

# Black Rock

By RALPH CONNOR

(Continued from First Page.)

draw on a grizzled veteran to tell how twenty years ago, he had crossed the Great Divide and had seen and done what no longer fell to men to see or do in these new days. And so she won the old timer. But it was beautiful to see the innocent gals with which she caught Billy Breen and drew him to her corner near the organ. What she was saying I knew not, but poor Billy was protesting, waving his big hands. The meeting came to order, with Shaw in the chair and the handsome young Oxford man secretary. Shaw stated the object of the meeting in a few halting words, but when he came to speak of the pleasure he and all felt in being together in that room his words flowed in a stream, warm and full. Then there was a pause, and Mr. Craig was called, but he knew better than to speak at that point. Finally Nixon rose hesitatingly, but as he caught a bright smile from Mrs. Mavor he straightened himself as if for a fight.

"I ain't no good at makin' speeches," he began, "but it ain't speeches we want. We've got somethin' to do, and what we want to know is how to do it. And, to be right plain, we want to know how to drive this cursed whisky out of Black Rock. You all know what it's doin' for us, at least for some of us, and it's time to stop it now, or for some of us it'll be mighty soon be too late, and the only way to stop it is to quit drinkin' it and help others to quit. I bear some talk of a league, and what I say is if it's a league out and out against whisky, a total abstinence league, then I'm with you. That's my talk. I move we make that kind of a league."

Nixon sat down amid cheers and a chorus of remarks: "Good man!" "That's the talk!" "Stay with it!" But he waited for the smile and the glance that came to him from the beautiful face in the corner, and with that he seemed content.

Again there was silence. Then the secretary rose, with a slight flush upon his handsome, delicate face, and acceded the motion. If he would pardon a personal reference, he would give them his reasons. He had come to this country to make his fortune. Now he was anxious to make enough to enable him to go home with some degree of honor. His home had everything that was dear to him. Between him and that home, between him and all that was good and beautiful and honorable, stood whisky. "I'm ashamed to confess, and the flush deepened on his cheek and his lips grew thinner, "that I feel the need of some such league." His handsome face, his perfect style of address, learned possibly in the Union, but more than all, his show of nerve, for these men knew how to value that, made a strong impression on his audience, but there were no following cheers.

Mr. Craig appeared hopeful, but with Mrs. Mavor's face there was a look of wistful tender pity, for she knew how much the words had cost the lad.

Then up rose a sturdy, hard featured man, with a bur in his voice that proclaimed his birth. His name was George Crawford. I afterward learned, but every one called him Geordie. He was a character in his way, fond of his glass; but, though he was never known to refuse a drink, he was never known to be drunk. He took his drink, for the most part, with bread and cheese in his own shack or with a friend or two in a sober, respectable way, but never could be induced to join the wild carousals in Slavin's saloon. He made the highest wages, but was far too true a Scot to spend his money recklessly. Every one waited eagerly to hear Geordie's mind. He spoke solemnly, as befitting a Scotsman expressing a deliberate opinion, and carefully, as if choosing his best English, for when Geordie became excited no one in Black Rock could understand him.

"Maister Chairman," said Geordie, "I'm aye for temperance in a' things. There was a shout of laughter, at which Geordie gazed round in pained surprise. "I'll no deny," he went on in an explanatory tone, "that I tak ma mornin' an' mornin' a nip at noon an' a wee drap after work in the evenin' an' whiles a sip o' toddy wi' a freem the cauld nights, but I'm no a guzzler, an' I dinna gang in wi' the loons flingin' about gold money."

"And that's thrue for ye, me boy," interrupted a rich Irish brogue, to the delight of the crowd and the amazement of Geordie, who went calmly on:

"An' I canna bidle yon saloon whaur they sell sic awfu'-like stuff—it's whaur ye never see o' yer richt change. It's an awfu'-like place. Man, an' Geordie began to warm up, "ye can just smell the sulphur when ye gang in. But I dinna care about the temperance societies, wi' their pledges an' havers, an' I canna see what harm can come till a man by takin' a bottle o' gold Glenlivet name w' him. I canna bidle the tsetvol buddies."

Geordie's speech was followed by loud applause, partly appreciative of Geordie himself, but largely sympathetic with his position.

Two or three men followed in the same strain, advocating a league for mutual improvement and social purposes, but without the feotal pledge. They were against the saloon, but did not see why they should not take a drink now and then.

Finally the manager rose to support his "friend, Mista—ah—Crawford," ridiculing the idea of a total abstinence pledge as fanatical and indeed "absurd." He was opposed to the saloon and would like to see a club formed, with a comfortable clubroom, books, magazines, pictures, games, anything, "doutcherknow, to make the time pass

pleasantly," but it was "absurd to ask men to abstain from a propoal use of—aw—nourishing drinks" because some men made beasts of themselves. He concluded by offering \$50 toward the support of such a club.

