

# Pierre And His People,(Tales of the Far North), Volume 1.

Gilbert Parker

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PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

With each volume of this subscription edition (1912) there is a special introduction, setting forth, in so far as seemed possible, the relation of each work to myself, to its companion works, and to the scheme of my literary life. Only one or two things, therefore, need be said here, as I wish God-speed to this edition, which, I trust, may help to make old friends warmer friends and new friends more understanding. Most of the novels and most of the short stories were suggested by incidents or characters which I had known, had heard of intimately, or, as in the case of the historical novels, had discovered in the works of historians. In no case are the main characters drawn absolutely from life; they are not portraits; and the proof of that is that no one has ever been able to identify, absolutely, any single character in these books. Indeed, it would be impossible for me to restrict myself to actual portraiture. It is trite to say that photography is not art, and photography has no charm for the artist, or the humanitarian indeed, in the portrayal of life. At its best it is only an exhibition of outer formal characteristics, idiosyncrasies, and contours. Freedom is the first essential of the artistic mind. As will be noticed in the introductions and original notes to several of these volumes, it is stated that they possess anachronisms; that they are not portraits of people living or dead, and that they only assume to be in harmony with the spirit of men and times and things. Perhaps in the first few pages of 'The Right of Way' portraiture is more nearly reached than in any other of these books, but it was only the nucleus, if I may say so, of a larger development which the original Charley Steele never attained. In the novel he grew to represent infinitely more than the original ever represented in his short life.

That would not be strange when it is remembered that the germ of The 'Right of Way' was growing in my mind over a long period of years, and it must necessarily have developed into a larger conception than the original character could have suggested. The same may be said of the chief characters in 'The Weavers'. The story of the two brothers--David Claridge and Lord Eglinton--in that book was brewing in my mind for quite fifteen years, and the main incidents and characters of other novels in this edition had the same slow growth. My forthcoming novel, called 'The Judgment House', had been in my mind for nearly twenty years and only emerged when it was full grown, as it were; when I was so familiar with the characters that they seemed as real in all ways as though they were absolute people and incidents of one's own experience.

Little more need be said. In outward form the publishers have made this edition beautiful. I should be ill-content if there was not also an element of beauty in the work of the author. To my mind truth alone is not sufficient. Every work of art, no matter how primitive in conception, how tragic or how painful, or even how grotesque in design--like the gargoyles on Notre Dame must have, too, the elements of beauty--that which lures and holds, the durable and delightful thing. I have a hope that these books of mine, as faithful to life as I could make them, have also been touched here and there by the staff of beauty. Otherwise their day will be short indeed; and I should wish for them a day a little longer at least than my day and span.

I launch the ship. May it visit many a port! May its freight never lie neglected on the quays!

## INTRODUCTION

So far as my literary work is concerned 'Pierre and His People' may be likened to a new city built upon the ashes of an old one. Let me explain. While I was in Australia I began a series of short stories and sketches of life in Canada which I called 'Pike Pole Sketches on the Madawaska'. A very few of them were published in Australia, and I brought with me to England in 1889 about twenty of them to make into a volume. I told Archibald Forbes, the great war correspondent, of my wish for publication, and asked him if he would mind reading the sketches and stories before I approached a publisher. He immediately consented, and one day I brought him the little brown bag containing the tales.

A few days afterwards there came an invitation to lunch, and I went to Clarence Gate, Regent's Park, to learn what Archibald Forbes thought of my tales. We were quite merry at luncheon, and after luncheon, which for him was a glass of milk and a biscuit, Forbes said to me, "Those stories, Parker--you have the best collection of titles I have ever known." He paused. I understood. To his mind the tales did not live up to their titles. He hastily added, "But I am going to give you a letter of introduction to Macmillan. I may be wrong." My reply was: "You need not give me a letter to Macmillan unless I write and ask you for it."

I took my little brown bag and went back to my comfortable rooms in an old-fashioned square. I sat down before the fire on this bleak winter's night with a couple of years' work on my knee. One by one I glanced through the stories and in some cases read them carefully, and one by one I put them in the fire, and watched them burn. I was heavy at heart, but I felt that Forbes was right, and my own instinct told me that my ideas were better than my performance--and Forbes was right. Nothing was left of the tales; not a shred of paper, not a scrap of writing. They had all gone up the chimney in smoke. There was no self-pity. I had a grim kind of feeling regarding the thing, but I had no regrets, and I have never had any regrets since. I have forgotten most of the titles, and indeed all the stories except one. But Forbes and I were right; of that I am sure.

