

## A LETTER FROM THE LONG GRASS.

Dan Crawford.

The year 1921 is dying. But there is life in its death, for what do I hear coming down the mountain side? I hear a band of from-far-away Christians singing as they descend into the town. Like many such, they have been traveling many miles in to us for our New Year Week of Prayer. This last contingent has come along the great range from the North, singing all the way.

Their leader is a trophy of grace, and a clear case of the devil defeating his own ends. Among many more, he was dragged out long ago in a slave gang to the far Atlantic. Many died en route, many ran away, but many also reached the dreaded goal, he among the rest. There he went from bad to worse, this new phase of slavery making "a new sinner" of him. Then came a broken leg in a black brawl, and this accident was the contributory cause that led him to the mission for medical treatment. But sure enough God had a treat for him hidden in this treatment. The body is as wholly ensouled as the soul is wholly embodied: the broken leg gave him in the end a broken heart, and healing of soul came first, then healing of body. This double phase is appropriate; is, indeed, the keynote of it all, for after soul-redemption came liberation from slavery, double redemption almost at the same time.

Now comes Satan's chagrin, now we see how Christ has royal revenge all along the old slave route! For hundreds of miles, twisting like a cork screw into the Interior, back goes the ex-slave along the old *via dolorosa*. Back, and preaching all the way! Back, and singing all the time! Every sight he saw of bleaching bones, every slave yoke lying ant-eaten by the trail, brought back memories of God's goodness in saving him from "so great a death," the death of a dog in a slave gang. Thus Satan outwitted himself, for the selfsame slave all along the selfsame slave track proclaimed twofold liberty from sinful bonds. All of which pledges for us the final victory of Christ over all Satan's stratagems! For if (and there is no "if" about it), if Golgotha was his master-stroke in the murder of

God's Son, and if (again avauant, that "if"!), if just there his maximum became his minimum, then so it was that stupid day when Satan enslaved this black saint, dragging him far out to the Ocean. The further he takes him, the larger will be the saved slave's area for preaching every yard of the homeward march on the return journey. The further he reached, the further he preached.

He is an oldish man. He is now a pastor of one of our branch churches, and he is now leading that band of weary travelers singing down the mountain side.

But does this slave story end here? What about those wild slavers: can not God save even such, "dregs of damnation" though they be? Yes, rare though it be, my old colleague, Mr. Swan, just sends from Lisbon the best of news. The details are a bit sordid, but it was for even such Christ died.

Years ago one such slaver saw Christ as the liberator of slaves, he an old slaver, greatest slave of all. Living in illicit union with a black woman, he proved sincerity of soul by marrying this mother of his children. Then came the conversion of this surprized wife, surprized at the change in her partner, surprized at the new life beginning for her.

The next phase is a break with Africa, and in 1911 he goes home to Portugal, boldly bringing wife and children with him. But there is trouble lurking ahead for him, trouble with lawyers and legal documents. Be it explained, although his old partnership with his brother was mutually and morally dissolved, yet a failure to get this duly documented by a lawyer is going to be his undoing. The brother in Africa has neither relented nor repented; he still continues to exploit their joint-names, runs up a pile of debts, and absconds! Then the long arm of Portugal, having failed to catch the real culprit, stretches across from Angola to Lisbon and arrests the astounded brother, who had washed his hands of it long ago. The authorities also take possession of all money he has in the bank.



Mr. and Mrs. Dan Crawford at home.

Then comes a nice point. What about that sum of money, hard-earned money, he had handed over to the mission some time ago for aggressive spiritual work? Surely the missionary is right in refunding it pro tem. Yes, refund is the verb, but pro tem. is its authentic adverb, and this pro tem. he never forgets, no, nor the intervening 4 per cent! Thus it was he was taken away back to Africa for his trial, but God so stood by the man who had so stood by him that he was released on promise to work off all those debts of another. It was a ten-years' struggle, but he did it all and nobly, the last payment being his proudest and pleasantest. I mean, of course, the refunding plus four per cent of that old gift he gave long ago, a gift for the progress of God's work in the souls of men.

Do not forget that this is not ancient history! Did not the great Portuguese newspaper "O Tempo" declare only the other day that slavery was still thriving in Angola?

