

Black Rock

By RALPH CONNOR

CHAPTER VII.
THE FIRST BLACK ROCK COMMUNION.
THE gleam of the great fire through the windows of the great camp gave a kindly welcome as we drove into the clearing in which the shanties stood. Graeme was greatly touched at his enthusiastic welcome by the men. At the supper table he made a little speech of thanks for their faithfulness during his absence, specially commending the care and efficiency of Mr. Nelson, who had had charge of the camp. The men cheered wildly, Baptiste's shrill voice leading all. Nelson, being called upon, expressed in a few words his pleasure at seeing the boss back and thanked the men for their support while he had been in charge.

COMBATING WEEDS.

Rank Growth of Useless Plants Has Demonstrated the Value of Thorough Tillage.

There is no royal road to weedless farming. Following are some of the means of keeping weeds in check:

1. Practice rotation; keep ahead of the weeds. Certain weeds follow certain crops; when these weeds become serious, change the crop.
2. Change the method of tillage. If a weed persists, try deeper or shallower plowing, or a different kind of harrow or cultivator, or till at different times and seasons.
3. Harrow the land frequently when it is in fallow, or is waiting for a crop. Harrow it, if possible, after seeding, and before the plants are high enough to be broken by the implement. Potatoes, corn and other things can be harrowed after they are several inches high; and sometimes the land may be harrowed before the plants are up.
4. Practice frequent tillage with light surface working tools throughout the season. This is hard on weeds, and does the crop good.
5. Pull or hoe out stray weeds that escape the wheel trays.
6. Clean the land as soon as the crop is harvested, and if the land lies open in the fall, till it occasionally. Many persons keep their premises scrupulously clean in the early season, but let them run wild late in the fall, and thus is the land seeded for the following year.
- Use clean seed, particularly of crops that are sown broadcast, and which, therefore, do not admit of tillage.
8. Do not let the weeds go to seed on the manure piles, in the fence corners, and along the highway.
9. Avoid coarse and raw stable manure, particularly if it is suspected of harboring bad company. Commercial fertilizers may be used for a time on foul land.
10. Sheep and pigs sometimes can be employed to clean the weeds from foul and fallow land. Land infested with Jerusalem artichokes is readily cleaned if hogs are turned in.
11. Induce your neighbor to keep his land as clean as you keep yours.

Rank pigweeds and their ilk are a compliment to a man's soil. Land that will not grow weeds will not grow crops, for crops are only those particular kinds of weeds a man wants to raise. Weeds have taught us the lesson of good tillage. There is no indication that they intend to remit their efforts in our behalf.—L. H. Bailey, in Principles of Vegetable Gardening.

CONSTIPATION

"I have gone 14 days at a time without a movement of the bowels, not being able to move them except by using hot water injections. Chronic constipation for many years placed me in this terrible condition; during that time I did everything I could, but never found any relief, such was my case until I began using CASCARETS. I now have from one to three passages a day, and if I was rich I would give \$1000 for each movement. It is such a relief."
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tered from the camp to the office, where was our bed, we paused to take in the beauty of the night. The moon rode high over the peaks of the mountains, flooding the narrow valley with mellow light. Under her magic the rugged peaks softened their harsh lines and seemed to lean lovingly toward us. The dark pine masses stood silent, as in breathless adoration. The dazzling snow lay like a garment over all the open spaces in soft, waving folds and crowded every stump with a quaintly shaped nightcap. Above the camps the smoke curled up from the campfires, standing like pillars of cloud that kept watch while men slept, and high over all the deep blue night sky, with its star jewels, sprang like the roof of a great cathedral from range to range, covering us in its kindly shelter. How homelike and safe seemed the valley, with its mountain sides, its sentinel trees and arching roof of jeweled sky! Even the night seemed kindly, and friendly the stars, and the lone cry of the wolf from the deep forest seemed like the voice of a comrade.

"How beautiful! Too beautiful!" said Graeme, stretching out his arms. "A night like this takes the heart out of me."
I stood silent, drinking in at every sense the night, with its wealth of loveliness.

"What is it I want?" he went on. "Why does the night make my heart ache? There are things to see and things to hear just beyond me. I cannot get to them."
The gay, careless look was gone from his face. His dark eyes were wistful with yearning.

