jest ordered chicken soup."—Chicago American.

As It Should Be. Miles—Isn't it queer that a man's ears are placed in such a way that he can hear only the sounds in front of him?

Giles—Nothing queer about it at all. A merciful Providence never intended that a man should hear what is said behind his back.

The Only One. "Everything in biblical history," said the argumentative wife, "goes to prove that Adam loved his wife."

"Yes, my dear," replied the cruel husband, "but you must remember that she was the only woman he had ever met."—Ohio State Journal.

Learned Graduation Essays. "Each spring when I listen to the learned graduation essays of a class of wealthy men's sons, at a college commencement, I feel that I won't be able to hold my job two weeks after those smart youths get out bustling for their daily bread in competition with me," mused the gloomy-eyed, middle-aged man in the back seat. "But on my way home, as I learn that the trolley car conductor is a college graduate, and the clerk at the corner cigar store is another, I begin to chirp up a bit, and in a day or two I get over my dismal forebodings!"—Puck.

Truly American. Sharpe—Would you care to occupy a \$100 seat and see the coronation parade? Wheaton—Not if I had a quarter to sit on the "bleachers."

What He Missed. Stranger—Is Dr. Quackerly in? Servant—No, sir. He went up the river this morning to shoot ducks.

Stranger—Well, I'm sorry he isn't at home. I could put him onto bigger game.

She Capitulated. Maud—Do you mean to tell me that you and George are engaged at last? Mignon—Yes; he had quit spending money on me, and I thought I might as well let him propose.—Chicago Tribune.

Lucky Children. The Maid—Dear little Pido, he will not eat sees boubons, madama. Mrs. Samsley—Ah! poor little doggie. There must be something wrong with them. Give them to the children.—Philadelphia Press.

Visible Proof. Pigg—What reason have you for thinking De Jones married an intellectual woman? Pong—Because most of his respondent buttons are safety-pins.



OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES.

By J. W. Waddell, D. D.

Some one has said we need not look afar across seas and seas for our Holy Land. Our Holy Land, if we will make it such, is right around us. The struggle of a valiant soul against the odds that lie about makes all ground holy ground. "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life." Do it right where you are, and the ground where you stand is holy ground.

Certainly there are enemies enough about us to supply the one condition of opposition by which every resolute soul attains. The foes of the soul's highest interests lurk and confront us everywhere. We are in the enemy's land and must fight to win. And these very foes, when overcome, help to higher things.

This is the significance of the scripture at Num. 14:6 regarding the giants of the land. "They are bread for us," said Joshua and Caleb, the heroic minority of the spies. Instead of hindrance we may turn them to help; wings instead of weights. Make bread of the giants and go on from victory to victory, growing stronger as we go.

It is the secret of mastery in this world. Take your hindrances and overcome them, making stepping stones to higher altitudes. Use the world as not abusing it. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

But here is the sharp alternative: Overcome or be overcome. Eat the giants or they will eat you. The people that timorously and faithfully cried out, "We are not grasshoppers," grasshoppers they were, and as such were disposed of under the heel of the vengeful Canaanite. "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." True indeed. Eat or be eaten. We can so act, cravenly and cringingly, as to invite defeat of the ordinary elements and agencies that lie about us, succumbing to circumstances, or we can stand boldly forth and conquer our environment and bring victory out of defeat, prevailing over our surroundings.

Here is the giant of natural depravity. Shall we yield to him? Many do, but it is not necessary; it is cowardly, it is faithless. "Where sin abounds grace did much more abound." God has provided in the philosophy of the plan of salvation not only a way of escape, but a scheme of victory whereby we may put our foot on Satan's neck and triumph over him openly. Adam's posterity may rise higher than Adam. Through the shedding of the blood we are made sons of God, heirs and joint heirs with Christ—better than Eden. Leap to the heights of this faith and prove the victory of the vanquished.

Here are the giants of sinful propensity and of besetting sin. The land is full of them; they come in at every avenue and we find them hiding in every ravine of the territory of man's soul. What shall we do with them? Fight them, overcome them. But there is only one way. Paul himself, gazing in at them, cried out in the sense of his own waywardness and weakness, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Then like Christian in the dungeon of Giant Despair, he reached forth his hand and laid hold of the key that extricated him. "I thank God through Jesus Christ," and he was out and away in the blessed freedom and fullness of the eighth of Romans.

Here are the giants of trials and temptations that are all around about us. Did Christ leave us in their midst to be annoyed and overcome? No, but to overcome and get strength out of the overcoming, and to give him the glory in it all. I pray not that thou "shouldst take them from the evil." And then he says, "Sanctify them through thy truth." Now, touch not the Lord's anointed. We are his, set apart for holy use. This is what has happened: Satan thought to pull us down with temptation and trial, and so, at our cry, God stooped down and plucked us up and set our feet on a rock, and, coming out of this very test, harsh and painful as it has been, there is a strength that we had not before, and God has a new victory that adds to his glory and the honor of his Son, who saves and loves to save unto the uttermost.