The next day after the arson I walked for hours where London was busiest. The shop windows fascinated me; they always did; but that day I seemed, subconsciously, to be looking for something. At last I found it. It was a second-hand shop in Covent Garden. In the window there was the uniform of an officer of the time of Wellington, and beside it--the leather coat and fur cap of a trapper of the Hudson's Bay Company! At that window I commenced to build again upon the ashes of last night's fire. Pretty Pierre, the French half-breed, or rather the original of him as I knew him when a child, looked out of the window at me. So I went home, and sitting in front of the fire which had received my manuscript the night before, with a pad upon my knee, I began to write 'The Patrol of the Cypress Hills' which opens 'Pierre and His People'.

The next day was Sunday. I went to service at the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, and while listening superficially to the sermon I was also reading the psalms. I came upon these words, "Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, that are out of remembrance," and this text, which I used in the story 'The Patrol of the Cypress Hills', became, in a sense, the text for all the stories which came after. It seemed to suggest the lives and the end of the lives of the workers of the pioneer world.

So it was that Pierre and His People chiefly concerned those who had been wounded by Fate, and had suffered the robberies of life and time while they did their work in the wide places. It may be that my readers have found what I tried, instinctively, to convey in the pioneer life I portrayed--"The soul of goodness in things evil." Such, on the whole, my observation had found in life, and the original of Pierre, with all his mistakes, misdemeanours, and even crimes, was such an one as I would have gone to in trouble or in hour of need, knowing that his face would never be turned from me.

These stories made their place at once. The 'Patrol of the Cypress Hills' was published first in 'The Independent' of New York and in 'Macmillan's Magazine' in England. Mr. Bliss Carman, then editor of 'The Independent', eagerly published several of them--'She of the Triple Chevron' and others. Mr. Carman's sympathy and insight were a great help to me in those early days. The then editor of 'Macmillan's Magazine', Mr. Mowbray Morris, was not, I think, quite so sure of the merits of the Pierre stories. He published them, but he was a little credulous regarding them, and he did not pat me on the back by any means. There was one, however, who made the best that is in 'Pierre and His People' possible; this was the unforgettable W. E. Henley, editor of 'The National Observer'. One day at a sitting I wrote a short story called 'Antoine and Angelique', and sent it to him almost before the ink was dry. The reply came by return of post: "It is almost, or quite, as good as can be. Send me another." So forthwith I sent him 'God's Garrison', and it was quickly followed by 'The Three Outlaws', 'The Tall Master', 'The Flood', 'The Cipher', 'A Prairie Vagabond', and several others. At length came 'The Stone', which brought a telegram of congratulation, and finally 'The Crimson Flag'. The acknowledgment of that was a postcard containing these all too-flattering words: "Bravo, Balzac!" Henley would print what no other editor would print; he gave a man his chance to do the boldest thing that was in him, and I can truthfully say that the doors which he threw open gave freedom to an imagination and an individuality of conception, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful.

These stories and others which appeared in 'The National Observer', in 'Macmillan's', in 'The English Illustrated Magazine' and others made many friends; so that when the book at length came out it was received with generous praise, though not without some criticism. It made its place, however, at once, and later appeared another series, called 'An Adventurer of the North', or, as it is called in this edition, 'A Romany of the Snows'. Through all the twenty stories of this second volume the character of Pierre moved; and by the time the last was written there was scarcely an important magazine in the English-speaking world which had not printed one or more of them. Whatever may be thought of the stories themselves, or of the manner in which the life of the Far North was portrayed, of one thing I am sure: Pierre was true to the life--to his race, to his environment, to the conditions of pioneer life through which he moved. When the book first came out there was some criticism from Canada itself, but that criticism has long since died away, and it never was determined.

Plays have been founded on the 'Pierre' series, and one in particular, 'Pierre of the Plains', had a considerable success, with Mr. Edgar Selwyn, the adapter, in the main part. I do not know whether, if I were to begin again, I should have written all the Pierre stories in quite the same way. Perhaps it is just as well that I am not able to begin again. The stories made their own place in their own way, and that there is

still a steady demand for 'Pierre and His People' and 'A Romany of the Snows' seems evidence that the editor of an important magazine in New York who declined to recommend them for publication to his firm (and later published several of the same series) was wrong, when he said that the tales "seemed not to be salient." Things that are not "salient" do not endure. It is twenty years since 'Pierre and His People' was produced--and it still endures. For this I cannot but be deeply grateful. In any case, what 'Pierre' did was to open up a field which had not been opened before, but which other authors have exploited since with success and distinction. 'Pierre' was the pioneer of the Far North in fiction; that much may be said; and for the rest, Time is the test, and Time will have its way with me as with the rest.

