



THE · HILL OF · FOLLY

A Romance of the Yellowhead.

By MABEL BURKHOLDER

THE hour for the proposed service came in due time, and Hayes was repaid for his effort by seeing a goodly number of people shuffle in and occupy the loose chairs which made such a clatter on the bare floor. The riff-raff drifted into the very back seats, having a sneaking conviction that their religious life needed a tonic, but very willing to receive it in small, homoeopathic doses. Half a dozen finer-looking fellows came to the front and began to interest themselves in Hallie's phonograph—that musical missionary of the wilds. If on that Sabbath evening a few dance jigs got sandwiched in between hymns, the parson made no comment. Perhaps he believed with many authorities that all music is sacred.

He was pleased to see that there had been a decided effort at "slicking up" on the part of the congregation. Doubtless they had heard of the arrival of aristocratic visitors in town, who might shed the light of their presence on the humble assemblage. The railroader is often a proud fellow, who remembers very distinctly all the social customs of the eastern town he left a few years before. At any rate, hair was smooth with oil, and best coats were buttoned snugly over workaday shirts and waistcoats. Some went to the reckless limit of having blackened their boots, but these were looked upon with disapproval by their associates. No white collars were in evidence, because there is an unwritten law in the wilds despising such marks of effete civilization, and a man who started out with a stiff collar would be very likely to return with a bare neck. They cherish a favorite story on the Pass of one stranger who came up to the camps with a silk hat and a cane. The boys cornered him one day, and taking his "plug" for a target, shot it full of holes without injuring the frightened head it encased. So, although other sins were allowed to flourish unrebuked in the construction camps, pride is kept severely in check.

Dawn Courtenay had promised the parson that her party would "look in" during the evening. Mrs. Lucas was a consistent helper of all good works, and much in demand, because she sometimes brought to the meetings an old guitar with which she accompanied their simple songs. There would be a generous sprinkling of women and children in the crowd and Dawn, openly interested in all phases of life in this new region, was frankly anxious to be there.

On the instant her party entered the room they became the most conspicuous group in the building. If the woman's regal air had not been relieved by a glint of humor and a genuine interest in everything and everybody, she would probably have become thoroughly unpopular with the natives of the place. As it was, in spite of her dignity and great reserve, every beholder was conscious of a fine sympathy and a wonderful depth of feeling in her calm, luminous, gray eyes. Criticism died on the lip, and respect and admiration took its place in every rude breast.

As far as Daisy Ravenden was concerned, there was but one opinion. She was already their own cherished, beloved and adored child. She could go among them at will, sometimes sketching them at their work and enjoying their bewilderment as they saw their own rough features grow beneath her pencil. Not a man among them but would cheerfully have laid down his life for the little "pink lady," as she was named from the enormous bow of ribbon on her favorite mountain hat.

Hallie came forward to welcome them. He had been bothered with a feeling that this successful and wealthy woman of the world might hold his kind of work in silent contempt, and his first words were that it was good of her to come.

Miss Courtenay disclaimed any goodness.

"Nonsense!" she laughed. "Why should we be the only people to miss such an event for twenty miles around? The town has taken on quite a metropolitan air. Surely you did not expect so many?"

Dawn Courtenay, a business woman of rare ability, after her little brother's death, decides to accept an offer to personally inspect the claim of Ralph Ravenden, in the Yellowhead district, accompanied by his daughter, Daisy. When the farewells were being said, Miss Courtenay was presented with "Ruffles," a horse belonging to the little son of her former employer and friend. On their journey they meet Mr. and Mrs. Lucas and family, who accompany them to their new home at Tete Jaune Cache. The "Sky Pilot of the Yellowhead," who knows the mountains well, comes for an interview with the supposed gentleman, and meets Miss Courtenay. He promises to personally conduct the party to "Old Wrangle" in a week, but in the meantime letters come warning Miss Courtenay of probable danger. Mr. Ravenden's miner's certificate had been renewed at Barkerville, one copy was left there among Government documents, and the other given to Aaron Wind to deliver to the owner. Shortly after, a fire destroyed the Government office at Barkerville and the man in charge, leaving old Aaron Wind alone in possession of the precious document. Daisy's life is saved, when out sketching, by Scoot, a young man of good family, but now in Driver's employ. Hardly have Driver and his party arrived in Tete Jaune Cache when an invitation comes to Miss Courtenay and her party to dine with them, which they accept. Preparations are made for a service.

"The men have done very well," Hallie said, his mild, hazel eyes beaming with pleasure.

After all, how unaffectedly simple the woman was! Simplicity is always a sign of real greatness. It was only whimsical creatures, like Roberta Sandys, who were always trying to impress people with something they did not possess at all.

"It is a proud night for the parson," Scoot said, as Hayes left the group, "but it is not over yet. Bloomy Bill has not yet presented himself. Hallie has been working with him for two weeks straight. I believe he promised to come, but if anybody interferes and gives him booze, it will be a different story. It's more than likely to happen, too, for he backslides every other week regularly."

