

Black Rock

By RALPH CONNOR

CHAPTER XIII. HOW NELSON CAME HOME.

THROUGH the long summer the mountains and the pines were with me, and through the winter, too, busy as I was sitting in my Black Rock sketches for the railway people who would still persist in ordering them by the dozen, the memory of that stirring life would come over me, and once more I would be among the silent pines and the mighty snow peaked mountains, and before me would appear the red shirted shanty men or dark faced miners, great, free, bold fellows, driving me almost mad with the desire to seize and fix those swiftly changing groups of picturesque figures. At such times I would drop my sketch and with eager brush seize a group, a face, a figure, and that is how my studio comes to be filled with the men of Black Rock. There they are about me—Graeme and the men from the woods, Sandy, Baptiste, the Campbells and, in many attitudes and groups, old man Nelson; Craig, too, and his miners, Shaw, George, Nixon, poor old Billy and the keeper of the league saloon.

It seemed as if I lived among them, and the illusion was greatly helped by the vivid letters Graeme sent me from time to time. Brief notes came now and then from Craig, too, to whom I had sent a faithful account of how I had brought Mrs. Mayor to her ship and of how I had watched her sail away with none too brave a face as she held up her hand that bore the miners' ring and smiled with that deep light in her eyes. Ah, those eyes have driven me to despair and made me fear that I am no great painter after all, in spite of what my friends tell me who come in to smoke my good cigars and praise my brush! I can get the brow and hair and mouth and nose, but the eyes—the eyes elude me. And the faces of Mrs. Mayor on my wall, that the men praise and rave over, are not such as I could show to any of the men from the mountains.

Graeme's letters tell me chiefly about Craig and his doings and about old man Nelson, while from Craig I hear about Graeme and how he and Nelson are standing at his back and doing what they can to fill the gap that never can be filled. The three are much together, I can see, and I am glad for them all, but chiefly for Craig, whose face, grief stricken, but resolute and often gentle as a woman's, will not leave me or let me rest in peace.

The note of thanks he sent me was entirely characteristic. There were no heroics, much less pining or self pity. It was simple and manly, not ignoring the pain, but making much of the joy. And then they had their work to do. That note, so clear, so manly, so nobly sensible, stiffens my back yet at times. In the spring came the startling news that Black Rock would soon be no more. The mines were to close down on April 1. The company, having assured the confiding public with enticing descriptions of marvelous drifts, veins, assays and prospects and having expended vast sums of the public's money in developing the mines till the assurance of their reliability was absolutely final, calmly shut down and vanished. With their vanishing vanished Black Rock, not without loss and much deep cursing on the part of the men brought some hundreds of miles to see the company in its extraordinary and wholly inexplicable game.

Personally it grieved me to think that my plan of returning to Black Rock could never be carried out. It was a great compensation, however, that the three men most representative to me of that life were soon to visit me actually in my own home and den. Graeme's letter said that in one month they might be expected to appear. At least he and Nelson were soon to come, and Craig would soon follow.

On receiving the great news I at once looked up young Nelson and his sister, and we proceeded to celebrate the joyful prospect with a specially good dinner. I found the greatest delight in picturing the joy and pride of the old man in his children, whom he had not seen for fifteen or sixteen years. The mother had died some five years before. Then the farm was sold, and the brother and sister came into the city, and any father might be proud of them. The son was a well made young fellow, handsome enough, thoughtful and solid looking. The girl reminded me of her father. The same resolution was seen in mouth and jaw, and the same passion slumbered in the dark gray eyes. She was not beautiful, but she carried herself well, and one would always look at her twice. It would be worth something to see the meeting between father and daughter.

But fate, the greatest artist of us all, who's little count of the careful drawing and the bright coloring of our fancy's pictures, but with rude hand de-scribes all and with one swift sweep paints out the bright and paints in the dark, and this trick he served me when one June night, after long and anxious waiting for some word from the west, my door suddenly opened and Graeme walked in upon me like a specter, gray and voiceless. My shout of welcome was choked back by the look in his face, and I could only gaze at him and wait for his word. He gripped my hand, tried to speak, but failed to make words come.

