

'Strike up, Batchees, ye little angel!' shouted Blaney, the appellation a concession to the minister's presence; and away went Baptiste in a rollicking French song with the English chorus—

'Then blow, ye winds, in the morning,  
Blow, ye winds, ay oh!  
Blow, ye winds, in the morning,  
Blow, blow, blow.'

And at each 'blow' every boot came down with a thump on the plank floor that shook the solid roof. After the second round, Mr. Craig jumped upon the bench, and called out—

'Three cheers for Billy the cook!'  
In the silence following the cheers Baptiste was heard to say, 'Bon! dat's mak me feel lak hit dat puddin' all hup meset, me.'

'Hear till the little baste!' said Blaney in disgust.

'Batchees,' remonstrated Sandy gravely, 'ye've more stomach than manners.'  
'Fu sure! but de more stomach dat's more better for dis puddin',' replied the little Frenchman cheerfully.

After a time the tables were cleared and pushed back to the wall, and pipes were produced. In all attitudes suggestive of comfort the men disposed themselves in a wide circle about the fire, which now roared and crackled up the great wooden chimney hanging from the roof. The lumberman's hour of bliss had arrived. Even old man Nelson looked a shade less melancholy than usual as he sat alone, well away from the fire, smoking steadily and silently. When the second pipes were well a-going, one of the men took down a violin from the wall and handed it to Lachlan Campbell. There were two brothers Campbell just out from Argyll, typical Highlanders: Lachlan, dark, silent, melancholy, with the face of a mystic, and Angus, red-haired, quick, impulsive, and devoted to his brother, a devotion he thought proper to cover under biting, sarcastic speech.

Lachlan, after much protestation, interspersed with gibes from his brother, took the violin, and, in response to the call from all sides, struck up 'Lord Macdonald's Reel.' In a moment the floor was filled with dancers, whooping and cracking their fingers in the wildest manner. Then Baptiste did the 'Red River Jig,' a most intricate and difficult series of steps, the men keeping time to the music with hands and feet.

When the jig was finished, Sandy called for 'Lochaber No More'; but Campbell said, 'No, no! I cannot play that to-night. Mr. Craig will play.'

Craig took the violin, and at the first note I knew he was no ordinary player. I did not recognise the music, but it was soft and thrilling, and got in by the heart, till every one was thinking his tenderest and saddest thoughts.

After he had played two or three exquisite bits, he gave Campbell his violin, saying, 'Now, "Lochaber," Lachlan.'

Without a word Lachlan began, not 'Lochaber'—he was not ready for that yet—but 'The Flowers o' the Forest,' and from that wandered through 'Auld Robin Gray' and 'The Land o' the Leal,' and so got at last to that most soul-subduing of Scottish laments, 'Lochaber No More.' At the first strain, his brother, who had thrown himself on some blankets behind the fire, turned over on his face, feigning sleep. Sandy M'Naughton took his pipe out of his mouth, and sat up straight and stiff, staring into vacancy, and Graeme, beyond the fire, drew a short, sharp breath. We had often sat, Graeme and I, in our student-days, in

the drawing-room at home, listening to his father wailing out 'Lochaber' upon the pipes, and I well knew that the awful minor strains were now eating their way into his soul.

Over and over again the Highlander played his lament. He had long since forgotten us, and was seeing visions of the hills and lochs and glens of his far-away native land, and making us, too, see strange things out of the dim past. I glanced at old man Nelson, and was startled at the eager, almost piteous, look in his eyes, and I wished Campbell would stop. Mr. Craig caught my eye, and, stepping over to Campbell, held out his hand for the violin. Lingeringly and lovingly the Highlander drew out the last strain, and silently gave the minister his instrument.

Without a moment's pause, and while the spell of 'Lochaber' was still upon us, the minister, with exquisite skill, fell into the refrain of that simple and beautiful camp-meeting hymn, 'The Sweet By and By.' After playing the verse through once, he sang softly the refrain. After the first verse, the men joined in the chorus; at first timidly, but by the time the third verse was reached they were shouting with throats full open, 'We shall meet on that beautiful shore.' When I looked at Nelson the eager light had gone out of his eyes, and in its place was a kind of determined hopelessness, as if in this new music he had no part.

After the voices had ceased, Mr. Craig played again the refrain, more and more softly and slowly; then laying the violin on Campbell's knees, he drew from his pocket his little Bible, and said—

'Men, with Mr. Graeme's permission, I want to read you something this Christmas Eve. You will all have heard it before, but you will like it none the less for that.'

