

BOYS AND GIRLS

Black Rock.

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

CHAPTER III.

WATERLOO. OUR FIGHT—HIS VICTORY

The sports were over, and there remained still an hour to be filled in before dinner. It was an hour full of danger to Craig's hopes of victory, for the men were wild with excitement, and ready for the most reckless means of 'slinging their dust.' I could not but admire the skill with which Mr. Craig caught their attention.

'Gentlemen,' he called out, 'we've forgotten the judge of the great race. Three cheers for Mr. Connor!'

Two of the shantymen picked me up and hoisted me on their shoulders while the cheers were given.

'Announce the Punch and Judy,' he entreated me, in a low voice. I did so in a little speech, and was forthwith borne aloft, through the street to the booth, followed by the whole crowd, cheering like mad.

The excitement of the crowd caught me, and for an hour I squeaked and worked the wires of the immortal and unhappy family in a manner hitherto unapproached by me at least. I was glad enough when Graeme came to tell me to send the men in to dinner. This Mr. Punch did in the most gracious manner, and again with cheers for Punch's master they trooped tumultuously into the tent.

We had only well begun when Baptiste came in quietly but hurriedly and whispered to me—

'M'sieu Craig, he's gone to Slavin's, and would lak you and M'sieu Graeme would follow queek.' Sandy he's take one leel drink at de stable, and he's go mad lak one diable.'

I sent him for Graeme, who was presiding at dinner, and set off for Slavin's at a run. There I found Mr. Craig and Nelson holding Sandy, more than half drunk, back from Slavin, who, stripped to the shirt, was coolly waiting with a taunting smile.

'Let me go, Mr. Craig,' Sandy was saying, 'I am a good Presbyterian. He is a Papist thief; and he has my money; and I will have it out of the soul of him.'

'Let him go, preacher,' sneered Slavin, 'I'll cool him off for yez. But ye'd better hold him if yez wants his mug left on to him.'

'Let him go!' Keefe was shouting.

'Hands off!' Blaney was echoing.

I pushed my way in. 'What's up?' I cried.

'Mr. Connor,' said Sandy solemnly. 'It is a gentleman you are, though your name is against you, and I am a good Presbyterian, and I can give you the Commandments and Reasons annexed to them; but you'n's a thief, a Papist thief, and I am justified in getting my money out of his soul.'

'But,' I remonstrated, 'you won't get it in this way.'

'He has my money,' reiterated Sandy.

'He is a blank liar, and he's afraid to take it up,' said Slavin, in a low, cool tone.

With a roar Sandy broke away and rushed at him; but, without moving from his tracks, Slavin met him with a straight left-hand and laid him flat.

'Hooray,' yelled Blaney, 'Ireland for ever!' and seizing the iron poker, swung it around his head, crying, 'Back, or, by the holy Moses, I'll kill the first man that interferes wid the game.'

'Give it to him!' Keefe said savagely.

Sandy rose slowly, gazing round stupidly.

'He don't know what hit him,' laughed Keefe.

This roused the Highlander, and saying, 'I'll settle you afterwards, Mister Keefe,' he rushed in again at Slavin. Again Slavin met him again with his left, staggered him, and, before he fell, took a step forward and delivered a terrific righthand blow on his jaw. Poor Sandy went down in a heap amid the yells of Blaney, Keefe, and some others of the gang. I was in despair when in came Baptiste and Graeme.

One look at Sandy, and Baptiste tore off his coat and cap, slammed them on the floor, danced on them, and with a long-drawn 'sap-r-r-r,' rushed at Slavin. But Graeme caught him by the back of the neck, saying, 'Hold on, little man,' and turning to Slavin, pointed to Sandy, who was re-veiving under Nelson's care, and said, 'What's this for?'

'Ask him,' said Slavin insolently. 'He knows.'

'What is it, Nelson?'

Nelson explained that Sandy, after drinking some at the stable and a glass at the Black Rock Hotel, had come down here with Keefe and the others, had lost his money—and was accusing Slavin of robbing him.

'Did you furnish him with liquor?' said Graeme sternly.

'It is none of your business,' replied Slavin, with an oath.

'I shall make it my business. It is not the first time my men have lost money in this saloon.'

'You lie,' said Slavin, with deliberate emphasis.

'Slavin,' said Graeme quietly, 'it's a pity you said that, because, unless you apologise in one minute, I shall make you sorry.'

