

BOYS AND GIRLS

Black Rock.

(A tale of the Selkirks, by Ralph Connor.)

CHAPTER XIV.—GRAEME'S NEW BIRTH.

There was more left in that grave than old man Nelson's dead body. It seemed to me that Graeme left part, at least, of his old self there, with his dead friend and comrade, in the quiet country churchyard. I waited long for the old careless, reckless spirit to appear, but he was never the same again. The change was unmistakable, but hard to define. He seemed to have resolved his life into a definite purpose. He was hardly so comfortable a fellow to be with; he made me feel even more lazy and useless than was my wont; but I respected him more, and liked him none the less. As a lion he was not a success. He would not roar. This was disappointing to me, and to his friends and mine, who had been waiting his return with eager expectation of tales of thrilling and bloodthirsty adventure.

His first days were spent in making right, or as nearly right as he could, the break that drove him to the west. His old firm (and I have had more respect for the humanity of lawyers ever since) behaved really well. They proved the restoration of their confidence in his integrity and ability by offering him a place in the firm, which, however, he would not accept. Then, when he felt clean, as he said, he posted off home, taking me with him. During the railway journey of four hours he hardly spoke; but when we had left the town behind, and had fairly got upon the country road that led toward the home ten miles away, his speech came to him in a great flow. His spirits ran over. He was like a boy returning from his first college term. His very face wore the boy's open, innocent, earnest look that used to attract men to him in his first college year. His delight in the fields and woods, in the sweet country air and the sunlight was without bound. How often had we driven this road together in the old days!

Every turn was familiar. The swamp where the tamaracks stood straight and slim out of their beds of moss; the brule, as we used to call it, where the pine-stumps, huge and blackened, were half-hidden by the new growth of poplars and soft maples; the big hill, where we used to get out and walk when the roads were bad; the orchards, where the harvest apples were best and most accessible—all had their memories.

It was one of these perfect afternoons that so often come in the early Canadian summer, before Nature grows weary with the heat. The white gravel road was trimmed on either side with turf of living green, close cropped by the sheep that wandered in flocks along its whole length. Beyond the picturesque snake-fences stretched the fields of springing grain, of varying shades of green, with here and there a dark brown patch, marking a turnip field or summer fallow, and far back were the woods of maple and beech and elm, with here and there the tufted top of a mighty pine, the lonely representative of a vanished race, standing clear above the humbler trees.

As we drove through the big swamp where the yawning, haunted gully plunges down to its gloomy depths, Graeme reminded me of that night when our horse saw something in that same gully, and refused to go past; and I felt again, though it was broad daylight, something of the grue that shivered down my back, as I saw in the

moonlight the gleam of a white thing far among the pine trunks.

As we came nearer home the houses became familiar. Every house had its tale: we had eaten or slept in most of them; we had sampled apples, and cherries, and plums from their orchards, openly as guests, or secretly as marauders, under cover of night—the more delightful way, I fear. Ah! happy days, with these innocent crimes and fleeting remorse, how bravely we faced them, and how gaily we lived them, and how yearningly we look back at them now! The sun was just dipping into the tree-tops of the distant woods behind as we came to the top of the last hill that overlooked the valley, in which lay the village of Riverdale. Wooded hills stood about it on three sides, and, where the hills faded out, there lay the mill-pond sleeping and smiling in the sun. Through the village ran the white road, up past the old frame church, and on to the white manse standing among the trees. That was Graeme's home, and mine too, for I had never known another worthy of the name. We held up our team to look down over the valley, with its rampart of wooded hills, its shining pond, and its nestling village, and on past to the church and the white manse, hiding among the trees. The beauty, the peace, the warm, loving homeliness of the scene came about our hearts, but, being men, we could find no words.