"Sit down, old man," I said, pushing

him into my chair, "and take your time."

He obeyed, looking up at me with burning, sleepless eyes. My heart was sore for his misery, and I said: "Don't mind, old chap. It can't be so awfully bad. You're here safe and sound at any rate." And so I went on to give him time, but he shuddered and looked round and groaned.

"Now, look here, Graeme, let's have it. When did you land here? Where is Nelson? Why didn't you bring him up?"

"He is at the station in his coffin," he answered slowly.

"In his coffin?" I echoed, my beautiful pictures all vanishing. "How was it?"

"Through my cursed folly," he groaned bitterly.

"What happened?" I asked.

But, ignoring my question, he said: "I must see his children. I have not slept for four nights. I hardly know what I am doing, but I can't rest till I see his children. I promised him. Get them for me."

"Tomorrow will do. Go to sleep now, and we shall arrange everything tomorrow," I urged.

"No," he said fiercely; "tonight, now!"

In half an hour they were listening, pale and grief stricken, to the story of their father's death.

Poor Graeme was relentless in his self condemnation as he told how, through his "cursed folly," old Nelson was killed. The three—Craig, Graeme and Nelson—had come as far as Victoria together. There they left Craig and came on to San Francisco. In an evil hour Graeme met a companion of other and evil days, and it was not long till the old fever came upon him.

In vain Nelson warned and pleaded. The reaction from the monotony and poverty of camp life to the excitement and luxury of the San Francisco gaming palaces swung Graeme quite off his feet, and all that Nelson could do was to follow from place to place and keep watch.

"And there he would sit," said Graeme in a hard, bitter voice, "waiting and watching often till the gray morning light, while my madness held me fast to the table. One night"—here he paused a moment, put his face in his hands and shuddered, but quickly he was master of himself again and went on in the same hard voice—"one night my partner and I were playing two men who had done us up before. I knew they were cheating, but could not detect them. Game after game they won till I was furious at my stupidity in not being able to catch them. Happening to glance at Nelson in the corner, I caught a meaning look, and, looking again, he threw me a signal. I knew at once what the fraud was and next game charged the fellow with it. He gave me the lie. I struck his mouth, but before I could draw my gun his partner had me by the arms. What followed I hardly know. When I was struggling to get free I saw him reach for his weapon, but as he drew it Nelson sprang across the table and bore him down. When the row was over, three men lay on the floor. One was Nelson. He took the shot meant for me."

Again the story paused.

"And the man that shot him?"

"I started at the intense fierceness in the voice and, looking upon the girl, saw her eyes blazing with a terrible light."

"He is dead," answered Graeme indifferently.

"You killed him?" she asked eagerly.

Graeme looked at her curiously and answered slowly:

"I did not mean to. He came at me. I struck him harder than I knew. He never moved."

She drew a sigh of satisfaction and waited.

"I got him to a private ward, had the best doctor in the city and sent for Craig to Victoria. For three days we thought he would live—he was keen to get home—but by the time Craig came he had given up hope. Oh, but I was thankful to see Craig come in, and the joy in the old man's eyes was beautiful to see! There was no pain at last and no fear. He would not allow me to reproach myself, saying over and over, 'You would have done the same for me,' as I would, fast enough, 'and it is better me than you. I am old and done. You will do much good yet for the boys.' And he kept looking at me till I could only promise to do my best.

"But I am glad I told him how much good he had done me during the last year, for he seemed to think that too good to be true, and when Craig told him how he had helped the boys in the camp and how Sandy and Baptiste and the Campbells would always be better men for his life among them the old man's face actually shone as if light were coming through, and with surprise and joy he kept on saying: 'Do you think so? Do you think so? Perhaps so, perhaps so.' At the last he talked of Christmas night at the camp. You were there, you remember. Craig had been holding a service, and something happened, I don't know what, but they both knew."

"I know," I said, and I saw again the picture of the old man under the pine, upon his knees in the snow, with his face turned up to the stars.

And Graeme's voice, hard till now, broke in a sob.

He had forgotten us and was back beside his passing friend, and all his self control could not keep back the flowing tears.

"It was his life for mine," he said huskily.