#### NOTE:

It is possible that a Note on the country portrayed in these stories may be in keeping. Until 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company--first granted its charter by King Charles II--practically ruled that vast region stretching from the fiftieth parallel of latitude to the Arctic Ocean--a handful of adventurous men entrenched in forts and posts, yet trading with, and mostly peacefully conquering, many savage tribes. Once the sole master of the North, the H. B. C. (as it is familiarly called) is revered by the Indians and half-breeds as much as, if not more than, the Government established at Ottawa. It has had its forts within the Arctic Circle; it has successfully exploited a country larger than the United States. The Red River Valley, the Saskatchewan Valley, and British Columbia, are now belted by a great railway, and given to the plough; but in the far north life is much the same as it was a hundred years ago. There the trapper, clerk, trader, and factor are cast in the mould of another century, though possessing the acuter energies of this. The 'voyageur' and 'courier de bois' still exist, though, generally, under less picturesque names.

The bare story of the hardy and wonderful career of the adventurers trading in Hudson's Bay,--of whom Prince Rupert was once chiefest,--and the life of the prairies, may be found in histories and books of travel; but their romances, the near narratives of individual lives, have waited the telling. In this book I have tried to feel my way towards the heart of that life--worthy of being loved by all British men, for it has given honest graves to gallant fellows of our breeding. Imperfectly, of course, I have done it; but there is much more to be told.

When I started *Pierre* on his travels, I did not know--nor did he--how far or wide his adventures and experiences would run. They have, however, extended from Quebec in the east to British Columbia in the west, and from the Cypress Hills in the south to the Coppermine River in the north. With a less adventurous man we had had fewer happenings. His faults were not of his race, that is, French and Indian,--nor were his virtues; they belong to all peoples. But the expression of these is affected by the country itself. Pierre passes through this series of stories, connecting them, as he himself connects two races, and here and there links the past of the Hudson's Bay Company with more modern life and Canadian energy pushing northward. Here is something of romance "pure and simple," but also traditions and character, which are the single property of this austere but not cheerless heritage of our race.

All of the tales have appeared in magazines and journals--namely, 'The National Observer', 'Macmillan's', 'The National Review', and 'The English Illustrated'; and 'The Independent of New York'. By the courtesy of the proprietors of these I am permitted to republish.

G. P.

HARPENDEN,  
HERTFORDSHIRE,  
July, 1892.

BOOK 1.

THE PATROL OF THE CYPRESS HILLS  
GOD'S GARRISON  
A HAZARD OF THE NORTH

THE PATROL OF THE CYPRESS HILLS

"He's too ha'sh," said old Alexander Windsor, as he shut the creaking door of the store after a vanishing figure, and turned to the big iron stove with outstretched hands; hands that were cold both summer and winter. He was of lean and frigid make.

"Sergeant Fones is too ha'sh," he repeated, as he pulled out the damper and cleared away the ashes with the iron poker.

Pretty Pierre blew a quick, straight column of cigarette smoke into the air, tilted his chair back, and said: "I do not know what you mean by 'ha'sh,' but he is the devil. Eh, well, there was more than one devil made sometime in the North West." He laughed softly.

"That gives you a chance in history, Pretty Pierre," said a voice from behind a pile of woollen goods and buffalo skins in the centre of the floor. The owner of the voice then walked to the window. He scratched some frost from the pane and looked out to where the trooper in dog-skin coat, gauntlets and cap, was mounting his broncho. The old man came and stood near the young man,--the owner of the voice,--and said again: "He's too ha'sh."

"Harsh you mean, father," added the other.

"Yes, harsh you mean, Old Brown Windsor,--quite harsh," said Pierre.

Alexander Windsor, storekeeper and general dealer, was sometimes called "Old Brown Windsor" and sometimes "Old Aleck," to distinguish him from his son, who was known as "Young Aleck."

As the old man walked back again to the stove to warm his hands, Young Aleck continued: "He does his duty, that's all. If he doesn't wear kid gloves while at it, it's his choice. He doesn't go beyond his duty. You can bank on that. It would be hard to exceed that way out here."