Presently Mrs. Lucas came to them with the rather startling request that some one of the party contribute something toward the programme.

"Miss Ravenden sings," announced Haist unexpectedly. "I have heard certain bird-songs as she takes her morning walks along the river."

Daisy looked quite frightened and much as if she would run and hide her face, but the pleading of the dark eyes held her gaze. The same new impulse stirred in her as had stirred the night of the feast, when she wished she might be a participant and not merely an on-looker in the struggle of life. Her soul was conscious of a growing power, which must be expressed for the benefit of other people. "I paint and I sing," she had confessed to Miss Courtenay on their first acquaintance, "but nobody sees my pictures or hears my voice." Was this her chance? She reconsidered what would have seemed before an absurd impossibility, and glanced appealingly at Dawn.

"Certainly, dear child, if you wish," encouraged Miss Courtenay. "Mrs. Lucas will accompany you on her guitar."

"If I thought it would do people the least little bit of good," murmured the girl, "I believe I should try it."

"Would you try it if you thought it was doing good to just one person?" Haist asked in her ear. The girl's soft blue eyes met his, and she nodded.

"Then will you sing 'The Ninety and Nine,' just for my benefit, as you sang it down by the river yesterday morning?"

Again she nodded. Then the meeting came to order, as Hallie Hayes arose in his place near the phonograph.

The order of the service was, perforce, a little different from the regular order of Sunday evening services in other places. The class of people with whom the young missionary dealt were given to quick expression of their feelings and listened very indifferently to long discourses. Consequently Hallie never gave them a sermon. He said a very great deal in the course of the evening, but he uttered it in disjointed sentences, as it seemed to fit the occasion, always leaving space for questions and free discussions. He had the happiest faculty of dealing with these children of the wild, temporarily lost to civilization, but by no means ignorant of right and truth. So long as Hallie could keep them under his direct influence they did well, but between his visits to the camps other influences intervened. Hence disturbances.

On the front row of chairs, in conspicuous array, sat four children-singers, known all along the line as "The Cricket Quartette." It was Hallie's delight to train them to lead the singing. Both Sonny and Alexis Lucas "belonged," and it was from this prac-

tice that young Alexis got the words he sang so proudly:

"Get out the life-line!
Get out the life-line!
Somebody's singing! Get away!"

The children's voices were badly cracked from overstraining, but the feature remained a part of every programme, because friends and acquaintances were immensely proud of the quartette, often breaking out into enthusiastic hand-clapping when the "Cricketets" acquitted themselves extraordinarily well.

Hallie began by asking for the familiar song "I Am Included." To stimulate interest, he requested the quartette to sing the verse and the congregation to join in the refrain. Bravely the children started out, faces puckered with anxiety, voices rising almost to a scream on the high notes. The crowd came in heavily on the chorus:

"I am included!
I am included!
When the Lord said whosoever,
That included me!"

"Now," exclaimed Hallie, holding up his hand to stop the flow of music for a moment, "all who feel that they are included in this invitation by the Lord, keep the right hand raised while singing the chorus."

A number of horny hands went up. Perhaps the men were specially repentant because pay-day was far off, all were dead-broke, no person had a dollar to get drunk on, but the one thing clear was that no other man alive could have wrung from them an expression of their need of a change of heart. At that moment Dawn saw Hallie Hayes in a new light. She confessed to knowing very little about the power of personal influence after studying Hayes. This plain, common man, with the homely face and the good, honest eyes, whom for some deep reason of her own she seemed to feel a tendency to ridicule, was a master in the art of laying his mind on other people until they believed in his belief. He led the poor, the ignorant, the ribald, the rude, whithersoever he willed and his influence was as mild, as constant, as beneficent as the sunlight on the hills.

Without any hesitation, Dawn Courtenay, too, had raised her right hand at Hallie's invitation. Her act was not for any outward show but because she truly wished, like those untutored children of men around her, to be included in the great family of believers on earth. She was aware that fifty pairs of eyes were on her face, and she could form little opinion of the result of her action. To the end of her life she never knew that in several subsequent times of danger many of those rough men offered to risk their lives to save hers, that at all times they practically formed a bodyguard securing her safety wherever she moved, that henceforth no story of indifference or coldness on her part gained credence among those who had seen for themselves.

The meeting turned into open testimony. While the collection was being taken up, the men took turns in speaking or reciting passages of Scripture. Painfully unfamiliar with the sacred text, several hard-fisted laborers stumbled over words usually conned in infancy, as if they had just heard them for the first time.

"He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out!" triumphantly repeated Tom, the confirmed boozier.

"Have you proved it so, Tom?" cried Hallie.

"I have, praise God!" responded Tom. "I always heard the Lord would give a man a new heart; but praise Him, He gave me a new stomach!"

Next, "Brownie," a reformed gambler, sang the verse of a hymn, in very good spirit, but in very poor tune; after which, Hallie called on Toot Lucas to make a few remarks. Toot's arm was still in a sling, and the whole man appeared in a very chastened mood. He had suffered a dual punish-