

The Right of Way, Volume 1.

Gilbert Parker

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THE RIGHT OF WAY

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

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EPILOGUE

INTRODUCTION

In a book called 'The House of Harper', published in this year, 1912, there are two letters of mine, concerning 'The Right of Way', written to Henry M. Alden, editor of Harper's Magazine. To my mind those letters should never have been published. They were purely personal. They were intended for one man's eyes only, and he was not merely an editor but a beloved and admired personal friend. Only to him and to W. E. Henley, as editors, could I ever have emptied out my heart and brain; and, as may be seen by these two letters, one written from London and the other from a place near Southampton, I uncovered all my feelings, my hopes and my ambitions concerning The Right of Way. Had I been asked permission to publish them I should not have granted it. I may wear my heart upon my sleeve for my friend, but not for the universe.

The most scathing thing ever said in literature was said by Robert Buchanan on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's verses--"He has wheeled his nuptial bed into the street." Looking at these letters I have a great shrinking, for they were meant only for the eyes of an aged man for whom I cared enough to let him see behind the curtain. But since they have been printed, and without a "by your leave," I will use one or two passages in them to show in what mood, under what pressure of impulse, under what mental and, maybe, spiritual hypnotism it was written. I first planned it as a story of twenty-five thousand words, even as 'Valmond' was planned as a story of five thousand words, and 'A Ladder of Swords' as a story of twenty thousand words; but I had not written three chapters before I saw what the destiny of the tale was to be. I had gone to Quebec to start the thing in the atmosphere where Charley Steele belonged, and there it was borne in upon me that it must be a three-

decker novel, not a novelette. I telegraphed to Harper & Brothers to ask them whether it would suit them just as well if I made it into a long novel. They telegraphed their assent at once; so I went on. At that time Mr. F. N. Doubleday was a sort of director of Harper's firm. To him I had told the tale in a railway train, and he had carried me off at once to Henry M. Alden, to whom I also told it, with the result that Harper's Magazine was wide open to it, and there in Quebec, soon after my interview with Mr. Alden and Mr. Doubleday, the book was begun.

The first of the letters published in *The House of Harper*, however, was apparently written immediately after my return to London when the novel was well on its way. Evidently the first paragraph of the letter was an apology for having suddenly announced the development of the book from a long short story to a long novel; for I used these words:

"Yet if you really take an interest in the working of the human mind in its relation to the vicissitudes of life, you will appreciate what I am going to tell you, and will recognise that there is only stability in evolution which the vulgar call chance. . . . Now, sir, perpend. Charley Steele is going to be a novel of one hundred thousand words or one hundred and twenty thousand--a real bang-up heartful of a novel."

Then there follows the confidence of a friend to a friend. As I look at the words I am not sorry that I wrote them. They were a part of me. They were the inveterate truth, but I would not willingly have uncovered my inner self to any except the man to whom the words were written. But here is what I wrote:

"I am a bit of a fool over this book. It catches me at every tender corner of my nature. It has aroused all the old ardent dreams of youth and springtime puissance. I cannot lay it down, and I cannot shorten it, for story, character, soul and reflection, imagination, observation are dragging me along after them. . . . This novel will make me or break me--prove me human and an artist, or an affected literary bore. If you want it you must take the risk. But, my dear Alden, you will be investing in a man's heart--which may be a fortune or a folly. Why, I ought to have seen--and far back in my brain I did see--that the character of Charley Steele was a type, an idiosyncrasy of modern life, a resultant of forces all round us, and that he would demand space in which to live and tell his story to the world. . . . And behold with what joy I follow him, not only lovingly but sternly and severely, noting him down as he really is, condoning naught, forgiving naught, but above all else, understanding him--his wilful mystification of the world, his shameless disdain of it, but the old law of interrogation, of sad yet eager inquiry and wonder and 'non possumus' with him to the end."

This letter was evidently written in December, 1899, and the other went to Mr. Alden on the 7th August, 1900; therefore, eight or nine months later. The work had gone well. Week after week, month after month it had unfolded itself with an almost unpardonable ease. Evidently, the very ease with which the book was written troubled me, because I find that in this letter of the 7th August, 1900, to Mr. Alden, I used these words:

"A kind of terror has seized me, and instead of sending a dozen more chapters to you as I proposed to do, I am setting to to break this love story anew under the stones of my most exacting criticism and troubled regard. I go to bury myself at a solitary little seaside place" (it was Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire), "there to live alone with Rosalie and

Charley, and if I do not know them hereafter, never ask me to write for 'Harper's' again. . . . This book has been written out of something vital in me--I do not mean the religious part of it, I mean the humanity that becomes one's own and part of one's self, by observation, experience, and understanding got from dead years."