"I often wonder if life has nothing better for me," he continued with his heartache voice.
I said no word, but put my arm within his. A light appeared in the stable. Glad of a diversion, I said:

"What is the light? Let us go and see."
"Sandy, taking a last look at his team, like enough."
We walked slowly toward the stable, speaking no word. As we neared the door we heard the sound of a voice in the monotone of one reading. I stepped forward and looked through a chink between the logs. Graeme was about to open the door, but I held up my hand and beckoned him to me. In a vacant stall, where was a pile of straw, a number of men were grouped. Sandy, leaning against the tying post, upon which the stable lantern hung, was reading; Nelson was kneeling in front of him and gazing into the gloom beyond; Baptiste lay upon his stomach, his chin in his hands and his upturned eyes fastened upon Sandy's face; Lachlan Campbell sat with his hands clasped about his knees, and two other men sat near him. Sandy was reading the undying story of the prodigal, Nelson now and then stopping him to make a remark. It was a scene I have never been able to forget. Today I pause in my tale and see it as clearly as when I looked through the chink upon it years ago—the long, low stable, with log walls and upright hitching poles; the dim outlines of the horses in the gloom of the background and the little group of rough, almost savage looking men, with faces wondering and reverent, lighted by the misty light of the stable lantern.

After the reading Sandy handed the book to Nelson, who put it in his pocket, saying:

"That's for us, boys, ain't it?"
"Aye," said Lachlan. "It is often that has been read in my hearing, but I am afraid it will not be for me whatever." And he swayed himself slightly as he spoke, and his voice was full of pain.

"The minister said I might come," said old Nelson earnestly and hopefully.

"Aye, but you are not Lachlan Campbell, and you have not had his privileges. My father was a golly elder in the Free Church of Scotland, and never a night or morning but we took the books."

"Yes, but he said 'any man,'" persisted Nelson, putting his hand on Lachlan's knee, but Lachlan shook his head.

"Dat young feller," said Baptiste— "wha's hees nem, heh?"
"He has no name. It is just a parable," explained Sandy.

"He's got no nem? He's just a parable?" asked young feller? asked Baptiste earnestly. "Das mean nothin'?"

Then Nelson took him in hand and explained to him the meaning, while Baptiste listened even more eagerly, ejaculating softly: "Ah, volia! Bon! By gar!" When Nelson had finished, he broke out: "Dat young feller—his name Baptiste, heh? And de old fadder—he's le bon Dieu? Bon! Das good story for me. How you go back? You go to de priest?"

"The book doesn't say priest or any one else," said Nelson. "You go back in yourself, you see?"
"Nou; das so, sure nuff. Ah!" As if a light broke in upon him. "You go in your own self. You make one lottle prayer. You say, 'Le bon Fadder, oh, I want come back, I so tire, so hongree, so sorrow!' He say, 'Come right 'long.' Ah, das fuss rate! Nelson, you make one lottle prayer for Sandy and me."
Nelson lifted up his face and said: "Father, we're all gone far away; we have spent all; we are poor; we are tired of it all; we want to feel different; to be different; we want to come back. Jesus came to save us from our sins, and he said if we came he wouldn't cast us out, no matter how bad we were, if we only came to him, O Jesus Christ," and his old iron face began to work, and two big tears slowly came from under his eyelids, "we are a poor lot, and I'm the worst of the lot, and we are trying to find the way. Show us how to get back. Amen."
"Bon!" said Baptiste. "Das fetch him sure!"
Graeme pulled me away, and without a word we went into the office and

drew up to the little stove. Graeme was greatly annoyed.
"Did you ever see anything like that?" he asked—"old Nelson, the ardent, savagely, toughest old singer in the camp, on his knees before a lot of men!"
"Before God," I could not help saying, for the thing seemed very real to me. The old man evidently felt himself talking to someone.

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said Graeme doubtfully, "but there's a lot of stuff I can't swallow."
"When you take medicine, you don't swallow the bottle," I replied, for his trouble was not mine.

