

BOYS AND GIRLS

Black Rock.

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

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

I would not have missed his meeting with Craig. Nelson was busy with tea. Craig was writing near the window. He looked up as Graeme came in, and nodded an easy good-evening; but Graeme strode to him, and, putting one hand on his shoulder, held out his other for Craig to take.

After a moment's surprise, Craig rose to his feet, and facing him squarely, took the offered hand in both of his and held it fast without a word. Graeme was the first to speak, and his voice was deep with emotion—

'You are a great man, a good man. I'd give something to have your grit.'

Poor Craig stood looking at him, not daring to speak for some moments, then he said quietly—

'Not good nor great, but, thank God, not quite a traitor.'

'Good man!' went on Graeme, patting him on the shoulder. 'Good man! but it's tough.'

Craig sat down quickly, saying, 'Don't do that, old chap!'

I went up with Craig to Mrs. Mavor's door. She did not hear us coming, but stood near the window gazing up at the mountains. She was dressed in some rich soft stuff, and wore at her breast a bunch of wild-flowers. I had never seen her so beautiful. I did not wonder that Craig paused with his foot upon the threshold to look at her. She turned and saw us. With a glad cry, 'Oh! my darling; you have come to me,' she came with outstretched arms. I turned and fled, but the cry and the vision were long with me.

It was decided that night that Mrs. Mavor should go the next week. A miner and his wife were going east, and I too would join the party.

The camp went into mourning at the news; but it was understood that any display of grief before Mrs. Mavor was bad form. She was not to be annoyed.

But when I suggested that she should leave quietly, and avoid the pain of saying good-bye, she flatly refused—

'I must say good-bye to every man. They love me and I love them.'

It was decided, too, at first, that there should be nothing in the way of a testimonial, but when Craig found out that the men were coming to her with all sorts of extraordinary gifts, he agreed that it would be better that they should unite in one gift. So it was agreed that I should buy a ring for her. And were it not that the contributions were strictly limited to one dollar, the purse that Slavin handed her when Shaw read the address at the farewell supper would have been many times filled with the gold that was pressed upon the committee. There were no speeches at the supper, except one by myself in reply on Mrs. Mavor's behalf. She had given me the words to say, and I was thoroughly prepared, else I should not have got through. I began in the usual way: 'Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Mavor is—' but I got no further, for at the mention of her name the men stood on the chairs and yelled until they could yell no more. There were over two hundred and fifty of them, and the effect was overpowering. But I got through my speech. I remember it well. It began—

'Mrs. Mavor is greatly touched by this mark of your love, and she will wear your

ring always with pride.' And it ended with—

'She has one request to make, that you will be true to the League, and that you stand close about the man who did most to make it. She wishes me to say that however far away she may have to go, she is leaving her heart in Black Rock, and she can think of no greater joy than to come back to you again.'

Then they had 'The Sweet By and By,' but the men would not join in the refrain, unwilling to lose a note of the glorious voice they loved to hear. Before the last verse she beckoned to me. I went to her standing by Craig's side as he played for her. 'Ask them to sing, she entreated; 'I cannot bear it.'

'Mrs. Mavor wishes you to sing in the refrain,' I said, and at once the men sat up and cleared their throats. The singing was not good, but at the first sound of the hoarse notes of the men Craig's head went down over the organ, for he was thinking I suppose of the days before them when they would long in vain for that thrilling voice that soared high over their own hoarse tones. And after the voices died away he kept on playing till, half turning toward him, she sang alone once more the refrain in a voice low and sweet and tender, as if for him alone. And so he took it, for he smiled up at her his old smile full of courage and full of love.

Then for one whole hour she stood saying good-bye to those rough, gentle-hearted men whose inspiration to goodness she had been for five years. It was very wonderful and very quiet. It was understood that there was to be no nonsense, and Abe had been heard to declare that he would 'throw out any cotton-backed fool who couldn't hold himself down,' and further, he had enjoined them to remember that 'her arm wasn't a pump handle.'