And here are giants of enmity. Observe the antagonism of the wicked world about us: the gaming table, the dance hall, the saloon. Shall the church yield to these? No; they are here but to prove us. Met and overcome in the might of righteousness, they become trophies of him who shall ride victor at last. Note the antagonism of skepticism, infidelity and distinctive criticism. Out of these free comes the Word of God, shining brighter than ever, helped on by its very foes. See the antagonism of false religions, whether pagan or civilized. The white light of pure religion will set them all up and feed at last upon their substance as he of the white horse comes forth as last conquering and to conquer.

And last of all the giants of disease and death. Oh, the beautiful Christian spirits that have risen up from the bed to praise God and to glory in tribulation also, for tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart! And as for death: Here at his last fell blow Satan meets his worst discomfiture, as the fraud spirit rises chastening. "Thanks be to God that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is success that is not worth the

possessing and there is a failure that is worth far more than some successes. There are three elements which every young man who desires success should cultivate in his life—perseverance, integrity and faith in God.

A high-minded, honest and truthful young man may sometimes think success is slow in coming, but he will win in the end. The saying that "One cannot be honest and live" is as old as the devil, and, like the devil, it is false.

Avoid an overindulgent spending of money. It is not hard work, but self-indulgence that ruins men. Revelry and luxury are the enemies of success. Real happiness consists not in increasing riches, but in limiting one's wants.

CHURCHES NEED GRADUATES.

By Rev. W. R. Rogers.

As multitudes of graduates have passed out from the college and university halls, many of our alert religious workers have found themselves asking: "Why do not more of these enter the membership of the church?" It is true that some of them have become staunch members of active churches; but it is also apparent that the great mass of educated youth passes by religious institutions.

In short, there are many conservative minds who feel that the church is not attracting enough of the college and university men, so that there is no more important and timely question that can be asked than this: "What must the church do to enlist the attention and services of the college and university graduate?"

It seems apparent that the pulpit that is to attract the graduate must, in the first place, be sincere, practical and careful in its thought. It is true that there are some men who pass from college who need primarily a more manly character, and there may be others who, in their indifference, are satisfied with a diploma. But the normal college graduate comes forth with a mind that is alert and hungry for truth—a mind that shrinks from loose thought and will not respect intellectual timidity. The college graduate has learned to think deeply on evolution, and no church can gain his interest by referring to the evolutionary theory with merely a sarcastic remark. The graduates of recent years have learned much about psychology, and the clergyman that would hold their respect cannot pass it over with a joke.

It is true that the church should not be carried away with evolution or the new psychology; it should not transform its pulpits into laboratories for tracing the ascent of man and dissecting the experiences of the soul. But at least, if it would attract the student, it must cease to trifle and manifest a respect for scholarship.

In brief, the mind of the modern college graduate is characterized by mental frankness, and if the church is to draw college men it must meet them with a similar candor.

There exists to-day too much of a difference between the teachings of the Christian college and some of the preaching of the Christian pulpit. The college is eager to cultivate the scientific spirit, but often the very churches that bring support to the institution are bitter in their denunciation of progressive thinking. Yes, even the theological seminaries and the church do not seem to find that all of the seminaries request that new light be shed on Biblical interpretation, on the other hand the very pulpits that mother theological schools often deny an advance in Bible study as irreligious.

The supreme need of our day is that the colleges and churches adjust themselves to each other, so that the graduate can pass without jar or hitch from the school to the church. If the college is too far advanced let it slacken its step. But if the church is tardy and lumbering in its growth let it move forward.

If the church is to attract the graduate it must remember that its task is not that of overthrowing what the scholar has learned in college, but that of adding to what he has there acquired.

The fact is we need this army of young graduates and thinkers in our churches to-day. But if we are to enlist their interest we should not oppose scholarship, but rather meet them with an intellectual fairness and reverence for truth as well as righteousness.

CHRIST THE LIBERATOR. By Rev. N. B. Carver.

Christ is the divine liberator. There are many ways of looking at the Savior, but none better than this. The embassy of Christ to this world was the most important event in human history.

He came as an ambassador from the court of heaven to liberate the captive of earth. His coming was the fulfillment of prophecy. He came to do many things for man, but above all he came to set men free from the dominion and slavery of sin.

We have had many saviors and redeemers of men. Washington led the Colonial fathers to independence, and Lincoln set three million slaves free. But Jesus Christ came to lead all men toward spiritual independence, and liberated a world of human beings from the bondage of evil.

I believe in the old-fashioned doctrine of a personal devil and the natural depravity of human nature. Evolution, environment and the advancement of civilization are pleasant terms to conjure with. But it is a self-evident fact, based upon a careful study of human history, that the whole moral tendency of the race was desperately downward until the advent of Jesus Christ, the divine liberator.

Business.—Business can never be an excuse for the Christian to forget to discharge his religious duties, nor can a Christian business man live in accordance with the dictates of Christ and prevent his employes discharging them. He must be a shining example to them in Christian life. Rev. Dr. Darlington, Episcopalian, Brooklyn, N. Y.

It is impossible that a man who is false to his friends should be true to his country.—Bishop Berkeley.