Sometimes we ourselves forget the fact (fatal fact!) that "saintly" souls have in days gone by so trafficked in the bodies and souls of negroes. This is only another annoying illustration of the truth that the ecstasy of a mystic is a poor proof of sanctity; that, in fact, "feelings are only like fiddle-strings,—screw them up and play any tune you like on them!" Nor need you go far to prove it.

Often on the march, right in the middle of the old slave track, we camp to keep the Lord's Supper, the witness of our corporate life. Then it is a curious case of disillusionment occurs, for the hymn we sing is none other than John Newton's grand old favorite, "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," a hymn hushed in that leafy sanctuary in the heart of the forest, sanctuary alas! through which the old slave track ran out to the Ocean. True, we are the guests of God enjoying the hospitalities of heaven, but there is an ugly discord of the worst teeth-on-edge kind. Where does it come in, if not in the ugly fact that this dear John Newton of Olney did most damnably continue to carry on the slave trade for many years after his conversion? You may draw all your distinctions and allow all your extenuations, but finally must face the fact that he it was who penned these ugly words: "I never knew sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion than in my last two (slave!) voyages to Guinea." Fancy the Lord's Table spread across that slave track, then fancy further the conflicting emotions of the same John Newton as arch-slaver and arch-hymn writer, both the slaving and the singing in his Christian career! This singing-slaving atrocity rankles all the time the wind tries to make amends by producing cathedral music from the swaying trees. Is not this the very slave track and this the very hymn of the slaver?

Thus you are remarkably remote from the crime of hasty induction when you repeat that feelings are mere fiddle-strings, screw them up and you get any tune you like. Ah, but when all is said and done this John Newton, ex-deputy of the devil, did die a glorious saint! William Jay saw his old friend near the end, when he spoke well and wisely for his Lord. Both the mind and the tongue of the old slaver were past their business. "I was," said he, "a wild beast on the west coast of Africa, but the Lord caught and tamed me." The same stout old penitent said, "I can never despair of the conversion of the African when I recall what Christ did for me."

Near the end, when just crossing the river, he whispered of the three great surprises he saw across Jordan awaiting him: "Surprise No. 1, so many yonder I did not expect to see yonder; surprise No. 2, so many not yonder I thought to meet yonder; surprise No. 3, that I, John Newton, am yonder!"

So it is God rules by his over-ruling, and he maketh man's wrath in slavery to praise him. Poor old saint, his name has sent me off at a tangent because of those distracting thoughts at the Lord's Table when we sang, "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," because an ex-slaver wrote it! But it is scarcely fair, for who ever hinted that John meant, "How sweet the name of NEWTON sounds"? Besides, what of the sweeping centralizing command, "This do in remembrance of ME"?

Ah, this slavery is a black old story! Beginning, too, with a date so late as January, 1909, and working back, how quickly the figures appal you! Try and strike a grand total: if you address yourself in earnest to the statistics of slavery in Africa, the figures mount up passing strange. But pictorially,—and what a picture!—it has been reckoned that the Negro victims would make a double row around the earth at its equator. Across morass, fen, and jungle were they dragged out to the Ocean, the Eastern Arabs being long anterior to the Western Portuguese.

On the West Coast Paolo Diaz got a footing as far back as 1576, and probably a dozen years later the real trans-Atlantic export slavery began. Even the Protestant Dutch, who captured Loanda in 1641, had

no higher ideal than to work their American possessions with Negro slave labor. Seven years later they were expelled, but by whom? A historian seriously informs us that "the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro largely contributed to the expedition, as they saw how hurtful to their interests the loss of Angola would be from the failure in the supply of slave labor."

After his long residence in the country we can now listen to Joachim John Monteiro, who worked the copper deposits of Benguella. The leap from 1576 to 1875 is a long one, but all that time slavery was raging. "The number of slaves," says Monteiro, "shipped in Angola could not have been far short of 100,000 per annum. I was told by some of the oldest inhabitants that to see as many as ten to twelve vessels loading at a time was a common occurrence. I have seen as many as a thousand slaves in one caravan from the interior, principally from Bihe. The average price of a full-grown man or woman was about £3 in cloth or other goods, and as low as 5/— for a little nigger."

