

CARMICHAEL: by Anison North.

A picture of farm home life in Canada faithfully reproduced by a writer who knows it. The disputed "line fence" has been the cause of many a bitter feud, and the settlement of this particular feud makes a most interesting story. Copyrighted. All rights reserved, including that of translation into foreign languages.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GETTING EVEN

Is there a more discouraging thing in the world than disillusionment, or a more confidence-shaking moment than that in which a halo with which we have invested our idol drops off, and the rosy mist we have enshrined it with falls away with a brutal suddenness, leaving, perhaps, a skeleton where we had imagined a god? Be the idol a thing abstract or concrete, a hope or a friend, the effect is the same. With the first shock of the reaction we feel that the world has become unsettled, and wonder in what or in whom we can, with surety, place our trust. Afterward, and sooner or later, according to our charity and openness of heart, things, as a rule, adjust themselves, and we become rational again.

It will be seen that Henry Carmichael was by no means an idol to me, the child who watched him with such varying emotions—for children have their emotions, and even to a greater intensity than older folk: it is only when we have had more experience of the world than the child had that there is a possibility of our becoming callous, transformed to such unyielding stuff that we "do not care." Yet, when the disillusionment of my newly-formed estimate of Henry Carmichael came, I was by no means insensitive to the sense of shock of which I have spoken.

How well I remember every event of the day that preceded that night. It was Sunday, a beautiful warm October day, with the maples flaming in red, and the beeches in yellow, wherever one might look.

I am sure my father enjoyed the quiet beauty of it all, for before breakfast he took me for a little walk up the road, and again and again he stopped to look into the depths of the glowing copses, or at the dull gold of the shorn fields, with a sort of quiet content. Once he said, as though speaking to himself, for he talked little to me:

"Yes, yes, God is very good to us—better than we deserve."

I remember, too, just how he looked when he took down the big black Bible after breakfast and began to read.

The reading that morning was the Twenty-third Psalm, that poem of poems, which has been to the hearts of the faint and the faithful in all generations like dew to the thirsty grass.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters."

"He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

"Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

My father read well, and his full, mellow voice, following the thought and emotion of the passage with a rare feeling and appreciation, left no cadence unturned which could bring out its strength or tenderness.

This morning, after he had finished reading the psalm, Miss Tring began to sing it, in a sweet, low voice, following the old metrical version, and presently we all joined her, even to old Chris who sat with bowed head.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want,"

He makes me down to lie
In pastures green, He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

After that we knelt beside our chairs as usual, while my father prayed; but his prayer was not as usual. Even I noted the difference, for this morning he "forgot," as I imagined, to offer "thanks" that "while some were called upon to mourn and others deprived of the necessities of life we were enjoying a portion of health and strength, and "basking in His favour." He also "forgot" to petition that we might be led "so to live on this fleeting and transitory earth as to be worthy of the reward in heaven which, in the justice of the Almighty awaited all who served Him in spirit and in truth."

Instead he prayed in a simple way thanking God for the beautiful day and the bountiful harvest, and beseeching that we might have the grace to live sweet and honourable lives, walking in the footsteps of Him, our example," who was so willing to carry us in His bosom, and comfort us with His love.

Perhaps my recent encounter with Carmichael in the wood, and the curious way in which it had recalled the great, glittering window, served to impress this prayer on me. However that may be, I listened to it throughout instead of, as usual, watching Jap through the "rungs" of the chair, or, with my face plunged reverentially in my hands, thinking of something else, while the words sounded far away, and came to me as sounds without meaning.

After that we got ready for church, and my father put his "tenth" apportionment into his envelope as he always did on Sunday mornings. The drive through the glowing woods in the democrat, my mother and father and I in the front seat, Miss Tring and old Chris with his big, green umbrella in the back; the mellow ringing of the church bells over the tree-tops; the faded asters and golden rod and boneset in the swamp; the people pouring into the stiff, old-fashioned pews—ah, I have but to close my eyes to see it all again!

And it is but a step further to remember how, in the afternoon, we all—at least my father and mother, and Miss Tring and I, for old Chris had set out immediately after dinner for a three or four days' visit with his nephew—sat under the trees in the garden, my father reading from his Christian Guide; Miss Tring swinging to and fro in a rocker and looking, for the most part, with a far-off gaze to the distant wood; while my mother dozed in her hammock, raising her plump hand, from time to time, to brush away an audacious fly that kept settling on her nose. As for me, I was much put to it to keep my attention on my catechism, although I tried hard in order that at the preacher's next visit I might retrieve the disgrace I had brought upon us all at his last one, when, in order to be put through my facings in this same catechism, I had been ignominiously drawn out from under a bed whence I had fled for escape.

So the day passed, and night fell.

I was awakened at about one o'clock by a loud crash; and now, if you grow weary of all these storms, I beg you to remember that it is almost impossible to tell of that summer without mentioning them, for indeed there was scarcely a week in which we missed them, and they kept me sorely in dread.