"If I were sure of the medicine, I wouldn't mind the bottle, and yet it acts well enough," he went on. "I don't mind Lachlan. He's a highland mystic and has visions. And Sandy's almost as bad, and Baptiste is an impulsive little chap. Those don't count much. But old man Nelson is a cool blood, level headed old fellow; has seen a lot of life too. And then there's Craig. He has a better head than I have and is a hot blooded, and yet he is living and slaying away in that hole and really enjoys it. There must be something in it."

"Oh, look here, Graeme!" I burst out impatiently. "What's the use of your talking like that? Of course there's something in it. There's everything in it. The trouble with me is I can't face the music. It calls for a life where a fellow must go in for straight, steady work, self denial and that sort of thing, and I'm too bohemian for that, and too lazy. But that fellow Craig makes one feel horribly uncomfortable!"

Graeme put his head on one side and examined me curiously.

"I believe you're right about yourself. You always were a luxurious beggar. But that's not where it catches me."
We sat and smoked and talked of other things for an hour and then turned in. As I was dropping off I was roused by Graeme's voice:

"Are you going to the preparatory service on Friday night?"
"Don't know," I replied rather sleepily.

"I say, do you remember the preparatory service at home?" There was something in his voice that set me wide awake.

"Yes. Rather terrific, wasn't it? But I always felt better after it," I replied.
"To me"—he was sitting up in bed now—"to me it was like a call to arms, or, rather, like a call for a forlorn hope—none but volunteers wanted. Do you remember the thrill in the old governor's voice as he dared any but the right stuff to come on?"
"We'll go in on Friday night," I said. And so we did. Sandy took a load of men with his team, and Graeme and I drove in the light sleigh.

The meeting was in the church, and over a hundred men were present. There was some singing of familiar hymns at first, and then Mr. Craig read the same story as we had heard in the stable, that most perfect of all parables, the prodigal son. Baptiste nudged Sandy in delight and whispered something, but Sandy held his face so absolutely expressionless that Graeme was moved to say:

"Look at Sandy! Did you ever see such a graven image? Something has hit him hard."
The men were held fast by the story. The voice of the reader, low, earnest and thrilling with the tender pathos of the tale, carried the words to our hearts, while a glance, a gesture, a movement of the body, gave us the vision of it all as he was seeing it.

Then, in simplest of words, he told us what the story meant, holding us the while with eyes and voice and gesture.

He compelled us to scorn the gay, heartless selfishness of the young fool setting forth so jauntily from the broken home; he moved our pity and our sympathy for the young prodigate, who, broken and deserted, had still pluck enough to determine to work his way back, and who, in utter desperation, at last gave it up, and then he showed us the homecoming—the ragged, heart-sick tramp, with hesitating steps, stumbling along the dusty road, and then the rush of the old father, his garments fluttering and his voice heard in broken cries. I see and hear it all now whenever the words are read.

He announced the hymn, "Just as I Am," read the first verse, and then went on: "There you are, men, every man of you, somewhere on the road. Some of you are too lazy"—here Graeme nudged me—"and some of you haven't got enough yet of the far country to come back. May there be a chance for you when you want to come! Men, you all want to go back home, and when you go you'll want to put on your soft clothes, and you won't go till you can go in good style. But where did the prodigal get his good clothes?"

Quick came the answer in Baptiste's shrill voice:

"From de old fadder!"
No one was surprised, and the minister went on:

"Yes, and that's where we must get the good, clean heart—the good, clean, brave heart—from our Father. Don't wait; but, just as you are, come. Sing."

"are coming back," for my attention was suddenly absorbed by Abe, the stage driver, who was sitting next me. I could hear him swearing approval and admiration, saying to himself:

"Ain't he a clincker? I'll be gee whizzly god! dusted if he ain't a malleable iron. Double back action, self adjusting corn cracker."

And the prayer continued, to be punctuated with like admiring and even more sulphurous epithets. It was an inconspicuous melody. The earnest, reverent prayer and the earnest, admiring profanity rendered chaotic one's ideas of religious propriety. The feelings in both were akin, the method of expression somewhat widely diverse.

After prayer Craig's tone changed utterly. In a quiet, matter of fact, businesslike way he stated his plan of organization and called for all who wished to join to remain after the benediction. Some fifty men were left, among them Nelson, Sandy, Lachlan Campbell, Baptiste, Shaw, Nixon, Geordie and Billy Breen, who tried to get out, but was held fast by Geordie.