Anyhow that shows the spirit in which the book was written, and there must have been something in it that rang true, because not only did it have an enormous sale and therefore a multitude of readers, but I received hundreds of letters from people who in one way or another were deeply interested in the story.

The majority of them were inquisitive letters. A great many of them said that the writer had shared in controversy as to what the relations of Charley and Rosalie were, and asked me to set for ever queries and controversies at rest by declaring either that the relations of these two were what, in the way of life's stern conventions, they ought not to be, or that Rosalie passed unscathed through the fire. I had foreseen all this, though I could not have foreseen the passionately intense interest which my readers would take in the life-story of these unhappy yet happy people. I had, however, only one reply. It was that all I had meant to say concerning Charley and Rosalie had been said in the book, to the last word. All I had meant not to say would not be said after the book was written. I asked them to take exactly the same view of Charley and Rosalie as they would in real life regarding two human beings with whom they were acquainted, and concerning whom, to their minds, there was sufficient evidence, or not sufficient evidence, to come to a conclusion as to what their relations were. I added that, as in real life we used our judgment upon such things with a reasonable amount of accuracy, I asked them to apply that judgment to Charley Steele and Rosalie Evanturel. They and their story were there for eyes to see and read, and when I had ended my manuscript in the year 1900 I had said the last word I ever meant to say as to their history. The controversy therefore continues, for the book still makes its appeal to an ever increasing congregation of new readers.

But another kind of letter came to me--the letter of some man who had just such a struggle as Charley Steele, or whose father or brother or friend had had such a struggle. Letters came from clergymen who had preached concerning the book; from men who told me in brief their own life problems and tragedies. These letters I prize; most of them had the real thing in them, the human truth.

That the book drew wide attention to the Dominion of Canada, particularly to French Canada, and crystallised something of the life of that dear Province, was a deep pleasure to me; and I was glad that I had been able to culminate my efforts to portray the life of the French-Canadian as I saw it, by a book which arrested the attention of so comprehensive a public.

I have seen many statements as to the original of Charley Steele, but I have never seen a story which was true. Many people have told me that they had seen the original of Charley Steele in an American lawyer. They knew he was the original, because he himself had said so. The gentleman was mistaken; I have never seen him. As with the purple cow, I never hope to see him. Whoever he is or whatever he is, the original Charley was an abler and a more striking man. I knew him as a boy, and he died while I was yet a boy, taking with him, save in the memory of a few, a rare and wonderful, if not wholly lovable personality. For over

twenty years I had carried him in my mind, wondering whether, and when, I should-make use of him. Again and again I was tempted, but was never convinced that his time had come; yet through all the years he was gaining strength, securing possession of my mind, and gathering to him, magnet-like, the thousand observations which my experience sent in his direction. In my mind his life-story ended with his death at the Cote Dorion. For years and years I saw his ending there. Yet it all seemed to me so futile, despite the wonder of his personality, that I could make nothing of him, and though always fascinated by his character I was held back from exploiting it, because of the hopelessness of it all. It led nowhere. It was the 'quid refert' of the philosopher, and I could not bring myself to get any further than an interrogation mark at the end of a life which was all scepticism, mind and matter, and nothing more.

There came a day, however, when that all ended, when the doors were flung wide to a new conception of the man, and of what he might have become. I was going to America, and I paid an angry and reluctant visit to my London tailor thirty-six hours before I was to start. A suit of clothes had been sent home which, after an effective trying-on, was a monstrosity. I went straight to my tailor, put on the clothes and bade him look at them. He was a great tailor-he saw exactly what I saw, and what I saw was bad; and when a tailor will do that, you may be quite sure he is a good and a great man. He said the clothes were as bad as they could be, but he added: "You shall have them before you sail, and they shall be exactly as you want them. I'll have the foreman down." He rang a bell. Presently the door swung open and in stepped a man with an eyeglass in his eye. There, with a look at once reflective and penetrating, with a figure at once slovenly and alert, was a caricature of Charley Steele as I had known him, and of all his characteristics. There was such a resemblance as an ugly child in a family may have to his handsome brother. It was Charley Steele with a twist--gone to seed. Looking at him in blank amazement, I burst out: "Good heavens, so you didn't die, Charley Steele! You became a tailor!"