At last they were all gone, all but her guard of honour—Shaw, Vernon Winton, Geordie, Nixon, Abe, Nelson, Craig, and myself.

This was the real farewell; for though in the early light of the next morning two hundred men stood silent about the stage, and then as it moved out waved their hats and yelled madly, this was the last touch they had of her hand. Her place was up on the driver's seat between Abe and Mr. Craig, who held little Marjorie on his knee. The rest of the guard of honor were to follow with Graeme's team. It was Winton's fine sense that kept Graeme from following them close. 'Let her go out alone,' and so we held back and watched her go.

She stood with her back towards Abe's plunging four-horse team, and steadying herself with one hand on Abe's shoulder, gazed down upon us. Her head was bare, her lips parted in a smile, her eyes glowing with their own deep light; and so, facing us, erect and smiling, she drove away, waving us farewell till Abe swung his team into the canyon road and we saw her no more. A sigh shuddered through the crowd, and with a sob in his voice, Winton said: 'God help us all.'

I close my eyes and see it all again. The waving crowd of dark-faced men, the plunging horses, and, high up beside the driver, the swaying, smiling, waving figure, and about all the mountains, framing the picture with their dark sides and white peaks tipped with the gold of the rising sun. It is a picture I love to look upon, albeit it calls up another that I can never see but through tears.

I look across a strip of ever-widening water, at a group of men upon the wharf, standing with heads uncovered, every man a hero, though not a man of them suspects it, least of all the man who stands in front, strong, resolute, self-conquered. And gazing long, I think I see him turn again to his place among the men of the mountains, not forgetting, but every day remembering the great love that came to him, and remembering, too, that love is not all. It is then the tears come.

But for that picture two of us at least are better men to-day.

(To be Continued.)

An Incident of the American War.

The following story is told by an eyewitness. It illustrates the heroism and the nobility of the American soldiers, on both sides, in that great struggle.

'Shortly after the battle of Richmond (Ky.) in 1862, it was my duty to visit the battlefield, to identify, if possible, the body of one of my friends, and remove it to his parents' home,' says the narrator. 'While riding slowly over the scene of the battle, I heard groans, which I was sure came from a cornfield near at hand. Looking down the corn rows I soon discovered two wounded soldiers, lying about forty yards apart. One was a Federal and the other was a Confederate. A cannon ball had broken and terribly mangled both of the Confederate's legs, while the Federal was shot through the body and thigh.'

"I am dying for water," I heard the Federal say, just as I discovered them. His words sounded as if they came from a parched mouth.

"I have some water in my canteen. You are welcome to a drink if you'll come here," said the Confederate, who had feebly raised his head from the ground to look at his late enemy when he heard his pitiful cry for water.

"I couldn't move to save my life," groaned the Federal, as he dropped his head to the ground, while his whole body quivered with agony.

'Then I beheld an act of heroism which held me spellbound until it was too late for me to give the assistance I should have rendered. The Confederate lifted his head again and took another look at his wounded foe, and I saw an expression of tender pity come over his pain-distorted face as he said:

"Hold out a little longer, Yank, and I'll try to come to you." Then the brave fellow by digging his fingers in the ground and catching hold of the cornstalks, painfully dragged himself to the Federal's side, the blood from his mangled legs making a red trail the entire distance. The tears ran down my cheeks like rain, and, out of sympathy for him, I groaned every time he moved, but I was so lost to everything except the fellow's heroism that I did not once think of helping him.

'When the painful journey was finished he offered his canteen to the Federal, who took it and drank eagerly, the water seeming to sizzle as it passed down his parched throat. Then, with a deep sigh of relief, he reached out to the Confederate, and it was plain to see, as they clasped hands and looked into each other's eyes, that whatever of hate may have rankled once in the hearts of these men, had now given place to mutual sympathy and love. Even while I watched them I saw the Confederate's body quiver as if in a spasm of pain, and when his head dropped to the ground I knew that a hero had crossed the dark river. The Federal kissed the dead hero's hand repeatedly, and cried like a child, until I had him removed to the hospital, where he, too, died the next day.'—'Forward'