Graeme was passing out, but I signed him to remain, saying that I wished "to see the thing out." Abe sat still beside me, swearing disgustedly at the fellows "who were goin' back on the preacher." Craig appeared amazed at the number of men remaining and seemed to fear that something was wrong. He put before them the terms of discipleship, as the Maker put them to the eager scribe, and he did not make them easy. He pictured the kind of work to be done and the kind of men needed for the doing of it. Abe grew uneasy as the minister went on to describe the completeness of the surrender, the intensity of the loyalty demanded.

"That knocks me out, I reckon," he muttered in a disappointed tone. "I ain't up to that grade." And as Craig described the heroism called for, the magnificence of the light, the worth of it and the outcome of it all Abe ground out, "I'll be blanked if I wouldn't like to take a hand, but I guess I'm not in it."

Craig finished by saying:

"I want to put this quite fairly. It is not any league of mine. You're not joining my company. It is no easy business, and it is for your whole life. What do you say, Nelson?"

Nelson rose slowly and with difficulty began:

"I may be all wrong, but you made it easier for me, Mr. Craig. You said he would see me through, or I should never have risked it. Perhaps I am wrong." And the old man looked troubled.

Craig sprang up.

"No, no! Thank God, no! He will see every man through who will trust his life to him—every man, no matter how tough he is, no matter how broken."

Then Nelson straightened himself up and said:

"Well, sir, I believe a lot of the men would go in for this if they were dead sure they would get through."

"Get through?" said Craig. "Never a fear of it! It is a hard fight, a long fight, a glorious fight," throwing up his head, "but every man who squarely trusts him and takes him as Lord and Master comes out victor!"

"Bon!" said Baptiste. "Das me. You tink he's take me in dat fight, M'sieu Craig, heh?"

His eyes were blazing.

"You mean it?" asked Craig almost sternly.

"Yes, by gar!" said the little Frenchman eagerly.

"Hear what he says, then." And Craig, turning over the leaves of his Testament, read solemnly the words, "Swear not at all."
"Non! For sure! Den I stop him," replied Baptiste earnestly, and Craig wrote his name down.

Poor Abe looked amazed and distressed, rose slowly and, saying, "That jars my whisky jug," passed out.

There was a slight movement near the organ, and glancing up, I saw Mrs. Mavor put her face lustily in her hands. The men's faces were anxious and troubled, and Nelson said in a voice that broke:

"Tell them what you told me, sir."

But Craig was troubled, too, and replied, "You tell them, Nelson!" And Nelson told the men the story of how he began just five weeks ago. The old man's voice steeled as he went on, and he grew eager as he told how he had been helped and how the world was all different and his heart seemed new. He spoke of his friend as if he were some one that could be seen out at camp, that he knew well and met every day.

But as he tried to say how deeply he regretted that he had not known all this years before, the old, hard face began to quiver, and the steady voice wavered. Then he pulled himself together and said:

"I begin to feel sure he'll pull me through—me, the hardest man in the mountains! So don't you fear, boys. He's all right."

Then the men gave in their names one by one. When it came to Geordie's turn, he gave his name:

"George Crawford, frae the parish of Kilsyth, Scotland, an' ye'll juist pit doon the lad's name, Maister Craig. He's a wee bit fashed w' the dis-course, but he has the root of the matter in him, I doot."

And so Billy Breen's name went down.

When the meeting was over, thirty-eight names stood upon the communion roll of the Black Rock Presbyterian church, and it will ever be one of the regrets of my life that neither Graeme's name nor my own appeared on that roll. And two days after, when the cup went round on that first communion Sabbath, from Nelson to Sandy and from Sandy to Baptiste, and so on down the line to Billy Breen and Mrs. Mavor, and then to Abe, the driver,

whom she had by her own mystic power lifted into hope and faith. I felt all the shame and pain of a traitor, and I believe in my heart that the fire of that pain and shame burned something of the selfish cowardice out of me—and that it is burning still.

The last words of the minister, in the short address after the table had been served, were low and sweet and tender, but they were words of high courage, and before he had spoken them all the men were listening with shining eyes, and when they rose to sing the closing hymn they stood straight and stiff like soldiers on parade.

And I wished more than ever I was one of them.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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