Finally, who can fill the gap of years between 1875 and Mr. Swan's date of 1909? The law of the equality of ratios surely demands that in these intervening years the increasing demand extorted from Africa an increasing supply. Gun-running in slave barter is now almost stopped, thank God! Then fifteen and even twenty slaves were paid for one repeating rifle; the accessory cartridges even fetching higher prices still,—one slave per ten cartridges was considered a fair figure. Even one oily little Englishman wriggled in from Loanda, and with all the sang froid of Captain Kettle hoisted the Jack and sold dozens of martines for slaves. Followed up by a band of State soldiers, this little man was deserted by his natives, so he calmly piled up his iron trunks across the trail, took cover, and in a series of long singing shots opened fire on the advancing soldiers through the loopholes formed by his 60 lb. trunks. When the soldiers saw one after another of their number roll over wounded, the forest rang with their hullabaloo, and back they rushed to headquarters, saying in sober earnest, "Never man shot like this man!" A back-art notion this, that because it was only one man

who thus struck terror into them, therefore they must flee!

As clever with his tongue as with his 303, this little Captain Kettle is the type who sits down in the forest, and gripping your arm with confidential emphasis will calmly give you chapter and verse for slavery from the law and the prophets, adding blandly that there is more serfdom in urban England than in rural Africa. All this silly screed as though no Jesus Christ had ever lived, died and risen again to abolish it!

Another smuggler of a more truculent type was an Irishman to his bone and marrow,—a Tipperary boy I could swear to the brogue,—who could scarcely write his own name. This waster’s endless brag was that his brother was an Irish M. P., and his stock phrase to browbeat officials was the threat in broadest brogue, “Shure, and I’ll write to me brother in the House!”

This seeming digression on slavery has sent me off from the great Week of Prayer now beginning. All these people mingling for prayer used to be enslaved to and by each other. The old bondmaster and old bondservant now pray for and with each other, both glorying in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free—the former free not to enslave, the latter free from enslavement.

But we miss Lenge this year. This old man got stronger and stronger in prayer towards the end: so full of it that he made our verandah a place where he spread all things before God, spreading himself at the same time all fours on the ground. He ailed a lot, but mere medicine was a small thing. To him prayer was the true physic for all the ailments in the medical dictionary. He kept at me daily, never temporized, and was always pushing for real old time religion, his one point being (what a point!) that “we cannot have the apostolic methods without the apostolic spirit.” I feel bereft; feel a friend of my soul has gone. Pray? He prayed about all things, at all times, and got me to join him until the thing became as delicious as divine.

The progress of this letter has been indeed victimized by many interruptions, but at the last moment here comes a most

appropriate intruder for my last paragraph.

Who is she? She does not live here; she is far along the Lake at the river Rwilwa. She is a bonnie girl. “The Child of Prayer” is her name, and thereby hangs a suitable conclusion to all this pleading of mine for more prayer. She must be twelve years of age now, for this incident is about her birth in 1910. Though not Christians, it is **THEY** who tell the tale, **THEY** who remember a mere trivial incident forgotten by me two minutes after it occurred.

It was a wayside prayer with a mere whiff of a girl, one of the “baby brides” of Africa, a prayer that God would spare her in her foreboding of imminent maternity. It was an unusual thing for me to do, but she was so unusually frail and childlike that this passing wayside prayer she never forgot. Never forgot it, and long after came my surprize when this heathen babe of hers, now a grown girl, was brought to me with this surprize name, **WALULUMBELO**, the child of prayer. This, mind you, from cold outsiders, who have no personal faith in Christ, just plain folks with two eyes in their head and behind those eyes just enough brains to know that God heard passing prayer that day long ago by the roadside. A prayer more whispered than uttered on such a sacred subject that even now one can scarcely talk about it with propriety. Yes, these heathen men and women away out in the long grass, they saw it all, they saw a clean-cut answer to prayer, and so seeing they dubbed the wonder-child, “The Child of Prayer”!

And can you be surprized that this one incident was the means of opening and keeping open their town to the gospel?

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#### PERSONALIA.

**Mr. Charles Inglis** expects to be in America throughout the coming fall and winter. Letters addressed to 692 Eighth Avenue, New York City, will reach him.

**Mr. William G. Landes of Philadelphia** has been elected general secretary of the World’s Sunday School Association, the office vacant by the death of Frank L. Brown.

Mr. Landes has been the general secretary of the Pennsylvania State Sabbath