

The Inglenook.

The Soldiers' Canary.

("P." IN CHRISTIAN LEADER)

The canary trilled forth a sweet little song that brightened the plain room where Widow Campbell was doing her housework. She stopped now and again to look at the bird, while shadows flitted across her face. Then she would resume work with a whispered word of satisfaction to herself. The door opened, and Jock Lawson marched in. Jock was a rabbit-trapper and poacher, and also an enthusiastic bird fancier.

"Guid mornin,' Mrs. Campbell," said he, sitting down on the nearest chair, "Hoo's a' the day?"

"Oh, fine min, fine," responded the widow quietly, for though Jock was a poacher and ne'er-dae-weel, he never troubled the folk of "the Brig," except when he was unlucky enough to fall across the track of the policeman. But she wondered to herself what could have brought him to her house.

"That's no a bad canary ye hev there, Mrs. Campbell,?"

"No sae bad at a'. The pair bit crater sings very sweet sometimes.

"Ay, ahem," and Jock coughed, apparently at a loss how to go on. There was silence for a minute. "Wis ye thinkin' o' sellin' the birdie?"

"Wis ye thinkin' o' buyin'?" was the widow's quick amused answer.

"Oh, aye, I wid buy it if ye didna want ow'r muckle for't. A freend o' mine wants a—a—canary if he can get ane no very dear."

"But what'll ye gie's for't then?"

"That's for you tae say. Hoo muckle dae ye want?"

"Man, Jock, a' the siller that ever ye had widna buy that canary," said the widow warmly.

"Weel, weel," he answered to hurry the bargaining a little, "wid ye say 10s.?"

"Gae awa wi' ye, min."

"Cae'd a pound, then."

"Man, Jock, ye're gettin' liberal. Ye're sharely rough o' siller the day."

"Weel, weel, that's a guid bid; and no tae be hard for a first tred I'll say 30s."

"Say twa pound when ye're at it."

This brought Jock up sharp. He thought Mrs. Campbell was giving way. "Na, na, twa pound's ow'r muckle. But because it's naither the day nor the morn say 35s." and Jock gave his leg a vigorous slap, as if business was over and done. "35s. mind ye's a hape o' siller."

"It's a hape o' siller," admitted the widow, smiling quietly, but showing no desire to close the bargain. Jock was perplexed.

"Wha wad hae thoct she kent what the canary was raley worth," he said to himself. "She's a lang headit ane." After a pause he started it again. "Weel dae ye say 35s?"

"That canary's no for sale, Jock."

"Come awa noo, let's us say twa pound and be dune wi't. Ye're a weedow woman, and 5s. is mair tae you than tae me."

"No nor twice twa pound aither. That birdie belongs tae ma son that's fechtin' oot in South Africa, an' I widna sell it if ye offered me £20 for it." Something in the widow's tone and manner told Jock Lawson that he had been making one or two slight mistakes in his calculations.

"A' richt, Mrs. Campbell, there's nae herm dune, I hope. I meant nae herm. I'll gie ye a ca' some ither time."

"No, no, nae herm at a'," answered the widow, cheerily, "nae herm at a'. Guid day wi' ye."

"Guid'day, Mrs. Campbell," said Jock as he stalked out. "I'll try her again some day when she's no on sic a high horse," he said to himself.

Jock could not forget the canary. Every day as he passed the house and looked into the window he eyed the bird with envious glances. The widow did not see them, and they would only have amused her if she had.

He had persuaded himself that £3 could be got for the bird, and his mind was made up to try again at the first opportunity.

"Wha wad hae thoct she kent what the bird was worth," always ran in his head when thinking over that morning's visit.

Days, weeks, months, passed on. Dim tidings of war, chase, combat, slaughter, of dead and dying men in the far South African wilderness, reached the village. Widow Campbell heard them with mingled hope and fear, and prayed earnestly for her absent son. Jock Lawson took no interest in the matter beyond the fact that hares and rabbits were unusually plentiful that year, as there had been no shooting on the principal estate in the neighborhood, the landlord's two sons being away at "the war."

