

Black Rock

By RALPH CONNOR

CHAPTER VI.

BLACK ROCK RELIGION.

WHEN I grow weary with the conventions of religion and sick in my soul from feeding upon husks that the churches too often offer me in the shape of elaborate service and eloquent discourses, so that in my sickness I doubt and doubt, then I go back to the communion in Black Rock and the days preceding it, and the fever and weariness leave me, and I grow humble and strong. The simplicity and rugged grandeur of the faith, the humble gratitude of the rough men I see about the table and the calm radiance of one saintly face and recall me.

Not its most enthusiastic apologist would call Black Rock a religious community, but it possessed in a marked degree that eminent Christian virtue of tolerance. All creeds, all shades of religious opinion, were allowed, and it was generally conceded that one was as good as another. It is fair to say, however, that Black Rock's catholicity was negative rather than positive. The only religious objectionable was that insisted upon as a necessity. It never occurred to any one to consider religion other than as a respectable if not ornamental addition to life in older lands.

During the weeks following the making of the league, however, this negative attitude toward things religious gave place to one of keen investigation and criticism. The indifference passed away and with it in a large measure the tolerance. Mr. Craig was responsible for the former of these changes, but hardly in fairness could he be held responsible for the latter. If any one more than another was to be blamed for the rise of intolerance in the village, that man was Georgie Crawford. He had his "lines" from the Established Kirk of Scotland, and when Mr. Craig announced his intention of having the sacrament of the Lord's supper observed, Georgie produced his lines and handed them in. As no other man in the village was equipped with like spiritual credentials, Georgie constituted himself a kind of kirk session charged with the double duty of guarding the entrance to the Lord's table and of keeping an eye upon the theo-

logical opinions of the community and more particularly upon such members of it as gave evidence of possessing any opinions definite enough for statement.

It came to be Mr. Craig's habit to drop into the logcabin and toward the close of the evening to have a short Scripture lesson from the gospels. Georgie's opportunity came after the meeting was over and Mr. Craig had gone away. The men would hang about and talk the lesson over, expressing opinions favorable or unfavorable, as appeared to them good. Then it was that all sorts of views, religious and otherwise, were aired and examined. The originality of the ideas, the absolute disregard of the authority of church or creed, the frankness with which opinions were stated and the forcefulness of the language in which they were expressed combined to make the discussions altogether marvelous. The passage between Abe Baker, the stage driver, and Georgie was particularly rich. It followed upon a very telling lesson on the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

The chief actors in that wonderful story were transferred to the Black Rock stage and were presented in minor's costume. Abe was particularly well pleased with the scoring of the "blanched old rooster who crowed so blanked high" and somewhat incensed at the quiet remark interjected by Georgie that "it was nae credit till a man tae be a sinner," and when Georgie went on to urge the importance of right conduct and respectability Abe was led to pour forth vials of contemptuous wrath upon the Pharisees and hypocrites who thought themselves better than other people. But Georgie was quite unruffled and lamented the ignorance of men who, brought up in the "Episcopawyan or Methodist" church, could hardly be expected to detect the Antinomian or Arminian heresies.

"Auntie Nomyun or Uncle Nomyun," replied Abe, boiling hot, "my mother was a Methodist, and I'll back any blanked Methodist against any blanked blank long faced, lantern jawed, skindint Presbyterian!" And this he was eager to maintain to any man's satisfaction if he would step aside.

Georgie was quite unmoved, but hastened to assure Abe that he meant no disrespect to his mother, who, he had "nae doot, was a clever enough biddie, tae judge by her son." Abe was speedily appeased and offered to set up the drinks all round, but Georgie, with evident reluctance, had to decline, saying, "Na, na, lad; I'm a league man, ye ken." And I was sure that Georgie at that moment felt that membership in the league had its drawbacks.

Nor was Georgie too sure of Craig's orthodoxy, while, as to Mrs. Mavor, whose slave he was, he was in the habit of lamenting her doctrinal condition.

"She's a fine wumman, nae doot; but, pur cratur, she's fair carried awa' wi' the errors o' the Episcopawlyuns."

It fell to Georgie, therefore, as a sacred duty, in view of the laxity of those who seemed to be the pillars of the church, to be all the more watchful and unyielding, but he was delightfully inconsistent when confronted with particulars. In conversation with him one night after one of the meetings, when he had been specially hard upon the ignorant and godless, I innocently changed the subject to Billy Breen, whom Georgie had taken to his slunk since the night of the league. He was very proud of Billy's success in the fight against whisky, the credit of which he divided evenly between Mrs. Mavor and himself.

"He's fair daft about her," he explained to me, "an' I'll no deny but she's a great help—aye, a vera considerable assistance—but, mon, she doesna ken the whisky an' the inside o' a man that's wantin' it. Aye, pur biddie, she diz her paln, an' when ye're a bit restless an' thravin' after yer day's work it's like a walk in a bonny glen on a summer eve, with the birds blin' about, the sit in yon roomie an' hear her slin'. But when the night is on an' ye canna sleep, but waiken w' an' awfu' thirst an' w' dreams o' cozy firesides an' the bonny sparklin' glasses, as it is w' pur Billy—aye, it's then ye need a mon w' a guid grip beside ye."

"What do you do then, Georgie?" I asked.

"Oo, aye, I juist gang for a bit walk w' the lad an' then pits the kettle on an' makes a cup o' tea or coffee, an' aff he gangs the sleep like a balm."

"Poor Billy!" I said pityingly. "There is no hope for him in the future, I fear."

"Hoot awn, mon," said Georgie quickly. "Ye wadna keep out a pur cratur frae creepin' in that's daein' his best?"

"But, Georgie," I remonstrated, "he doesn't know anything of the doctrines. I don't believe he could give us 'the chief end of man.'"

"An' wha's tae blame for that?" said Georgie, with fine indignation. "An' maybe you remember the pood Pharisee an' the pur wumman that cam' creepin' in abint the Malster."

The mingled tenderness and indignation in Georgie's face were beautiful to see, so I meekly answered:

"Well, I hope Mr. Craig won't be too strict with the boys."

Georgie shot a suspicious glance at me, but I kept my face like a summer morn, and he replied cautiously:

"Aye, he's no' that strict, but he maun exercise discretion."

Georgie was none the less determined, however, that Billy should "come forrit," but as to the manager, who was a member of the English church, and some others who had been confirmed years ago and had forgotten much and denied more, he was extremely doubtful and expressed himself in very decided words to the minister:

"Ye'll no be askin' forrit the Epeescopawyan buddies. They juist ken naein' ava'."

BEST FOR THE BOWELS



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Allen—Naw, I learned myself by picking out the dirty keys.—Detroit Free Press.

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He complained by officers of the courts that citizens bother them remembering great deal by not caring, what courts are for, managers try to have the affair kept out of court, first, because they like the ensuing publicity, and second, because there may be the opportunity to get back part of the stolen money by some compromise arrangement. It is a prevalent impression that courts are not for the adjustment of personal differences, grievances, controversies, and that these can be settled without legal intervention, so much the better.

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