"True, Young Aleck, so true; but then he wears gloves of iron, of ice. That is not good. Sometime the glove will be too hard and cold on a man's shoulder, and then!--Well, I should like to be there," said Pierre, showing his white teeth.

Old Aleck shivered, and held his fingers where the stove was red hot.

The young man did not hear this speech; from the window he was watching Sergeant Fones as he rode towards the Big Divide. Presently he said: "He's going towards Humphrey's place. I--" He stopped, bent his brows, caught one corner of his slight moustache between his teeth, and did not stir a muscle until the Sergeant had passed over the Divide.

Old Aleck was meanwhile dilating upon his theme before a passive listener. But Pierre was only passive outwardly. Besides hearkening to the father's complaints he was closely watching the son. Pierre was clever, and a good actor. He had learned the power of reserve and outward immobility. The Indian in him helped him there. He had heard what Young Aleck had just muttered; but to the man of the cold fingers he said: "You keep good whisky in spite of the law and the iron glove, Old Aleck." To the young man: "And you can drink it so free, eh, Young Aleck?"

The half-breed looked out of the corners of his eyes at the young man, but he did not raise the peak of his fur cap in doing so, and his glances askance were not seen.

Young Aleck had been writing something with his finger-nail on the frost of the pane, over and over again. When Pierre spoke to him thus he scratched out the word he had written, with what seemed unnecessary force. But in one corner it remained:

"Mab--"

Pierre added: "That is what they say at Humphrey's ranch."

"Who says that at Humphrey's?--Pierre, you lie!" was the sharp and threatening reply. The significance of this last statement had been often attested on the prairies by the piercing emphasis of a six-chambered revolver. It was evident that Young Aleck was in earnest. Pierre's eyes glowed in the shadow, but he idly replied:

"I do not remember quite who said it. Well, 'mon ami,' perhaps I lie; perhaps. Sometimes we dream things, and these dreams are true. You call it a lie--'bien!' Sergeant Fones, he dreams perhaps Old Aleck sells whisky against the law to men you call whisky runners, sometimes to Indians and half-breeds--halfbreeds like Pretty Pierre. That was a dream of Sergeant Fones; but you see he believes it true. It is good sport, eh? Will you not take--what is it?--a silent partner? Yes; a silent partner, Old Aleck. Pretty Pierre has spare time, a little, to make money for his friends and for himself, eh?"

When did not Pierre have time to spare? He was a gambler. Unlike the majority of half-breeds, he had a pronounced French manner, nonchalant and debonair.

The Indian in him gave him coolness and nerve. His cheeks had a tinge of delicate red under their whiteness, like those of a woman. That was why he was called Pretty Pierre. The country had, however, felt a kind of

weird menace in the name. It was used to snakes whose rattle gave notice of approach or signal of danger. But Pretty Pierre was like the death-adder, small and beautiful, silent and deadly. At one time he had made a secret of his trade, or thought he was doing so. In those days he was often to be seen at David Humphrey's home, and often in talk with Mab Humphrey; but it was there one night that the man who was ha'sh gave him his true character, with much candour and no comment.

Afterwards Pierre was not seen at Humphrey's ranch. Men prophesied that he would have revenge some day on Sergeant Fones; but he did not show anything on which this opinion could be based. He took no umbrage at being called Pretty Pierre the gambler. But for all that he was possessed of a devil.

Young Aleck had inherited some money through his dead mother from his grandfather, a Hudson's Bay factor. He had been in the East for some years, and when he came back he brought his "little pile" and an impressionable heart with him. The former Pretty Pierre and his friends set about to win; the latter, Mab Humphrey won without the trying. Yet Mab gave Young Aleck as much as he gave her. More. Because her love sprang from a simple, earnest, and uncontaminated life. Her purity and affection were being played against Pierre's designs and Young Aleck's weakness. With Aleck cards and liquor went together. Pierre seldom drank.

But what of Sergeant Fones? If the man that knew him best--the Commandant--had been asked for his history, the reply would have been: "Five years in the Service, rigid disciplinarian, best non-commissioned officer on the Patrol of the Cypress Hills." That was all the Commandant knew.

A soldier-policeman's life on the frontier is rough, solitary, and severe. Active duty and responsibility are all that make it endurable. To few is it fascinating. A free and thoughtful nature would, however, find much in it, in spite of great hardships, to give interest and even pleasure. The sense of breadth and vastness, and the inspiration of pure air could be a very gospel of strength, beauty, and courage, to such an one--for a time. But was Sergeant Fones such an one? The Commandant's scornful reply to a question of the kind would have been: "He is the best soldier on the Patrol."

