

Black Rock.

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

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

We were a quiet combination. Old 'Beetles,' whose nickname was prophetic of his future fame as a bugman, as the fellows irreverently said; 'Stumpy' Smith, a demon bowler; Polly Lindsay, slow as ever and as sure as when he held the half-back line with Graeme, and used to make my heart stand still with terror at his cool deliberation. But he was never known to fumble nor to funk, and somehow he always got us out safe enough. Then there was Rattray—'Rat' for short—who, from a swell, had developed into a cynic with a sneer, awfully clever and a good enough fellow at heart. Little 'Wig' Martin, the sharpest quarter ever seen, and big Barney Lundy, centre scrimmage, whose terrific roar and rush had often struck terror to the enemy's heart, and who was Graeme's slave. Such was the party.

As the supper went on my fears began to vanish, for if Graeme did not 'roar,' he did the next best thing—ate and talked quite up to his old form. Now we played our matches over again, bitterly lamenting the 'ifs' that had lost us the championships, and wildly approving the tackles that had saved, and the runs that had made the 'Varsity crowd go mad with delight and had won for us. And as their names came up in talk, we learned how life had gone with those who had been our comrades of ten years ago. Some, success had lifted to high places; some, failure had left upon the rocks, and a few lay in their graves.

But as the evening wore on, I began to wish that I had left out the wines, for the men began to drop an occasional oath, though I had let them know during the summer that Graeme was not the man he had been. But Graeme smoked and talked and heeded not, till Rattray swore by that name most sacred of all ever borne by man. Then Graeme opened upon him in a cool, slow way—

'What an awful fool a man is, to damn things as you do, Rat. Things are not damned. It is men who are; and that is too bad to be much talked about. But when a man brings out of his foul mouth the name of Jesus Christ—here he lowered his voice—it's a shame—it's more, it's a crime.'

There was dead silence, then Rattray replied—

'I suppose you're right enough, it is bad form; but crime is rather strong, I think.'

'Not if you consider who it is,' said Graeme with emphasis.

'Oh, come now,' broke in Beetles. 'Religion is all right, is a good thing, and I believe a necessary thing for the race, but no one takes seriously any longer the Christ myth.'

'What about your mother, Beetles?' put in Wig Martin.

Beetles consigned him to the pit and was silent, for his father was an Episcopal clergyman, and his mother a saintly woman.

'I fooled with that for some time, Beetles, but it won't do. You can't build a religion that will take the devil out of a man on a myth. That won't do the trick. I don't want to argue about it, but I am quite convinced the myth theory is not reasonable, and besides, it won't work.'

'Will the other work?' asked Rattray, with a sneer.

'Sure!' said Graeme; 'I've seen it.'

'Where?' challenged Rattray. 'I haven't seen much of it.'

'Yes, you have, Rattray, you know you have,' said Wig again. But Rattray ignored him.

'I'll tell you, boys,' said Graeme. 'I want you to know, anyway, why I believe what I do.'

Then he told them the story of old man Nelson, from the old coast days, before I knew him, to the end. He told the story well. The stern fight and the victory of the life, and the self-sacrifice and the pathos of the death appealed to those men, who loved fight and could understand sacrifice.

'That's why I believe in Jesus Christ, and that's why I think it a crime to fling his name about!'

'I wish to Heaven I could say that,' said Beetles.

'Keep wishing hard enough and it will come to you,' said Graeme.

'Look here, old chap,' said Rattray; 'you're quite right about this; I'm willing to own up. Wig is correct. I know a few, at least, of that stamp, but most of these who go in for that sort of thing are not much account.'

'For ten years, Rattray,' said Graeme in a downright matter-of-fact way, 'you and I have tried this sort of thing—tapping a bottle—and we got out of it all there is to be got, paid well for it, too, and—faugh! you know it's not good enough, and the more you go in for it, the more you curse yourself. So I have quit this and I am going in for the other.'

'What! going in for preaching?'

'Not much—railroading—money in it—and lending a hand to fellows on the rocks.'

'I say, don't you want a centre forward?' said big Barney in his deep voice.

