

A Toast to Woman

By Capt. Jack Crawford, The Poet Scout

WHEN Captain Jack Crawford, the poet scout, was the special guest at the Allied Trade Press banquet at the new McAlpin Hotel he was asked at 2:30 A. M. to drink a toast to the ladies. Despite the fact that there were no ladies present and wine had been flowing freely, he did a brave and manly act when he said to the fifty or more editors: "Gentlemen, undoubtedly you have noticed that my wine glasses have been turned upside down, and, although it may not be considered altogether in good taste, there is only one toast that I can give, and which I gave at the Governor's banquet in Boston some years ago. A beautiful, laughing, blue eyed society girl passed a glass of wine across the table to me and asked me to give a toast to the ladies. Flowers between us hid my upturned glasses, hence she did not know that I had not been drinking wine. I stood up, took the glass from her jeweled hand and said: 'Miss, your father, the toastmaster, is my comrade. This is a difficult task you have given me, and I shall drink a toast to Woman—not in that, however, which may bring her husband reeling home to abuse where he should love and cherish, send her boy to a drunkard's grave, and perhaps her daughter to a life of shame. Not in that, but rather in God's life giving water, pure as her chastity, clear as her intuitions, bright as her smile, sparkling as the laughter of her eyes, strong and sustaining as her love'—which I did amid profound silence.

"The girl was about to speak when I said, 'Just a moment, please. That toast would be entirely out of place without an explanation. My horse and I were on the trail of hostile Indians, almost famished for water, when, after discovering a spring and drinking, I heard several yells and whoops in a group of trees just below me, and approaching carefully, I saw a dozen men dancing around a camp fire and one of them, throwing his sombrero in the air, exclaimed, 'Say, fellers, I reckon we've struck it rich at last.' Thinking they were prospectors and that they had found gold, I jumped on to my mare, and as the sun had just gone down, started toward the crowd. And immediately some one shouted, 'Indians, get yer guns.' Thinking the Indians were behind me, I put spurs to my mare; threw my head down alongside of her neck, and started on the dead run, and

just then someone, shouted, 'Don't shoot; that's a white man. In a few seconds more I was up with the group, wheeled my mare around and, pulling my Winchester, shouted: 'Where's the Indians?' 'Who said anything about Indians?' said a big fellow with long hair and a broad sombrero. 'Someone shouted Indians,' said I. 'Wal, I reckon there ain't no Injins 'round here 'cept you're one.' 'Me?' I said, and my mare still dancing from the sting of the spurs, 'me?' 'Yes, you, an' if Shorty hadn't yelled that you was a white man, we'd a perforated your anatomy. Who are yer?' 'My name is Jack Crawford. The boys call me 'Capt. Jack' because I am chief of Uncle Sam's scouts on the trail of hostile Indians.' Then, before I had time to quiz him, he said, 'I'll tell ye what was the racket, Jack. Ye see, we've been cooped up here in the mountains for near two months prospectin'; hard work an' no fun. We heard that a trader down on the little Missourre had some tarantula pison (whiskey) an' we sent out an' coral'd a demijohn full. Ye see we're celebratin' last Fourth o' July. We lost track o' the date. Won't you join us?'

"'I surely will,' said I, 'though it is the 12th of August. Even if it was the middle of January I would help you celebrate the glorious Fourth.' Then Bill said, 'Shorty, that demijohn 'ill get stiff in the joints 'thout more exercise. Start 'er around the ring again.' And the demijohn was passed around until it came to Bill.

"'That's the stuff,' said he, 'that warms up the hunter's soul, makes him forgit thar's danger on the trail. Real old Kentucky rye, a laugh in every gurgle of the jug and every gurgle of the jug a command for pain an' trouble to get off the trail.'

"After Bill had taken his drink he said, 'Here Jack.' I was still on my hunkers broiling my venison. 'Here, Jack, take a swallow of this hallelujah juice. It'll make you fell as if yer soul had angel wings an' was on the trail to paradise.'

"'No, thank you, Bill, I don't drink.'

"'Oh, go 'long; ye do on special occasions. An' this is a special—a Fourth of July celebration. Why can't you?'

"'Because I never took a drink of intoxicants in all my life.' And Bill laughed. Everybody laughed as Shorty said, 'What do you think of that? A frontiersman that never took a drink. Come on, Jack,

don't you spring that kind of a joke on us again. Throw your mouth into a soart of yerning attitude an' down 'er.' And he shoved the demijohn toward me. As I was rising with my meat in my left hand, partly broiled, the demijohn came into my right hand with such force as to overbalance me. I sat down on the ground with both hands full. Everyone laughed, and Shorty said, 'Well, if the outside of the jug is going to act like that what 'ill the inside do when it gets mixed up with his inwards?'