And so with hard gallops here and there after the refugees of crime or misfortune, or both, who fled before them like deer among the passes of the hills, and, like deer at bay, often fought like demons to the death; with border watchings, and protection and care and vigilance of the Indians; with hurried marches at sunrise, the thermometer at fifty degrees below zero often in winter, and open camps beneath the stars, and no camp at all, as often as not, winter and summer; with rough barrack fun and parade and drill and guard of prisoners; and with chances now and then to pay homage to a woman's face, the Mounted Force grew full of the Spirit of the West and became brown, valiant, and hardy, with wind and weather. Perhaps some of them longed to touch, oftener than they did, the hands of children, and to consider more the faces of women,--for hearts are hearts even under a belted coat of red on the Fiftieth Parallel,--but men of nerve do not blazon their feelings.

No one would have accused Sergeant Fones of having a heart. Men of keen discernment would have seen in him the little Bismarck of the Mounted Police. His name carried farther on the Cypress Hills Patrol than any

other; and yet his officers could never say that he exceeded his duty or enlarged upon the orders he received. He had no sympathy with crime. Others of the force might wink at it; but his mind appeared to sit severely upright upon the cold platform of Penalty, in beholding breaches of the statutes. He would not have rained upon the unjust as the just if he had had the directing of the heavens. As Private Gellatly put it: "Sergeant Fones has the fear o' God in his heart, and the law of the land across his saddle, and the newest breech-loading at that!" He was part of the great machine of Order, the servant of Justice, the sentinel in the vestibule of Martial Law. His interpretation of duty worked upward as downward. Officers and privates were acted on by the force known as Sergeant Fones. Some people, like Old Brown Windsor, spoke hardly and openly of this force. There were three people who never did--Pretty Pierre, Young Aleck, and Mab Humphrey. Pierre hated him; Young Aleck admired in him a quality lying dormant in himself--decision; Mab Humphrey spoke unkindly of no one. Besides--but no!

What was Sergeant Fones's country? No one knew. Where had he come from? No one asked him more than once. He could talk French with Pierre, --a kind of French that sometimes made the undertone of red in the Frenchman's cheeks darker. He had been heard to speak German to a German prisoner, and once, when a gang of Italians were making trouble on a line of railway under construction, he arrested the leader, and, in a few swift, sharp words in the language of the rioters, settled the business. He had no accent that betrayed his nationality.

He had been recommended for a commission. The officer in command had hinted that the Sergeant might get a Christmas present. The officer had further said: "And if it was something that both you and the Patrol would be the better for, you couldn't object, Sergeant." But the Sergeant only saluted, looking steadily into the eyes of the officer. That was his reply. Private Gellatly, standing without, heard Sergeant Fones say, as he passed into the open air, and slowly bared his forehead to the winter sun:

"Exactly."

And Private Gellatly cried, with revolt in his voice, "Divils me own, the word that a't to have been full o' joy was like the clip of a rifle-breech."

Justice in a new country is administered with promptitude and vigour, or else not administered at all. Where an officer of the Mounted Police-Soldiery has all the powers of a magistrate, the law's delay and the insolence of office have little space in which to work. One of the commonest slips of virtue in the Canadian West was selling whisky contrary to the law of prohibition which prevailed. Whisky runners were land smugglers. Old Brown Windsor had, somehow, got the reputation of being connected with the whisky runners; not a very respectable business, and thought to be dangerous. Whisky runners were inclined to resent intrusion on their privacy with a touch of that biting inhospitableness which a moonlighter of Kentucky uses toward an inquisitive, unsympathetic marshal. On the Cypress Hills Patrol, however, the erring servants of Bacchus were having a hard time of it. Vigilance never slept there in the days of which these lines bear record. Old Brown Windsor had, in words, freely espoused the cause of the sinful. To the careless spectator it seemed a charitable siding with the suffering; a proof that the old man's heart was not so cold as his hands. Sergeant Fones thought differently, and his mission had just been to warn the store-keeper that

there was menacing evidence gathering against him, and that his friendship with Golden Feather, the Indian Chief, had better cease at once. Sergeant Fones had a way of putting things. Old Brown Windsor endeavoured for a moment to be sarcastic. This was the brief dialogue in the domain of sarcasm:

"I s'pose you just lit round in a friendly sort of way, hopin' that I'd kenoodle with you later."

