

BOYS AND GIRLS

Black Rock.

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

CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

The summer found me religiously doing Paris and Vienna, gaining a more perfect acquaintance with the extent and variety of my own ignorance, and so fully occupied in this interesting and wholesome occupation that I fell out with all my correspondents, with the result of weeks of silence between us.

Two letters among the heap waiting on my table in London made my heart beat quick, but with how different feelings: one from Graeme telling me that Craig had been very ill, and that he was to take him home as soon as he could be moved. Mrs. Mavor's letter told me of the death of the old lady, who had been her care for the past two years, and of her intention to spend some months in her old home in Edinburgh. And this letter it is that accounts for my presence in a miserable, dingy, dirty little hall running off a close in the historic Cowgate, redolent of the glories of the splendid past, and of the various odors of the evil-smelling present. I was there to hear Mrs. Mavor sing to the crowd of gamins that thronged the closes in the neighborhood, and that had been gathered into a club by 'a fine leddie frae the West End,' for the love of Christ and his lost. This was an 'At Home' night, and the mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, of all ages and sizes were present. Of all the sad faces I had ever seen, those mothers carried the saddest and most woe-stricken. 'Heaven pity us!' I found myself saying; 'is this the beautiful, the cultured, the heaven-exalted city of Edinburgh? Will it not, for this, be cast down into hell some day, if it repent not of the utter weariness, the dazed hopelessness of the ghastly faces! Do not the kindly, gentle church-going folks of the crescents and the gardens see them in their dreams, or are their dreams too heavenly for these ghastly faces to appear?'

I cannot recall the programme of the evening, but in my memory-gallery is a vivid picture of that face, sweet, sad, beautiful, alight with the deep glow of her eyes, as she stood and sang to that dingy crowd. As I sat upon the window-ledge listening to the voice with its flowing song, my thoughts were far away, and I was looking down once more upon the eager, coal-grimed faces in the rude little church in Black Rock. I was brought back to find myself swallowing hard by an audible whisper from a wee lassie to her mother—

'Mither! See till yon man. He's greetin'.'

When I came to myself she was singing 'The Land o' the Leal,' the Scotch 'Jerusalem the Golden,' immortal, perfect. It needed experience of the hunger-haunted Cowgate closes, chill with the black mist of an eastern haar, to feel the full bliss of the vision in the words—

'There's nae sorrow there, Jean,
There's neither cauld nor care, Jean,
The day is aye fair in
The Land o' the Leal.'

A land of fair, warm days; untouched by sorrow and care, would be heaven indeed to the dwellers of the Cowgate.

The rest of that evening is hazy enough to me now, till I find myself opposite Mrs. Mavor at her fire, reading Graeme's letter; then all is vivid again.

I could not keep the truth from her. I

knew it would be folly to try. So I read straight on till I came to the words—

'He has had mountain fever, whatever that may be, and he will not pull up again. If I can, I shall take him home to my mother'—when she suddenly stretched out her hand, saying, 'Oh, let me read!' and I gave her the letter. In a minute she had read it, and began almost breathlessly—

'Listen! my life is much changed. My mother-in-law is gone; she needs me no longer. My solicitor tells me, too, that owing to unfortunate investments there is need of money, so great need, that it is possible that either the estates or the works must go. My cousin has his all in the works—iron works, you know. It would be wrong to have him suffer. I shall give up the estates—that is best.' She paused.

'And come with me,' I cried.

'When do you sail?'

'Next week,' I answered eagerly.

She looked at me a few moments, and into her eyes there came a light soft and tender, as she said—

'I shall go with you.'

And so she did; and no old Roman in all the glory of a Triumph carried a prouder heart than I, as I bore her and her little one from the train to Graeme's carriage, crying—

'I've got her.'

But his was the better sense, for he stood waving his hat and shouting—

'He's all right,' at which Mrs. Mavor grew white; but when she shook hands with him, the red was in her cheek again.

'It was the cable did it,' went on Graeme. 'Connor's a great doctor! His first case will make him famous. Good prescription—after mountain fever try a cablegram!' And the red grew deeper in the beautiful face beside us.