"It's an ull wind that blaws naebod guid," chuckled Jock to himself.

But the canary bothered him. He had tried the widow once or twice again, but met with sharper refusals each time. You see the war had turned out a much worse affair than the soldiers and their friends expected it would be.

One night Jock had an extra good haul in the Colonel's plantations. Two mornings later he walked carelessly down to Mrs. Campbell's house with three sovereigns jingling in his pocket, to see if the sight of gold would not melt her resolution. Possession of the canary had become a craze with Jock, and he wanted the bird at any price, for Jock had never been accustomed to control or subdue any caprice.

The sun shone brightly as the poacher sauntered along the street whistling a merry air. Sparrows chirped pleasantly among the bushes, and the house martins darted swiftly to and from their nests. Perfect peace seemed to reign over wood and field. Jock felt certain of success as he knocked at Widow Campbell's door.

"Come in," said a very quiet voice.

Jock entered. The widow was sitting in her chair at the window. She took no notice of the visitor. Her eyes were fixed on a newspaper in her right hand, held tightly between finger and thumb, the latter nervously crumpling the middle of a paragraph as if to mark something. A strange absent look was on her face.

"Guid mornin', Mrs. Campbell," the man said, at length. There was something in the widow's fixed gaze that awed him. He felt uncomfortable and his confidence began to ooze away. Mrs. Campbell gave no sign of being aware of his presence. Jock was cowed for a little and sat silent. The canary trilled its note of triumph. Then he took

courage. "I cam' tae mak' ye a better offer for"—

The widow started like a sleeper suddenly awakened from a gloomy troubled dream, and looked at the speaker in a way that made him stop short. Then with a calmness that was terrible she reached over the paper to him, her thumb still crushing the fatal spot. Jock took the paper, and glancing at the marked place read—

Died.—72669 Private David Campbell,—Company, Black Watch.

The mother spoke no word. When he read the few words even the poacher's hard thoughtless nature was touched. He looked to the ground for some minutes, then again at the paper, then at the widow. Her head was sunk on her bosom. He spoke, but she returned no answer. The poacher became nervous, and hurried out to call the neighbours. They found Widow Campbell lying on the floor in a deathlike swoon.

Some weeks after when the poor woman had recovered sufficiently to betake herself to a few household duties, she was dusting her mantel-piece when something rattled at the bottom of an old vase. She turned it up and out dropped three shining gold sovereigns. No one ever claimed them, and the widow could never tell how they came there. Jock Lawson never mentioned the canary again, though he sometimes gave Widow Campbell a rabbit or two, and a word of cheer. On that fatal morning he had understood at last that no money could buy the soldier's bird.

The Ice and the Snow.

"You are as white as a sheet," said the ice to the snow. "You are falling; are you faint?"

"My robe is spotless, my flakes harmless, and my fall noiseless," replied the snow.

"I think you lack firmness," quoth the ice; "and more solidity and weight would render you less the sport of the wintry winds."

"We've more to fear from the sun than from the wind," answered the snow.

"Indeed," observed the ice. "I should pity your weakness on the approach of such a foe."

"I shall commend myself to his mercy by my whiteness and my purity," said the snow.

"I shall resist his power by my hardness and strength," said the ice.

Then the sun shed his beams on our two cold friends. The snow began to weep, and the ice to melt.

"Where are your whiteness and purity now?" said the ice.

"And where your firmness and strength?" inquired the snow.

"We are returning to water, from whence we came," said the ice.

"Why, 'tis no change, but death," joyfully exclaimed the snow.

"By this change we are becoming one," said the ice.

"And seeking the lowest place," said the snow.

"We can now ascend to heaven," said the ice, "whereas we never could while I retained my boasted firmness, and you your vaunted whiteness."

Death is not a destroyer, but a restorer to the believer.

Kind looks, kind words, kind acts, and warm handshakes, these are the secondary means of grace when men are in trouble and are fighting their unseen battles.