"My head was aching frightfully as I arose to my knees, placed the meat on the lid of the coffee pot and, holding the demijohn up, I said, 'Boys, do you really want me to drink?'

"'Sure,' said half a dozen.

"'All right, boys, if you insist. But before I drink, will you listen to a little story?'

"'Sure we will,' said Bill. And, as I stood up and placed the demijohn on the stump of a decayed tree, Bill threw some wood on the fire, pulled his pipe and began to fill it, while Shorty rolled a cigarette. Finally, as Bill lit his pipe from a coal from the fire, he looked up as I stood in the fading daylight with a full moon looking down upon one of the most beautiful and picturesque scenes I have ever looked upon. Bill looked up after he got his pipe going and said, 'All right Jack, unhitch yer jaw an' let her go. I'll bet she's a bird of a story. Keep still, Scotty.'

"This is the story, and absolutely true:

"'Boys, it seems but yesterday that I was a barefooted boy at my mother's knee; wild, reckless, impulsive, misunderstood and abused by everybody but her. She understood me, and, although the wildest, I was her favorite. My father's intemperance deprived me of even the rudiments of a school education, and, when on her death bed she said to me, 'My poor, wild boy, did you know that your mother was going to heaven?' Boys, that was the first great sorrow of my life. Down on my knees by her bedside I wept as I had never wept before. As I sobbed, 'Mother, dear, no one cares for me but you; no one in all the world but you understands me. Oh, I am afraid I will go wrong.' How beautiful she looked, her big, brown eyes aswim in tears, her white curls and her white face on the pillow, and, as she placed her hand on my head, she said, 'Don't cry, Johnny, dear; your mother will meet her boy Johnny in heaven if he will give her a promise to take with her.' 'I will promise you anything you ask, mother, and I will try to keep my promise.' 'Then promise me never to touch intoxicants and then it won't be so hard to leave these two little sisters in your

care.' Boys, I gave that promise to mother and she went to heaven with a smile on her face, still holding my hand, and, as God is my judge, amid all the temptations of a frontier, army or social life, I have kept that promise even when men who were called bad men have put a six shooter in my face, when they considered it an insult to refuse to drink with them. I have folded my arms and, looking into the muzzle of a gun, said, 'You can shoot and you can kill me, but you can't make me break a promise that I gave to a dying mother,' and I've seen a man who had killed his man put his six shooter back in his belt, take a glass of liquor he had poured out and throw it on the floor, after I had mentioned that word 'mother,' then take my hand and say, 'Pard, I beg your pardon. I had that kind of a mother,' and walk out of the saloon. That man is living today. He never took another drink.

"As I continued my story, I picked up the demijohn, and, holding it up, said, 'Boys, I said I would drink if you insisted; shall I?' Quick as a flash there was a shot; the demijohn was shattered; part of the liquor went into the fire, a blue blaze leaped up. I pulled my own six shooter, for I did not see where the shot came from, when, from behind the fire and smoke, Bill Wild stepped out, the smoking pistol still in his hand and tears on his bronzed cheeks, as he said, 'Nobody can drink when you talk like that. Say Jack, that's the kind of a mother I had back in the sunrise country. I was jest like you, a wild, reckless boy. I started wrong, when I smoked my first cigarette as a newsie, then I got to readin' dime novels, and one time I went to see a Wild West dime novel play, with real Western men killing Indians. Later I got to drinking, and one day when crazed with liquor I shot a man and had to run away. The only consolation my good mother had was that the man did not die, but I never saw her agin. She's up thar with your mother, and when that shot goes ringin' through the canyons of heaven, she'll hear it, Jack, and it'll tell her that her wild boy has signed the pledge at last. There's my hand. I swear to God an' mother an' you I'll never touch the poison stuff again.' And he never did."

And, concluding, Capt. Jack said: "Gentlemen, that is the story I told at the Boston banquet, and the beautiful young lady thanked me and took my hand. It is my own story, and, because it is true is why I am alive today. And when, two years later, I visited Bill's home, his good wife said, 'God bless you Capt. Jack, for getting my wild boy to make that pledge.' Bill calls it 'A Shot for Temperance.'"