

The Inglenook

A Mother Who Helped.

BY RALPH CONNOR.

Author of "The Sky Pilot," and "Black Rock."

Our best deeds we often do unconsciously. Certain it is that nothing was farther from my mind than pushing my friend's cause with the great man of the railway company for which I had flourished my brush. But it is equally certain that I turned over my sketches of scenes from camp life with the lumbermen and miners, I found myself talking with full enthusiasm of the two men who filled my imagination as the greatest of all men I had yet met. The railway man kept me talking of Graeme for an hour, and then said, 'Bring your friend to see me tomorrow,' which I did, to the mutual and lasting advantage of them both; for, when Graeme came back to me after his interview with the great man, he greeted me with a thumping whack, and demanded to know with what yarns I had been regaling his chief's ears.

'Chief?' I asked in delighted surprise.

'So! But how did you do it?' he replied.

'With what material did you pack him?'

'Pack him? Not at all! I simply gave him a few yarns and showed him some sketches.'

'Yarns and sketches! Oh, I know you and your tricks and your ways,' he answered, shaking his head at me. 'All the same, old man, I owe it to you that I sign myself 'Confidential Secretary to the Superintendent of Construction,' with almost unlimited power.'

'Good, man!' I shouted. 'When you are president I'll take an annual pass, if you don't mind.'

'You can get a pass now, if you want to come.'

'Not yet. But when do you go?'

'Next week.'

'Next week?' I cried in dismay, thinking of the sweet, pale face of the little lady in the manse in the country.

'Yes,' he said, a little sadly. 'I know what you are thinking of. Seems selfish, but I'm afraid I must go. My particular chief is out there now, over the ears in work, and he must have help at once.'

'It's a long way,' I said.

'Yes,' he answered, 'a long way, and a big work it will be. They say it is a five years' job.' He paused, then added, as if to himself, 'And the mother is not very strong any time.'

'Do you think you really ought to go?' I asked. 'You banish yourself, you know, from civilization and decent society, and your—your people have not seen much of you for the last ten years, and—and life is going on you know.'

I could not force myself to speak out brutally my fear that, when he said farewell to the sweet-faced little lady he still loved better than all else in the world, it would be to see her face no more. He read me quickly enough.

'Don't, old chap,' he said, with a shake in his voice. 'I know what you mean, and I have gone over all that; but my work is out there, and I must not shirk it. She will say 'Go,—you'; see.'

And so she did. After a week of hard work getting his outfit together, and learning something of his duties as confidential secretary to the superintendent of construction, Graeme carried me off with him to his home

to say good-by. He had written fully of his plans, so that, when his mother greeted him at the little garden gate, I saw by the way she held her arms about him, looking into his face, that no word of entreaty would be spoken by her, and that she had given him up.

Those three last days were days of tender sacrament. Graeme talked fully of all his plans and his hopes in regard to the work he meant to do for the men in the mountains.

'Poor chaps!' he would say, 'they mostly go down for the want of a hand to steady them at a critical time, or to give them a lift when they have stumbled; and they have, most of them, mothers at home, and some of them wives.' And the mother would smile at him with a light of divine compassion in her eyes, feeling at such moments that for such a work it were easy to have her son go from her. They had long walks together through the woods, and would come back laden with spoils, mosses, and grasses and ferns, and they were happy with each other as a boy and girl in their first love. How I envied him, and how I pitied him! Such a love is earth's greatest treasure, the loss of it earth's greatest loss. But the hours of the three days fled with winged feet, as do all happy hours, and we came to that hour of sweet agony we shrink from most, and yet would not miss.

Long before the sun we had all been astir, for we had to catch an early train. Breakfast by lamplight is always a ghastly affair. The food is nauseating, the conversation drags wearily, the whole atmosphere is depressing.

Graeme was making a great effort to adopt a matter of fact tone with a little tinge of sharpness in it, except when he spoke to his mother. The father came down half dressed as we were rising from an almost untasted meal, to have, according to his invariable custom, a word of prayer. It was always an ideal, that prayer of his.

A man must give up pretenses when he undertakes to address the Almighty. There is no place in prayer for simulated cheerfulness and courage, and, as the old man prayed, the barriers were borne down by the rush of feeling hitherto held in check by force of will. The brave little mother broke down in quiet weeping while the father commended the member of the family departing from his home this day to the care and keeping of the great Father from whom distance cannot separate, and to whom no land is strange.' Graeme, too, I could see, was losing his grip of himself; but the prayer rose into a great strain of thanksgiving for 'the love that reached down from heaven to save a world of lost men, and for the noble company who were giving their lives to bring this love near to men's hearts.' Then we all grew quiet, and under the steadying of that prayer the farewells were easier.

'Good by, Leslie, my son; God be with you, and keep you, and make you a blessing to many,' said the old gentleman. His voice was grave and steady, but he immediately turned aside, and blew his nose like a trumpeter, remarking upon the chilly morning air. The mother's farewell was without a word. She reached up and put her arms about her son's neck, kissed him twice, and then let him go.

But while the trunks were being got on to

the wagon, she came and stood outside the gate, looking up at us with a face so white and wan, but with a smile so brave, so trembling, so pitiful, that I did not wonder that Graeme suddenly sprang down from the seat and ran to her.

'Oh mother! mother!' he cried in a choking voice, gathering her to him, 'I can't do it! I can't do it!'

'Oh, yes, we can, my boy,' she answered, smiling, while the tears flowed down her pale cheeks. 'For His sake we can.'

And while we drove up the hill, the smile never faded from the face that seemed alight with a glory not of the rising sun.—S. S. Times.

Three Things.

BY WILLIAM WILFRED CAMPBELL.

Three things are strange to me;

—The kiss of the west wind's breath,

—The wonder of life and death,

—And the thoughts that the future hath.

Three things are sad to me;

—The earth on a new-made grave,

—The sob of winds in a cave,

—And a heart that never gave.

Three things are sweet to me;

—The song of a bird that flies,

—The blue of the summer skies,

—And the light in a young wife's eyes.

Where Britain Leads.

While Germany has gone to enormous expense to secure the record for speed across the Atlantic, there is another and far more important record, which neither that enterprising country, nor any other can hope to wrench from Great Britain. An admiralty return just issued shows that between 1st July, 1899, and 31st March, 1900, 180,000 troops and 30,000 horses were despatched from British and Mediterranean ports to South Africa. It is a long voyage, and, at some seasons, a very rough one; if, therefore, many casualties had occurred that would have been no matter for surprise. But the official record happily proves precisely the contrary; only two vessels were wrecked in carrying on this gigantic service, while the mortality among the horses was comparatively insignificant.

The contingents from India and the Colonies fared equally well when crossing the ocean; not a single vessel was lost in conveying them to South Africa. It has to be remembered too, that the transports engaged in this immense work were under obligation to make all possible speed; the time-factor was all-important in the landing of reinforcements. There was no sparing of fuel, no timid avoidance of risk; every skipper pressed on as though his own life depended on a quick passage. It is really marvellous, therefore that the casualties have been so few and so unimportant in the conveyance by sea of, in the aggregate, more than 200,000 troops, some 50,000 horses, and a slightly less number of mules for many thousands of miles. But no less wonder is it that the whole of this titanic labor was performed without resorting to any other nation for supplementary assistance.

Most people tell us that they want to do what is right; and to favor it, but they would generally much prefer to find the right some place inside the boundary line of their own quarter section.

'It's all nonsense, dear, about wedding cake. I put an enormous piece under my pillow, and dreamed of nobody.' 'Well?' 'and the next night I ate it and dreamed of everybody.'