The brother and sister were quietly weeping, but spoke no word, though I knew Graeme was waiting for them.

I took up the word and told of what I had known of Nelson and his influence upon the men of Black Rock. They listened eagerly enough, but still without speaking. There seemed nothing to say till I suggested to Graeme that he must get some rest. Then the girl turned to him and, impulsively putting out her hand, said:

"Oh, it is all so sad, but how can we ever thank you?"

"Thank me?" gasped Graeme. "Can you forgive me? I brought him to his death?"

"No, no! You must not say so!" she answered hurriedly. "You would have done the same for him."

"God knows I would," said Graeme earnestly. "and God bless you for your words."

And I was thankful to see the tears start in his dry, burning eyes.

We carried him to the old home in the country, that he might lie by the side of the wife he had loved and wronged. A few friends met us at the wayside station and followed in sad procession along the country road that wound past farms and through woods and at last up to the ascent where the quaint old wooden church, black with the rains and snows of many years, stood among its silent graves. The little graveyard sloped gently toward the setting sun, and from it one could see, far on every side, the fields of grain and meadowland that wandered off over softly undulating hills to meet the maple woods at the horizon, dark, green and cool. Here and there white farmhouses, with great barns standing near, looked out from clustering orchards.

Up the grass grown walk and through the crowding mounds, over which waves came the long, tangling grass, we bear our friend and let him gently down into the kindly bosom of Mother Earth, dark, moist and warm. The sound of a distant cowbell mingles with the voice of the last prayer; the sobs drop heavily with heart starting sob; the mound is heaped and shaped by kindly friends, sharing with one another the task; the long, rough sods are laid over and patted into place; the old minister takes farewell in a few words of gentle sympathy; the brother and sister, with lingering looks at the two graves side by side, the old and the new, step into the farmer's carriage and drive away; the sexton locks the gate and goes home, and we are left outside alone.

Then we went back and stood by Nelson's grave.

After a long silence Graeme spoke, "Connor, he did not grudge his life to me, and I think," and here the words came slowly, "I understand now what that means, 'Who loved me and gave himself for me.'"

Then, taking off his hat, he said reverently:

"By God's help, Nelson's life shall not end, but shall go on. Yes, old man," looking down upon the grave, "I'm with you," and, lifting up his face to the calm sky, "God help me to be true!"

Then he turned and walked briskly away, as one might who had pressing business or as soldiers march from a comrade's grave to a merry tune, not that they have forgotten, but they have still to fight.

And this was the way old man Nelson came home.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

He Was Much Obligated.

Tramp—I'm very much obliged for that piece of fresh bread you gave me, mum.

Young Housekeeper—You are welcome.

Tramp—Yes, mum. It was a little too doughy to eat, mum, but it tightened my leaky shoes up elegant.—N. Y. Weekly.

A Modern Caesar.

Caesar for the third time declined the proffered crown.

"Darn it!" he exclaimed, angrily. "That thing is not at all in style. If you can't give me a decent Panama, I don't want anything."

Just then Brutus laughed and went off to sharpen his stiletto.—N. Y. Times.

The Hint Direct.

"I don't believe you love me a bit!" sobbed his wife.

"But I do, darling! I—"

"Don't tell me! It's unnatural you should. No man could love a woman who wears such old hats as I do."—London Answers.

When Seen Afar.

"Is matrimony an ideal condition?" asked the little one.

"In perspective it is," answered her mother, with a quick glance in the direction of the man who was reading a newspaper at the breakfast table.—Chicago Post.

She Was Sharpening Up.

"You've had some acquaintance with Miss Withers; is she really as dull as most people seem to think her?"

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SCOTCH FARE LAUDED.
Oatmeal, Scones and Haggis Serve as Preventives of Dentists and Dyspepsia.

Defenders of the Scottish national fare of oatmeal, scones and haggis have been few. To the ordinary bill of fare nearly every nation save the Scotch has contributed something, but Scotch dishes, except at distinctively Caledonian functions, are generally eschewed, says the New York Sun.

A Scotch physician has, however, come forward recently with arguments in favor of Scotch cooking. He says, for instance, that dyspepsia and dentists are practically unknown in Scotland outside of the large cities, in which the national cooking of Scotland is discarded for foreign dishes and foreign ways.