The current of feeling was setting strongly against the total abstinence idea, and Mr. Craig's face was hard, and his eyes gleamed like coals. Then he did a bit of generalship. He proposed that since they had the two plans clearly before them they should take a few minutes' intermission in which to make up their minds, and he was very glad to have Mrs. Mavor's aid. In the interval the men talked in groups, eagerly, even fiercely, hampered seriously in the forceful expression of their opinions by the presence of Mrs. Mavor, who glided from group to group, dropping a word here and a smile there. She reminded me of a general riding along the ranks, bracing his men for the coming battle. She paused beside Geordie, spoke earnestly for a few moments, while Geordie gazed solemnly at her, and then she came back to Billy in the corner near me. What she was saying I could not hear, but poor Billy was protesting, spreading his hands out aimlessly before him, but gazing at her while in dumb admiration. Then she came to me.

"Poor Billy! He was good to my husband," she said softly, "and he has a good heart."

"He's not much to look at," I could not help saying.

"The oyster hides its pearl," she answered, a little reproachfully.

"The shell is apparent enough," I replied, for the mischief was in me.

"Ah, yes," she replied softly, "but it is the pearl we love."

I moved over beside Billy, whose eyes were following Mrs. Mavor as she went to speak to Mr. Craig.

"Well," I said, "you all seem to have a high opinion of her."

"An 'igh hopinion!" he replied in deep scorn. "An 'igh hopinion, you call it!"

"What would you call it?" I asked, wishing to draw him out.

"O! don't call it nothink," he replied, spreading out his rough hands.

"She seems very nice," I said indifferently.

He drew his eyes away from Mrs. Mavor, and gave attention to me for the first time.

"Nice!" he repeated, with fine contempt, and then he added impressively, "Them as don't know shouldn't say nothink."

"You are right," I answered earnestly, "and I am quite of your opinion."

He gave me a quick glance out of his little, deep-set, dark blue eyes and opened his heart to me. He told me in his quiet speech how again and again she had taken him in and nursed him and encouraged him and sent him out with a new heart for his battle until, for very shame's sake at his own miserable weakness, he had kept out of her way for many months, going steadily down.

"Now, O! hain't got no grip, but when she says to me to drink, says she, 'O! Billy, she calls me Billy to myself' (this with a touch of pride)—'oh, Billy, says she, 'we must aye a total abstinence league tonight, and O! want you to help!' and she keeps a-lookin' at me with those heyes o' hers till, if you believe me, sir," lowering his voice to an emphatic whisper, "though O! knowed O! couldn't help none, afore O! knowed O! promised 'er O! would. It's 'er heyes. When them heyes says 'O! hup you steps and 'does,' ye."

I remember my first look into her eyes, and I could quite understand Billy's enthusiasm. Just as she began to sing I went over to Geordie and took my seat beside him. She began with an English stunner song, "Sleep, Baby, Sleep," one of Barry Cornwall's, I think, and then sang a love song with the refrain, "Love once again," but no thrills came to me, and I began to wonder if her spell over me was broken. Geordie, who had been listening somewhat indifferently, encouraged me, however, by saying: "She's just pitin' af time with the feckless sangs. Man, there's a hue grip till them." But when, after a few minutes' pause, she began "My Ain Fireside" Geordie gave a sigh of satisfaction, "Aye, that's somethin' like," and when she finished the first verse he gave me a dig in the ribs with his elbow that took my breath away, saying in a whisper, "Man, hear till yon, will ye?" And again I found the spell upon me. It was not the voice, after all, but the great soul behind that thrilled and compelled. She was seeing, feeling, living, what she sang, and her voice showed us her heart. The cozy fireside, with its bonnet, blithe blink, where no care could abide, but only peace and love, was vividly present to her, and as she sang we saw it too. When she came to the last verse:

When I drew in my stool  
On my cozy hearthstone,  
My heart loupes me light  
I hear ken't for my ain,  
there was a feeling of tears in the flowing song, and we knew the words had brought her a picture of the fireside that the tears in my eyes, and wondering at myself, I cast a stealthy glance at the men about me, and I saw that they, too, were looking through their hearts' windows upon firesides and little nooks that glowed from afar.

And then she sang "The Auld House," and Geordie, giving me another poke, said, "That's my ain sang, and when I asked him what he meant he whisp'ered fiercely, "Whesht, mon!" and I did, for his face looked dangerous.

In a pause between the verses I heard Geordie saying to himself, "Aye, I manna gie it up, I do."

"What?" I ventured.

"Naethin' ava." And then he added impatiently, "Mon, but ye're an inquisitive boddie," after which I subsided into silence.

Immediately upon the meeting being called to order Mr. Craig made his speech, and it was a fine bit of work, beginning with a clear statement of the object in view, he set in contrast the two kinds of leagues proposed—one a league of men who would take whisky in moderation, the other a league of men who were pledged to drink none themselves and to prevent in every honorable way others from drinking. There was no long argument, but he spoke at white heat, and as he appealed to the men to think, each not of himself alone, but of the others as well, the yearning born of his long months of desire and toll vibrated in his voice and reached to the heart. Many men

looked uncomfortable and uncertain, and even the manager looked none too cheerful.

At this critical moment the crowd got a shock. Billy Breen shuffled out to the front and, in a voice shaking with nervousness and emotion, began to speak. His large, coarse hands wavered tremulously about his head. "O! hain't no biossial' temperance forer, and mayhap O! hain't no right to speak 'er. But O! got somethin' to say, and O! in a goin' to say it."

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