"Exactly."

There was an unpleasant click to the word. The old man's hands got colder. He had nothing more to say.

Before leaving, the Sergeant said something quietly and quickly to Young Aleck. Pierre observed, but could not hear. Young Aleck was uneasy; Pierre was perplexed. The Sergeant turned at the door, and said in French: "What are your chances for a Merry Christmas at Pardon's Drive, Pretty Pierre?" Pierre answered nothing. He shrugged his shoulders, and as the door closed, muttered, "Il est le diable." And he meant it. What should Sergeant Fones know of that intended meeting at Pardon's Drive on Christmas Day? And if he knew, what then? It was not against the law to play euchre. Still it perplexed Pierre. Before the Windsors, father and son, however, he was, as we have seen, playfully cool.

After quitting Old Brown Windsor's store, Sergeant Fones urged his stout broncho to a quicker pace than usual. The broncho was, like himself, wasteful of neither action nor affection. The Sergeant had caught him wild and independent, had brought him in, broken him, and taught him obedience. They understood each other; perhaps they loved each other. But about that even Private Gellatly had views in common with the general sentiment as to the character of Sergeant Fones. The private remarked once on this point "Sarpints alive! the heels of the one and the law of the other is the love of them. They'll weather together like the Devil and Death."

The Sergeant was brooding; that was not like him. He was hesitating; that was less like him. He turned his broncho round as if to cross the Big Divide and to go back to Windsor's store; but he changed his mind again, and rode on toward David Humphrey's ranch. He sat as if he had been born in the saddle. His was a face for the artist, strong and clear, and having a dominant expression of force. The eyes were deepset and watchful. A kind of disdain might be traced in the curve of the short upper lip, to which the moustache was clipped close--a good fit, like his coat. The disdain was more marked this morning.

The first part of his ride had been seen by Young Aleck, the second part by Mab Humphrey. Her first thought on seeing him was one of apprehension for Young Aleck and those of Young Aleck's name. She knew that people spoke of her lover as a ne'er-do-weel; and that they associated his name freely with that of Pretty Pierre and his gang. She had a dread of Pierre, and, only the night before, she had determined to make one last great effort to save Aleck, and if he would not be saved--strange that, thinking it all over again, as she watched the figure on horseback coming nearer, her mind should swerve to what she had heard of Sergeant Fones's expected promotion. Then she fell to wondering if anyone had ever given him a real Christmas present; if he had any friends at all; if life meant anything more to him than carrying the law of the land across his saddle. Again he suddenly came to her in a new thought, free from apprehension,

and as the champion of her cause to defeat the half-breed and his gang, and save Aleck from present danger or future perils.

She was such a woman as prairies nurture; in spirit broad and thoughtful and full of energy; not so deep as the mountain woman, not so imaginative, but with more persistency, more daring. Youth to her was a warmth, a glory. She hated excess and lawlessness, but she could understand it. She felt sometimes as if she must go far away into the unpeopled spaces, and shriek out her soul to the stars from the fulness of too much life. She supposed men had feelings of that kind too, but that they fell to playing cards and drinking instead of crying to the stars. Still, she preferred her way.

Once, Sergeant Fones, on leaving the house, said grimly after his fashion: "Not Mab but Ariadne--excuse a soldier's bluntness..... Good-bye!" and with a brusque salute he had ridden away. What he meant she did not know and could not ask. The thought instantly came to her mind: Not Sergeant Fones; but who? She wondered if Ariadne was born on the prairie. What knew she of the girl who helped Theseus, her lover, to slay the Minotaur? What guessed she of the Slopes of Naxos? How old was Ariadne? Twenty? For that was Mab's age. Was Ariadne beautiful? She ran her fingers loosely through her short brown hair, waving softly about her Greek-shaped head, and reasoned that Ariadne must have been presentable, or Sergeant Fones would not have made the comparison. She hoped Ariadne could ride well, for she could.

But how white the world looked this morning, and how proud and brilliant the sky! Nothing in the plane of vision but waves of snow stretching to the Cypress Hills; far to the left a solitary house, with its tin roof flashing back the sun, and to the right the Big Divide. It was an old-fashioned winter, not one in which bare ground and sharp winds make life outdoors inhospitable. Snow is hospitable-clean, impacted snow; restful and silent. But there was one spot in the area of white, on which Mab's eyes were fixed now, with something different in them from what had been there. Again it was a memory with which Sergeant Fones was associated. One day in the summer just past she had watched him and his company put away to rest under the cool sod, where many another lay in silent company, a prairie wanderer, some outcast from a better life gone by. Afterwards, in her home, she saw the Sergeant stand at the window, looking out towards the spot where the waves in the sea of grass were more regular and greener than elsewhere, and were surmounted by a high cross. She said to him--for she of all was never shy of his stern ways:

"Why is the grass always greenest there, Sergeant Fones?"