My first thought was to close my window, for the wind was shrieking through it and the rain driving in. It had turned very cold, and the drip from the roof and trees betokened

that it had been raining for some time. Hastily I drew the sash down, and in the nick of time, for a blinding glare and a second crash sent me helter-skelter into bed again, where I drew the clothes over my head and cowered in fear. It seemed as if all the witches and hobgoblins of the heavens had been let loose. Around the eaves the wind whistled with a thin, eerie screech; at the window the panes rattled as though something were trying to get in; outside the trees creaked as they bent before the hurricane; and all the while the rain beat on the roof and against the windows, with occasionally, a sharp pattering accompaniment that betokened the presence of hail.

Presently the rain ceased. Then, again came a flash, and simultaneously a rushing roar that seemed to be hovering about our very house. I could bear it alone no longer, so gathering courage, only for want of which I had been prevented from fleeing before, I dashed out of my room and along the narrow corridor leading to my mother's.

When half-way through it, and directly opposite the window, a hesitating, quivering glimmer of lightning illuminated the scene out of doors. It lasted for two seconds perhaps, but in it, in the fields, I distinctly saw the huge form of Henry Carmichael going toward his home.

At the next flash, which came almost instantaneously, I saw my father coming toward me, his face, in the glare, seeming very pale; and, as a third terrific crash sounded over our heads I flew into his arms.

He carried me into the room and placed me beside my mother, then, without a word went out and down stairs.

My mother was awake. "Dear, dear!" she said sleepily. "where's your father off to now? Why can't he stay in his bed?"

A moment later she raised her head, for a strange, continuous, flickering light, not like that of the lightning, was creeping up the bed-room wall.

"Gracious sakes' alive!" she said, "what's that?" and sprang out of bed.

Against the window I saw her white-robed form, with the shadow of it black upon the strange, red light.

"Mercy upon us! The barn's a-fire!" she screamed with the next breath; then I was at her side.

In truth the barn was a-fire, the flames already bursting forth, in a momentary cessation of rain, from the roof, while dense clouds of smoke, all red from the glow beneath, curled up to the inky sky.

A moment later and we were running, both of us, toward it, our bare feet splashing through the cold puddles that lay shining with the reflection along the path.

We found my father frantically dragging at some piece of machinery that had been run in on the barn floor.

"Call Torrance and Might!" he shouted; but ere we had well turned to obey his behest we came face to face with Carmichael and Dick.

One wrench of Carmichael's mighty arm and the big machine, whatever it was, rolled forth on its wheels and down into the yard.

"Go for Might!" shouted Carmichael, and Dick set off on a run.

Then an awful thing happened.

Striding up before Henry Carmichael my father looked him fair in the face with an expression upon his that made us fear for what was to come. Slowly he raised his hand as if in accusation, but words failed him. Instantly the hand dropped and he

clutched at his throat, the white of his face turning, in the red light, to purple. An instant later his features worked convulsively, then he fell heavily forward on Carmichael, who reached both arms to receive him.

With a low cry my mother rushed forward; then, collecting herself marvelously, she said, "To the house!" and set off, while Carmichael followed, carrying my father as though he had been a child.

What a sight that was our little procession moving along with that terrible burden, with the fire-brands flying above our heads, and the red light mounting up behind, and the lightning quivering everywhere, with intervals of double darkness between! And the worst was not yet.

"Merciful Heaven! The house is a-fire too!"

It was Carmichael's voice, and looking up between my terrified sobs I saw that what he said was only too true. Ignited somehow by a straying brand, the fire was already well under way, and the smoke and flames were bursting through the kitchen roof. The higher front part of the house was still intact, with the reflection of the fire shining red upon all its windows facing the barn.

My mother gave a smothered cry, "Miss Tring!" and dashed in through the front door whence she returned in a moment with the little teacher who, as it afterward appeared, had been sleeping quietly through all the turmoil.

Carmichael had laid my father on the grass, and was kneeling beside him with a hand on his heart.

"I'll carry him to our house," he said to my mother. "He must be got in out of here!"

But my mother turned on him with a sort of savagery, my placid gentle mother in whose eyes there had seldom been any look more angry than that of a playing kitten. Yet there she stood, erect as an avenging goddess, with the flickering glare of the fire light on her white, terrible face, and the burning of a bitter resentment in her eyes.

"Henry Carmichael," she said, and the tone of her voice was enough to make one shudder, so full of determined agony was it, "Robert Mallory will never enter your door, dead or alive!"

"But, Heavens above, woman, he can't live out here!"

She raised her hands to her head as though dazed, then took them down and spoke again in those harsh, unnatural tones which, surely, were not my mother's.

"He will rest in the apple-house till Adam Might comes," she said.

But she made no objection to Carmichael's carrying my father, and so once more he raised him and carried him to the little out-house where my mother, now sobbing wildly, threw herself on the floor beside him shrieking, "Robert! Robert! Speak to me! Speak to your own little Alice! Robert! Robert!" like one demented.

Scarcely had he been laid on the floor when Miss Tring came in with a lighted lamp, and set it down on a board over an apple-bin. Then away she went again only to return with a pillow and blankets.

"Is Dick back?" asked Carmichael.

"I have sent him for the doctor," said Miss Tring.

"Thank Heaven! How did he go?"

"On horseback. He'll be back soon."

With that Carmichael and Miss Tring set to work rubbing and chafing my poor father, and were hard at it when Mr. and Mrs. Might appeared at the door.

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