It is a fact that though distinguished in the field of medicine, the Scotch as dentists are little known, and while the details of cases of dyspepsia are less easily procurable, it is certainly not a national ailment in Scotland. The Scotch show no partiality for pies and pastry, and in the highlands they are much out of doors—two reasons which might be taken to account for the absence of dyspepsia, apart from the wholesomeness of their diet.

The Scotch are a hardy race, and in one particular at least they have been able in recent years to impress their views upon the people of other countries, namely, in the moral general use of cereals. The popularity of cereal food has vastly increased in the United States in the last ten years, and if the advocates of Scotch cooking, or rather of Scotch fare, have been unable to get recognition for their views at the dinner table, they have been more fortunate at the breakfast board.

CHANGES IN OCEAN'S BED.
Recent Surveys Show New Conditions Near the Island of St. Vincent, West Indies.

The volcanic eruptions and other disturbing causes have recently produced some material changes in the bed of the ocean off the coast of St. Vincent. These will necessitate a careful resurvey to make navigation safe in that neighborhood, according to Dr. Jagger, of Harvard university, who, as one of the party of scientists sent to the West Indies to investigate the recent volcanic eruptions, has made a special study of the vicinity of the British island. Where before the outbreak of La Soufriere and Mont Pelee there existed solid land is now deep water, as yet unsounded, which extends to the base of high cliffs, bare and vertical, formerly a considerable distance from the shore.

It is erroneous, Dr. Jagger says, to state that there has been no change in soundings as a result of the eruptions. Tremendous submarine disturbances occurred, he asserts, and the breaking of the cables after the first eruption of May 5 was probably due to landslides along the bed of the ocean, the extent of which cannot be determined. The cables in all probability were snapped asunder under the weight of enormous masses thrown upon them from the higher portions of the ocean's bed.

VOTING BY TELEGRAPH.
An Electrical Device Once Planned for Use in the Legislatures of Germany.

There is only one reference to mechanical voting in the 13 reports on foreign parliaments which have lately been issued. This occurs in a memorandum on the subject of divisions in the reichstag and Prussian landtag.

As long ago as 1869 a motion was introduced in the Prussian lower house in favor of establishing a system called the voting telegraph, an electric invention. Each member was to have at his place a handle to turn to right or left as he wished to vote "yes" or "no," and this handle could be turned only by the member to whom the seat belonged, each member being provided with a special key. The time for taking the votes of the lower house would, according to this scheme, have occupied less than two minutes.

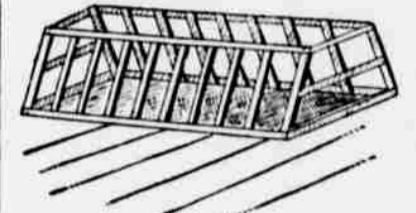
There were no practical objections made to the machine, says the London Chronicle, but it was rejected, partly because no pressing need existed for shortening the divisions and partly on account of the advantages of an oral process of voting.

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IMPROVED FEEDING BOX.
the frame, where the feed is put in, more than three or four inches, so that a hen cannot get in. The openings at the sides I have about three inches between the laths.

I have used and have seen a large variety of box feeders and I find that this plan is about as near perfect as anything in use. I must not omit to say that in putting on the upright laths it is well to let them into the side of the four foot board, as a box made in this manner will last for years with proper care. It is not easily tipped over, and will hold grain or mush food by letting the laths come up an inch above the bottom board.—Charles E. Russell, in N. Y. Tribune.

IF SHE LIVES.



Mrs. Martyr—I must say, Jane, that I am not altogether pleased with your cooking.

Cook—It ain't to be expected you should be at first, mum; but you'll get dedicated up to it in time.—Ally Sloper.

Strange, But True.
O' deyaln't no controvertin' of this simple song I sing; Day ain't nothin' so uncertain As a dead-sure thing.—Philadelphia Press.

He Knew.

She—I never saw a married couple who got on so well together as Mr. and Mrs. Rigby.

He—Humph! I know! Each of them does exactly as she likes.—Brooklyn Life.

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