'Let's go,' cried Graeme, and down the hill we tore and rocked and swayed to the amazement of the steady team, whose education from the earliest years had impressed upon their minds the criminality of attempting to do anything but walk carefully down a hill, at least for two-thirds of the way. Through the village, in a cloud of dust, we swept, catching a glimpse of a well-known face here and there, and flinging a salutation as we passed, leaving the owner of the face rooted to his place in astonishment at the sight of Graeme whirling on in his old-time, well-known reckless manner. Only old Dunc. McLeod was equal to the moment, for as Graeme called out, 'Hello, Dunc!' the old man lifted up his hands, and called back in an awed voice: 'Bless my soul! is it yourself?'

'Stands his whiskey well, poor old chap!' was Graeme's comment.

As we neared the church he pulled up his team, and we went quietly past the sleepers there, then again on the full run down the gentle slope, over the little brook, and up to the gate. He had hardly got his team pulled up before, flinging me the lines, he was out over the wheel, for coming down the walk, with her hands lifted high, was a dainty little lady, with the face of an angel. In a moment Graeme had her in his arms. I heard the faint cry, 'My boy, my boy,' and got down on the other side to attend to my off horse, surprised to find my hands trembling and my eyes full of tears. Back upon the steps stood an old gentleman, with white hair and flowing beard, handsome, straight, and stately—Graeme's father, waiting his turn.

'Welcome home, my lad,' was his greeting, as he kissed his son, and the tremor of his voice, and the sight of the two men kissing each other, like women, sent me again to my horses' heads.

'There's Connor, mother!' shouted out Graeme, and the dainty little lady, in her black silk and white lace, came out to me quickly, with outstretched hands.

'You, too, are welcome home,' she said, and kissed me.

I stood with my hat off, saying something about being glad to come, but wishing that I could get away before I should make quite a fool of myself. For as I looked down upon that beautiful face, pale, except for a faint flush upon each faded cheek, and read the story of pain endured and conquered, and as I thought of all the long years of waiting and of vain hoping, I found my throat dry and sore, and the words would not come. But her quick sense needed no words, and she came to my help.

'You will find Jack at the stable,' she said, smiling; 'he ought to have been here.'

The stable! Why had I not thought of that before? Thankfully now my words came—

'Yes, certainly, I'll find him, Mrs. Graeme. I suppose he's as much of a scapegrace as ever,' and off I went to look up Graeme's young brother, who had given every promise in the old days of developing into as stirring a rascal as one could desire; but who, as I found out later, had not lived these years in his mother's house for nothing.

'Oh, Jack's a good boy,' she answered, smiling again, as she turned toward the other two, now waiting for her upon the walk.

(To be Continued.)

Ginger Jack.

(By Mary Bradford Whiting, in 'Dawn of Day'.)

No one who saw Ginger Jack needed to ask how he got his name. Rings of red hair lay all over his head, in a confusion of curls that glittered like burnished gold in the sunlight, but which shone brightly even on the darkest day.

Ginger Jack had suffered much on account of his hair ever since he could remember; his feelings were as sensitive as his temper was quick, and he had never ceased to resent it when he was asked how much carrots were in the market, or when an ingenious friend pretended to warm his hands at the fiery head. Who his parents were nobody knew; brothers and sisters he had none; of a home he had never so much as heard; his lodging was an archway or a doorstep, or any other nook into which he could creep out of sight of the police, and his meals were the bits and scraps that he begged or stole, washed down with a drink from the nearest water-tap. Of books Jack was densely and blindly ignorant; not a syllable could he read, and he troubled his head about his lack of learning no more than did the little black sparrows.

There were times when Jack was very cold and very hungry; when his thin, ragged clothes were no more protection than if they were made of paper, and when his dinner hour was so fashionably late that sometimes night came on before he had found anything with which to follow his morning crust; and yet, if anyone had asked him if he liked his wandering life, he would have been filled with astonishment at such a foolish question. What if London streets are dirty and noisy—they are the most magnificent play-place that was ever made. Travellers tell us of their adventures in savage places and desert wastes; but no savage country and no desert waste is so full of dangers and excitements as the crowded thoroughfares of the great city. Let people boast of making their way through pathless jungles who have never dodged through carts, vans, and omnibuses when traffic is at its thickest; let those brag