His voice was soft, but clear and penetrating, as he read the eternal story of the angels and the shepherds and the Babe. And as he read, a slight motion of the hand or a glance of an eye made us see, as he was seeing, that whole radiant drama. The wonder, the timid joy, the tenderness, the mystery of it all, were borne in upon us with overpowering effect. He closed the book, and in the same low, clear voice went on to tell us how, in his home years ago, he used to stand on Christmas Eve listening in thrilling delight to his mother telling him the story, and how she used to make him see the shepherds and hear the sheep bleating near by, and how the sudden burst of glory used to make his heart jump.

'I used to be a little afraid of the angels, because a boy told me they were ghosts; but my mother told me better, and I didn't fear them any more. And the Babe, the dear little Baby—we all love a baby.' There was a quick, dry sob; it was from Nelson. 'I used to peek through under to see the little one in the straw, and wonder what things swaddling clothes were. Oh, it was all so real and so beautiful!' He paused, and I could hear the men breathing.

'But one Christmas Eve,' he went on, in a lower, sweeter tone, 'there was no one to tell me the story, and I grew to forget it, and went away to college, and learned to think that it was only a child's tale and was not for men. Then bad days came to me and worse, and I began to lose my grip of myself, of life, of hope, of godness, till one black Christmas, in the slums of a far-away city, when I had given up all, and the devil's arms were about me, I heard the story again. And as I listened, with a bitter ache in my heart, for I had put it all behind me, I suddenly found myself peeping under the shepherd's arms with a child's wonder at the Babe in the straw.

Then it came over me like great waves, that His name was Jesus, because it was He that should save men from their sins. Save! Save! The waves kept beating upon my ears, and before I knew, I had called out, "Oh! can He save me?" It was in a little mission meeting on one of the side streets, and they seemed to be used to that sort of thing there, for no one was surprised; and a young fellow leaned across the aisle to me and said, "Why! you just bet He can!" His surprise that I should doubt, his bright face and confident tone, gave me hope that perhaps it might be so. I held to that hope with all my soul, and—stretching up his arms, and with a quick glow in his face and a little break in his voice, 'He hasn't failed me yet; not once, not once!'

He stopped quite short, and I felt a good deal like making a fool of myself, for in those days I had not made up my mind about these things. Graeme, poor old chap, was gazing at him with a sad yearning in his dark eyes; big Sandy was sitting very stiff, and staring harder than ever into the fire; Baptiste was trembling with excitement; Blaney was openly wiping the tears away. But the face that held my eyes was that of old man Nelson. It was white, fierce, hungry-looking, his sunken eyes burning, his lips parted as if to cry.

The minister went on. 'I didn't mean to tell you this, men, it all came over me with a rush; but it is true, every word, and not a word will I take back. And, what's more, I can tell you this, what He did for me He can do for any man, and it doesn't make any difference what's behind him, and—leaning slightly forward, and with a little thrill of pathos vibrating in his voice—'O boys, why don't you give Him a chance at you? Without Him you'll never be the men you want to be, and you'll never get the better of that that's keeping some of you now from going back home. You know you'll never go back till you're the men you want to be.' Then, lifting up his face and throwing back his head, he said, as if to himself, 'Jesus! He shall save His people from their sins,' and then, 'Let us pray.'

Graeme leaned forward with his face in his hands; Baptiste and Blaney dropped on their knees; Sandy, the Campbells, and some others, stood up. Old man Nelson held his eyes steadily on the minister.

Only once before had I seen that look on a human face. A young fellow had broken through the ice on the river at home, and as the black water was dragging his fingers one by one from the slippery edges, there came over his face that same look. I used to wake up for many a night after in a sweat of horror, seeing the white face with its parting lips, and its piteous, dumb appeal, and the black water slowly sucking it down.

Nelson's face brought it all back; but during the prayer the face changed, and seemed to settle into resolve of some sort, stern, almost gloomy, as of a man with his last chance before him.

After the prayer Mr. Craig invited the men to a Christmas dinner next day in Black Rock. 'And because you are an independent lot, we'll charge you half a dollar for dinner and the evening show.' Then leaving a bundle of magazines and illustrated papers on the table—a godsend to the men—he said good-bye and went out.

I was to go with the minister, so I jumped into the sleigh first, and waited while he said good-bye to Graeme, who had been hard hit by the whole service, and seemed to want to say something. I heard Mr. Craig say cheerfully and confidently, 'It's a true bill: try Him.'