He knew what she meant, and slowly said: "It is the Barracks of the Free."

She had no views of life save those of duty and work and natural joy and loving a ne'er-do-weel, and she said: "I do not understand that."

And the Sergeant replied: "'Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, who are out of remembrance.'"

But Mab said again: "I do not understand that either."

The Sergeant did not at once reply. He stepped to the door and gave a short command to some one without, and in a moment his company was mounted in line; handsome, dashing fellows; one the son of an English

nobleman, one the brother of an eminent Canadian politician, one related to a celebrated English dramatist. He ran his eye along the line, then turned to Mab, raised his cap with machine-like precision, and said: "No, I suppose you do not understand that. Keep Aleck Windsor from Pretty Pierre and his gang. Good-bye."

Then he mounted and rode away. Every other man in the company looked back to where the girl stood in the doorway; he did not. Private Gellatly said, with a shake of the head, as she was lost to view: "Devils bestir me, what a widdy she'll make!" It was understood that Aleck Windsor and Mab Humphrey were to be married on the coming New Year's Day. What connection was there between the words of Sergeant Fones and those of Private Gellatly? None, perhaps.

Mab thought upon that day as she looked out, this December morning, and saw Sergeant Fones dismounting at the door. David Humphrey, who was outside, offered to put up the Sergeant's horse; but he said: "No, if you'll hold him just a moment, Mr. Humphrey, I'll ask for a drink of something warm, and move on. Miss Humphrey is inside, I suppose?"

"She'll give you a drink of the best to be had on your patrol, Sergeant," was the laughing reply. "Thanks for that, but tea or coffee is good enough for me," said the Sergeant. Entering, the coffee was soon in the hand of the hardy soldier. Once he paused in his drinking and scanned Mab's face closely. Most people would have said the Sergeant had an affair of the law in hand, and was searching the face of a criminal; but most people are not good at interpretation. Mab was speaking to the chore-girl at the same time and did not see the look. If she could have defined her thoughts when she, in turn, glanced into the Sergeant's face, a moment afterwards, she would have said, "Austerity fills this man. Isolation marks him for its own." In the eyes were only purpose, decision, and command. Was that the look that had been fixed upon her face a moment ago? It must have been. His features had not changed a breath. Mab began their talk.

"They say you are to get a Christmas present of promotion, Sergeant Fones."

"I have not seen it gazetted," he answered enigmatically.

"You and your friends will be glad of it."

"I like the service."

"You will have more freedom with a commission." He made no reply, but rose and walked to the window, and looked out across the snow, drawing on his gauntlets as he did so.

She saw that he was looking where the grass in summer was the greenest!

He turned and said:

"I am going to barracks now. I suppose Young Aleck will be in quarters here on Christmas Day, Miss Mab?"

"I think so," and she blushed.

"Did he say he would be here?"

"Yes."

"Exactly."

He looked toward the coffee. Then: "Thank you.....Good-bye."

"Sergeant?"

"Miss Humphrey!"

"Will you not come to us on Christmas Day?"

His eyelids closed swiftly and opened again. "I shall be on duty."

"And promoted?"

"Perhaps."

"And merry and happy?"--she smiled to herself to think of Sergeant Fones being merry and happy.

"Exactly."

The word suited him.

He paused a moment with his fingers on the latch, and turned round as if to speak; pulled off his gauntlet, and then as quickly put it on again. Had he meant to offer his hand in good-bye? He had never been seen to take the hand of anyone except with the might of the law visible in steel.

He opened the door with the right hand, but turned round as he stepped out, so that the left held it while he faced the warmth of the room and the face of the girl. The door closed.

Mounted, and having said good-bye to Mr. Humphrey, he turned towards the house, raised his cap with soldierly brusqueness, and rode away in the direction of the barracks.

The girl did not watch him. She was thinking of Young Aleck, and of Christmas Day, now near. The Sergeant did not look back.