'Every man must play his game in his place, old chap. I'd like to see you tackle it, though, right well,' said Graeme earnestly. And so he did, in the after years, and good tackling it was. But that is another story.

'But I say, Graeme,' persisted Beetles, 'about this business, do you mean to say you go the whole thing—Jonah, you know, and the rest of it?'

Graeme hesitated, then said—

'I haven't much of a creed, Beetles; don't really know how much I believe. But,' by this time he was standing, 'I do know that good is good, and bad is bad, and good and bad are not the same. And I know a man's a fool to follow the one, and a wise man to follow the other, and,' lowering his voice, 'I believe God is at the back of a man who wants to get done with bad. I've tried all that folly,' sweeping his hand over the glasses and bottles, 'and all that goes with it, and I've done with it.'

'I'll go you that far,' roared big Barney, following his captain as of yore.

'Good man,' said Graeme, striking hands with him.

'Put me down,' said little Wig cheerfully.

Then I took up the word, for there rose before me the scene in the League saloon, and I saw the beautiful face with the deep shining eyes, and I was speaking for her again. I told them of Craig and his fight for these men's lives. I told them, too, of how I had been too indolent to begin. 'But,' I said, 'I am going this far from to-night,' and I swept the bottles into the champagne tub.

'I say,' said Polly Lindsay, coming up in his old style, slow but sure, 'let's all go in, say for five years.' And so we did. We didn't sign anything, but every man shook hands with Graeme.

And as I told Craig about this a year later, when he was on his way back from his Old Land trip to join Graeme in the mountains, he threw up his head in the old way, and said, 'It was well done. It must have been worth seeing. Old man Nelson's work is not done yet. Tell me again,' and he made me go over the whole scene with all the details put in.

But when I told Mrs. Mavor, after two years had gone, she only said, 'Old things are passed away, all things are become new'; but the light glowed in her eyes till I could not see their color. But all that, too, is another story.

(To be Continued.)

Pearls? or Toads.

(Helena H. Thomas, in 'The Evangelist'.)

She was a stranger among us and was so beautiful of face and so winsome of manner that it was little wonder that, for a time, she was the centre of attraction. I was not near enough, however, to understand what she said, but as I saw the sparkling eyes, and heard the rippling laugh, I, too, felt the charm of her presence.

'Well, well!' exclaimed I, as Henry Jenkins left the group of young people, and took a seat near me, 'such self-denial is surely praiseworthy, but I cannot accept the sacrifice.'

The young man seemed at a loss for words, and I continued, 'Yes, I insist upon your returning. If your gallantry will not permit of it I will accompany you.'

'You misunderstand my motives in joining you,' said Henry, as I arose to lead the way, 'I do not like to appear critical, but the truth is that Miss Carter's bright speeches are so embellished with slang that her society has no charm for me.'

The pretty girl had so taken my heart by storm when we exchanged greetings, that it was hard to believe that her conversation was so objectionable. I knew that Henry Jenkins never allowed himself to use slang, but Mabel Carter must indeed be a slave to the bad habit if he could not endure to hear her converse.

'Oh, excuse me,' said she, presently, checking herself in the middle of a sentence, while the blood mantled her cheek, 'such slangy phrases are only fit for my set, but the truth is I am so full of slang that it comes out when I dreadfully want to be proper.'

'You remember the fairy tale,' I said, smiling, 'of the girl from whose lips dropped pearls and diamonds?'

'And the other girl, from whose lips dropped toads,' said Miss Carter, quickly. 'I see you think using slang is like that.'

While we were speaking Henry Jenkins passed. The young girl's eyes followed him and she said, 'Mr. Jenkins seems head and shoulders above the rest of the fellows. I should like to become better acquainted with him, but he seems to avoid me. I wonder why it is?'

I did not enlighten her, for of course I could not repeat what her critic had said of her. Besides, it was evident that she realized she had formed a habit which weakened her character.

Thinking of her, however, I come to the dear young people the wide world over with 'don't use it.' True the slang phrases that fall from the lips of the 'girl of the period' may have a certain charm for some, but rest assured that slang will never elevate a girl in the minds of those whose respect is worth having.

So cultivate the best style. This alone is worth while.