

BOYS AND GIRLS

Black Rock.

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

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

By this time Craig was standing before her, his face deadly pale. When she came to the end of her words, he said, in a voice low, sweet, and thrilling with emotion—
'Ah, if you only knew! Do not make me forget myself. You do not guess what you are doing.'

'What am I doing? What is there to know, but that you tell me easily to go? She was struggling with the tears she was too proud to let him see.

He put his hands resolutely behind him, looking at her as if studying her face for the first time. Under his searching look she dropped her eyes, and the warm color came slowly up into her neck and face; then, as if with a sudden resolve, she lifted her eyes to his, and looked back at him unflinchingly.

He started, surprised, drew slowly near, put his hands upon her shoulders, surprise giving place to wild joy. She never moved her eyes; they drew him towards her. He took her face between his hands, smiled into her eyes, kissed her lips. She did not move; he stood back from her, threw up his head, and laughed aloud. She came to him, put her head upon his breast; and lifting up her face said, 'Kiss me.' He put his arms about her, bent down and kissed her lips again, and then reverently her brow. Then putting her back from him, but still holding both her hands, he cried—
'No! you shall not go. I shall never let you go.'

She gave a little sigh of content, and, smiling up at him, said—

'I can go now'; but even as she spoke the flush died from her face, and she shuddered.

'Never!' he almost shouted; 'nothing shall take you away. We shall work here together.'

'Ah, if we could, if we only could,' she said piteously.

'Why not?' he demanded fiercely.

'You will send me away. You will say it is right for me to go,' she replied sadly.

'Do we not love each other?' was his impatient answer.

'Ah! yes, love,' she said; 'but love is not all.'

'No!' cried Craig; 'but love is the best.'

'Yes!' she said sadly; 'love is the best, and it is for love's sake we will do the best.'

'There is no better work than here. Surely this is best,' and he pictured his plans before her. She listened eagerly.

'Oh! if it should be right,' she cried, 'I will do what you say. You are good, you are wise, you shall tell me.'

She could not have recalled him better. He stood silent some moments, then burst out passionately—

'Why then has love come to us? We did not seek it. Surely love is of God. Does God mock us?'

He threw himself into his chair, pouring out his words of passionate protestation. She listened, smiling, then came to him and, touching his hair as a mother might her child's, said—

'Oh, I am very happy! I was afraid you would not care, and I could not bear to go that way.'

'You shall not go,' he cried aloud, as if in pain. 'Nothing can make that right.'

But she only said, 'You shall tell me to-

morrow. You cannot see to-night, but you will see, and you will tell me.'

He stood up and, holding both her hands, looked long into her eyes, then turned abruptly away and went out.

She stood where he left her for some moments, her face radiant, and her hands pressed upon her heart. Then she came toward my room. She found me busy with my painting, but as I looked up and met her eyes she flushed slightly, and said—

'I quite forgot you.'

'So it appeared to me.'

'You heard?'

'And saw,' I replied boldly. 'It would have been rude to interrupt, you see.'

'Oh, I am so glad and thankful.'

'Yes; it was rather considerate of me.'

'Oh, I don't mean that,' the flush deepening; 'I am glad you know.'

'I have known some time.'

'How could you? I only knew to-day myself.'

'I have eyes.' She flushed again.

'Do you mean that people——' she began anxiously.

'No; I am not "people." I have eyes, and my eyes have been opened.'

'Opened?'

'Yes, by love.' ...

Then I told her openly how, weeks ago, I struggled with my heart and mastered it, for I saw it was vain to love her, because she loved a better man who loved her in return. She looked at me shyly and said—

'I am sorry.'

'Don't worry,' I said cheerfully. 'I didn't break my heart, you know; I stopped it in time.'

'Oh!' she said, slightly disappointed; then her lips began to twitch, and she went off into a fit of hysterical laughter.

'Forgive me,' she said humbly; 'but you speak as if it had been a fever.'

'Fever is nothing to it,' I said solemnly. 'It was a near thing.' At which she went off again. I was glad to see her laugh. It gave me time to recover my equilibrium, and it relieved her intense emotional strain. So I rattled on some nonsense about Craig and myself till I saw she was giving no heed, but thinking her own thoughts: and what these were it was not hard to guess.

Suddenly she broke in upon my talk—

'He will tell me that I must go from him.'

'I hope he is no such fool,' I said emphatically and somewhat rudely, I fear; for I confess I was impatient with the very possibility of separation for these two, to whom love meant so much. Some people take this sort of thing easily and some not so easily; but love for a woman like this comes once only to a man, and then he carries it with him through the length of his life, and warms his heart with it in death. And when a man smiles or sneers at such love as this, I pity him, and say no word, for my speech would be in an unknown tongue. So my heart was sore as I sat looking up at this woman who stood before me, overflowing with joy of her new love, and dully conscious of the coming pain. But I soon found it was vain to urge my opinion that she should remain and share the work and life of the man she loved. She only answered—

'You will help him all you can, for it will hurt him to have me go.'

The quiver in her voice took out all the anger from my heart, and before I knew I had pledged myself to do all I could to help him.

But when I came upon him that night,

sitting in the light of his fire, I saw he must be let alone. Some battles we fight side by side, with comrades cheering us and being cheered to victory; but there are fights where lives are lost and won. So I could only lay my hand upon his shoulder without a word. He looked up quickly, read my face, and said, with a groan—

'I could not help it. But why groan?'

'She will think it right to go,' he said despairingly.

'Then you must think for her; you must bring some common-sense to bear upon the question.'

'You know.'

'I cannot see clearly yet,' he said; 'the light will come.'

For an hour I talked, eloquently, even vehemently urging the reason and right of my opinion. She would be doing no more than every woman does, no more than she did before; her mother-in-law had a comfortable home, all that wealth could procure, good servants, and friends; the estates could be managed without her personal supervision; after a few years' work here they would go east for little Marjorie's education; why should two lives be broken?—and so I went on.

He listened carefully, even eagerly.

'You make a good case,' he said, with a slight smile. 'I will take time. Perhaps you are right. The light will come. Surely it will come. But,' and here he sprang up and stretched his arms to full length above his head, 'I am not sorry, whatever comes I am not sorry. It is great to have her love, but greater to love her as I do. Thank God! nothing can take that away. I am willing, glad to suffer for the joy of loving her.'

Next morning, before I was awake, he was gone, leaving a note for me:—

'My dear Connor,—I am due at the Landing. When I see you again I think my way will be clear. Now all is dark. At times I am a coward, and often, as you sometimes kindly inform me, an ass; but I hope I may never become a mule.'

I am willing to be led, or want to be, at any rate. I must do the best—not second best—for her, for me. The best only is God's will. What else would you have? Be good to her these days, dear old fellow.

Yours,

CRAIG.

How often those words have braced me he will never know, but I am a better man for them: 'The best only is God's will. What else would you have?' I resolved I would rage and fret no more, and that I would worry Mrs. Mavor with no more argument or expostulation, but, as my friend had asked, 'Be good to her.'

(To be Continued.)

The Most Helpful Books.

A young man just commencing business for himself, writing to the editor of the 'New York Tribune' for guidance in his position of employer, and also to ask if he knew of any books that would help him, received the following reply: 'The very best single treatise is the New Testament, and next to this is the book of Proverbs.' The best business man we ever knew memorized the entire book of Proverbs at twenty-two, and when he became an employer himself, gave a copy of the book to every employee, with a friendly inscription commending it as an admirable business guide. 'S. S. Times.'