Meantime the party at Windsor's store was broken up. Pretty Pierre and Young Aleck had talked together, and the old man had heard his son say: "Remember, Pierre, it is for the last time." Then they talked after this fashion:

"Ah, I know, 'mon ami;' for the last time! 'Eh, bien,' you will spend Christmas Day with us too--no? You surely will not leave us on the day of good fortune? Where better can you take your pleasure for the last time? One day is not enough for farewell. Two, three; that is the magic number. You will, eh? no? Well, well, you will come to-morrow--and--eh, 'mon ami,' where do you go the next day? Oh, 'pardon,' I forgot, you spend the Christmas Day--I know. And the day of the New Year? Ah, Young Aleck, that is what they say--the devil for the devil's luck. So."

"Stop that, Pierre." There was fierceness in the tone. "I spend the Christmas Day where you don't, and as I like, and the rest doesn't concern you. I drink with you, I play with you--'bien!' As you say

yourself, 'bien,' isn't that enough?"

"Pardon!" We will not quarrel. No; we spend not the Christmas Day after the same fashion, quite. Then, to-morrow at Pardon's Drive! Adieu!"

Pretty Pierre went out of one door, a malediction between his white teeth, and Aleck went out of another door with a malediction upon his gloomy lips. But both maledictions were levelled at the same person. Poor Aleck.

"Poor Aleck!" That is the way we sometimes think of a good nature gone awry; one that has learned to say cruel maledictions to itself, and against which demons hurl their deadly maledictions too. Alas, for the ne'er-do-weel!

That night a stalwart figure passed from David Humphrey's door, carrying with him the warm atmosphere of a good woman's love. The chilly outer air of the world seemed not to touch him, Love's curtains were drawn so close. Had one stood within "the Hunter's Room," as it was called, a little while before, one would have seen a man's head bowed before a woman, and her hand smoothing back the hair from the handsome brow where dissipation had drawn some deep lines. Presently the hand raised the head until the eyes of the woman looked full into the eyes of the man.

"You will not go to Pardon's Drive again, will you, Aleck?"

"Never again after Christmas Day, Mab. But I must go to-morrow. I have given my word."

"I know. To meet Pretty Pierre and all the rest, and for what? Oh, Aleck, isn't the suspicion about your father enough, but you must put this on me as well?"

"My father must suffer for his wrong-doing if he does wrong, and I for mine."

There was a moment's silence. He bowed his head again.

"And I have done wrong to us both. Forgive me, Mab."

She leaned over and caressed his hair. "I forgive you, Aleck."

A thousand new thoughts were thrilling through him. Yet this man had given his word to do that for which he must ask forgiveness of the woman he loved. But to Pretty Pierre, forgiven or unforgiven, he would keep his word. She understood it better than most of those who read this brief record can. Every sphere has its code of honour and duty peculiar to itself.

"You will come to me on Christmas morning, Aleck?"

"I will come on Christmas morning."

"And no more after that of Pretty Pierre?"

"And no more of Pretty Pierre."

She trusted him; but neither could reckon with unknown forces.



Sergeant Fones, sitting in the barracks in talk with Private Gellatly, said at that moment in a swift silence, "Exactly."

Pretty Pierre, at Pardon's Drive, drinking a glass of brandy at that moment, said to the ceiling:

"No more of Pretty Pierre after to-morrow night, monsieur! Bien! If it is for the last time, then it is for the last time. So....so."

He smiled. His teeth were amazingly white.

The stalwart figure strode on under the stars, the white night a lens for visions of days of rejoicing to come. All evil was far from him. The dolorous tide rolled back in this hour from his life, and he revelled in the light of a new day.

"When I've played my last card to-morrow night with Pretty Pierre, I'll begin the world again," he whispered.

And Sergeant Fones in the barracks said just then, in response to a further remark of Private Gellatly,--"Exactly."

Young Aleck fell to singing:

"Out from your vineland come  
Into the prairies wild;  
Here will we make our home,  
Father, mother, and child;  
Come, my love, to our home,  
Father, mother, and child,  
Father, mother, and--"

He fell to thinking again--"and child--and child,"--it was in his ears and in his heart.

But Pretty Pierre was singing softly to himself in the room at Pardon's Drive:

"Three good friends with the wine at night  
Vive la compagnie!  
Two good friends when the sun grows bright  
Vive la compagnie!  
Vive la, vive la, vive l'amour!  
Vive la, vive la, vive l'amour!  
Three good friends, two good friends  
Vive la compagnie!"

What did it mean?

Private Gellatly was cousin to Idaho Jack, and Idaho Jack disliked Pretty Pierre, t

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