Never did the country look so lovely. The woods were in their gayest autumn dress; the brown fields were bathed in a purple haze; the air was sweet and fresh with a suspicion of the coming frosts of winter. But in spite of all the road seemed long, and it was as if hours had gone before our eyes fell upon the white manse standing among the golden leaves.

'Let them go,' I cried, as Graeme paused to take in the view, and down the sloping dusty road we flew on the dead run.

'Reminds one a little of Abe's curves,' said Graeme, as we drew up at the gate. But I answered him not, for I was introducing to each other the two best women in the world. As I was about to rush into the house, Graeme seized me by the collar, saying—

'Hold on, Connor! you forget your place, you're next.'

'Why, certainly,' I cried thankfully enough; 'what an ass I am!'

'Quite true,' said Graeme solemnly.

'Where is he?' I asked.

'At this present moment?' he asked, in a shocked voice. 'Why, Connor, you surprise me.'

'Oh, I see!'

'Yes,' he went on gravely; 'you may trust my mother to be discreetly attending to her domestic duties; she is a great woman, my mother.'

I had no doubt of it, for at that moment she came out to us with little Marjorie in her arms.

'You have shown Mrs. Mavor to her room, mother, I hope,' said Graeme; but she only smiled and said—

'Run away with your horses, you silly boy,' at which he solemnly shook his head.

'Ah, mother, you are deep—who would have thought it of you?'

That evening the manse overflowed with joy, and the days that followed were like dreams set to sweet music.

But for sheer wild delight, nothing in my memory can quite come up to the demonstration organized by Graeme, with assistance from Nixon, Shaw, Sandy, Abe, Geordie, and Baptiste, in honor of the arrival in camp of Mr. and Mrs. Craig. And, in my opinion, it added something to the occasion, that after all the cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Craig had died away, and after all the hats had come down, Baptiste, who had never taken his eyes from that radiant face, should suddenly have swept the crowd into a perfect storm of cheers by excitedly seizing his tuque, and calling out in his shrill voice—

'By gar! Three cheer for Mrs. Mavor.'

And for many a day the men of Black Rock would easily fall into the old and well-loved name; but up and down the line of construction, in all the camps beyond the Great Divide, the new name became as dear as the old had ever been in Black Rock.

Those old wild days are long since gone into the dim distance of the past. They will not come again, for we have fallen into quiet times; but often in my quietest hours I feel my heart pause in its beat to hear again that strong, clear voice, like the sound of a trumpet, bidding us to be men; and I think of them all—Graeme, their chief, Sandy, Baptiste, Geordie, Abe, the Campbells, Nixon, Shaw, all stronger, better for their knowing of him, and then I think of Billy asleep under the pines, and of old man Nelson with the long grass waving over him in the quiet churchyard, and all my nonsense leaves me, and I bless the Lord for all his benefits, but chiefly for the day I met the missionary of Black Rock in the lumber-camp among the Selkirks.

THE END.

Take a Lesson from the Ivy.

The ivy in a dungeon grew,
Unfed by rain, uncheered by dew;
Its pallid leaflets only drank
Cave moistures foul, or odors dank.

But through the dungeon grating high
There fell a sunbeam from the sky,
It slept upon the grateful floor
In silent gladness evermore.

The ivy felt a tremor shoot
Through all its fibres to the root,
It felt the light, it saw the ray,
It longed to blossom into day.

It grew, it crept, it pushed, it clomb,
Long had the darkness been its home;
For well it knew, though veiled in night,
The goodness and the joy of light.

It reached the beam, it thrilled, it curled,
It blessed the warmth that cheers the world;
It grew toward the dungeon bars,
It looked upon the moon and stars.

Upon that solitary place
Its verdure threw adorning grace,
The mating birds became its guests,
And sang its praises from their nests.

By rains and dews and sunshine fed,
Upon the outer world it spread,
And in the day-beam rolling free,
It grew into a stately tree.

Wouldst know the moral of this rhyme?
Behold the heavenly light and climb.
To every dungeon comes a ray
Of God's illimitable day.

—Charles Mackay.