'Apologise?' roared Slavin, 'apologise to you?' calling him a vile name.

Graeme grew white, and said even more slowly, 'Now you'll have to take it; no apology will do.'

He slowly stripped off coat and vest. Mr. Craig interposed, begging Graeme to let the matter pass. 'Surely he is not worth it.'

'Mr. Craig,' said Graeme, with an easy smile, 'you don't understand. No man can call me that name and walk around afterwards feeling well.'

Then, turning to Slavin, he said, 'Now, if you want a minute's rest, I can wait.'

Slavin, with a curse, bade him come.

'Blaney,' said Graeme sharply, 'you get back.' Blaney promptly stepped back to Keefe's side. 'Nelson, you and Baptiste can see that they stay there.' The old man nodded and looked at Craig, who simply said, 'Do the best you can.'

It was a good fight. Slavin had plenty of pluck, and for a time forced the fighting, Graeme guarding easily and tapping him aggravatingly about the nose and eyes, drawing blood, but not disabling him. Gradually there came a look of fear into Slavin's eyes, and the beads stood upon his face. He had met his master.

'Now, Slavin, you're beginning to be sorry; and now I am going to show you what you are made of.' Graeme made one or two lightning passes, struck Slavin one, two, three terrific blows, and laid him quite flat and senseless. Keefe and Blaney both sprang forward, but there was a savage kind of growl.

'Hold, there!' It was old man Nelson looking along a pistol barrel. 'You know me, Keefe,' he said. 'You won't do any murder this time.'

Keefe turned green and yellow, and staggered back, while Slavin slowly rose to his feet.

'Will you take some more?' said Graeme. 'You haven't got much; but mind I have stopped playing with you. Put up your gun, Nelson. No one will interfere now.'

Slavin hesitated, then rushed, but Graeme stepped to meet him, and we saw Slavin's heels in the air as he fell back upon his neck and shoulders and lay still, with his toes quivering.

'Bon!' yelled Baptiste. 'Bully boy! Dat's de bon stuff. Dat's larn him one good lesson.' But immediately he shrieked, 'Gar-r-r-e a vous!'

He was too late, for there was a crash of breaking glass, and Graeme fell to the floor with a long deep cut on the side of his head. Keefe had hurled a bottle with all too sure an aim, and had fled. I thought he was dead; but we carried him out, and in a few minutes he groaned, opened his eyes, and sank again into insensibility.

'Where can we take him?' I cried.

'To my shack,' said Mr. Craig.

'Is there no place nearer?'

'Yes; Mrs. Mavor's. I shall run on to tell her.'

She met us at the door. I had in mind to say some words of apology, but when I looked upon her face I forgot my words, forgot my business at her door, and stood simply looking.

'Come in! Bring him in! Please do not wait,' she said, and her voice was sweet and soft and firm.

We laid him in a large room at the back of the shop over which Mrs. Mavor lived. Together we dressed the wound, her firm white fingers, skilful as if with long training. Before the dressing was finished I sent Craig off, for the time had come for the Magic Lantern in the church, and I knew how critical the moment was in our fight. 'Go,' I said; 'he is coming to, and we do not need you.'

In a few moments more Graeme revived, and, gazing about, asked, 'What's all this about?' and then, recollecting, 'Ah! that brute Keefe'; then seeing my anxious face he said carelessly, 'Awful bore, ain't it? Sorry to trouble you, old fellow.'

'You be hanged!' I said shortly; for his old sweet smile was playing about his lips, and was almost too much for me. 'Mrs. Mavor and I are in command, and you must keep perfectly still.'

'Mrs. Mavor?' he said, in surprise. She came forward, with a slight flush on her face.

'I think you know me, Mr. Graeme.'

'I have often seen you, and wished to know you. I am sorry to bring you this trouble.'

'You must not say so,' she replied, 'but let me do all for you that I can. And now the doctor says you are to lie still.'

'The doctor? Oh! you mean Connor. He is hardly there yet. You don't know each other. Permit me to present Mr. Connor, Mrs. Mavor.'

As she bowed slightly her eyes looked into mine with serious gaze, not inquiring, yet searching my soul. As I looked into her eyes I forgot everything about me, and when I recalled myself it seemed as if I had been away in some far place. It was not their color or their brightness; I do not yet know their color, and I have often looked into them; and they were not bright; but they were clear, and one could look far down into them, and in their depths see a glowing, steady light. As I went to get some drugs from the Black Rock doctor,