All at once the whole new landscape of my story as it eventually became, spread out before me. I was justified in waiting all the years. My discontent with the futile end of the tale as I originally knew it and saw it was justified. Charley Steele, brilliant, enigmatic and epigrammatic, did not die at the Cote Dorion, but lived in that far valley by Dalgrothe Mountain, and became a tailor! So far as I am concerned he became much more. He was the beginning of a new epoch in my literary life. I had got into subtler methods, reached more intimate understandings, had come to a place where analysis of character had shaken itself free--but certainly not quite free--from a natural yet rather dangerous eloquence.

As a play *The Right of Way*, skilfully and sympathetically dramatised by Mr. Eugene Presbery, has had a career extending over several years, and still continues to make its appearance.

NOTE

It should not be assumed that the "Chaudiere" of this story is the real Chaudiere of Quebec province. The name is characteristic, and for this reason alone I have used it.

I must also apologise to my readers for appearing to disregard a statement made in 'The Lane that Had no Turning', that that tale was the last I should write about French Canada. In explanation I would say that 'The Lane that Had no Turning' was written after the present book was finished.

G. F.

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"They had lived and loved, and walked and worked in their own way, and the world went by them. Between them and it a great gulf was fixed: and they met its every catastrophe with the Quid Refert? of the philosophers."

"I want to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who lived before the god of love was born."

"There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification."

CHAPTER I

THE WAY TO THE VERDICT

"Not guilty, your Honour!"

A hundred atmospheres had seemed pressing down on the fretted people in the crowded court-room. As the discordant treble of the huge foreman of the jury squeaked over the mass of gaping humanity, which had twitched at skirts, drawn purposeless hands across prickling faces, and kept nervous legs at a gallop, the smothering weights of elastic air lifted suddenly, a great suspiration of relief swept through the place like a breeze, and in a far corner of the gallery a woman laughed outright.

The judge looked up reprovably at the gallery; the clerk of the court angrily called "Silence!" towards the offending corner, and seven or eight hundred eyes raced between three centres of interest--the judge, the prisoner, and the prisoner's counsel. Perhaps more people looked at the prisoner's counsel than at the prisoner, certainly far more than looked at the judge.

Never was a verdict more unexpected. If a poll had been taken of the judgment of the population twenty-four hours before, a great majority would have been found believing that there was no escape for the prisoner, who was accused of murdering a wealthy timber merchant. The minority would have based their belief that the prisoner had a chance of escape, not on his possible innocence, not on insufficient evidence, but on a curious faith in the prisoner's lawyer. This minority would not have been composed of the friends of the lawyer alone, but of outside spectators, who, because Charley Steele had never lost a criminal case, attached to him a certain incapacity for bad luck; and of very young men, who looked upon him as the perfect pattern of the person good to see and hard to understand.

During the first two days of the trial the case had gone wholly against the prisoner, who had given his name as Joseph Nadeau. Witnesses had heard him quarrelling with the murdered man, and the next day the body of the victim had been found by the roadside. The prisoner was a stranger in the lumber-camp where the deed was done, and while there had been morose and lived apart; no one knew him; and he refused to tell even his lawyer whence he came, or what his origin, or to bring witnesses from his home to speak for his character.

One by one the points had been made against him--with no perceptible effect upon Charley Steele, who seemed the one cool, undisturbed person in the courtroom.

Indifferent as he seemed, seldom speaking to the prisoner, often looking out of the windows to the cool green trees far over on the hill, absorbed and unbusinesslike, yet judge and jury came to see, before the second day was done, that he had let no essential thing pass, that the questions he asked had either a pregnant aptness, opened up new avenues of deliberation, or were touched with mystery--seemed to have a longer reach than the moment or the hour.

Before the end of this second day, however, more attention was upon him than upon the prisoner, and nine-tenths of the people in the court-room could have told how many fine linen handkerchiefs he used during the afternoon, how many times he adjusted his monocle to look at the judge meditatively. Probably no man, for eight hours a day, ever exasperated and tried a judge, jury, and public, as did this man of twenty-nine years of age, who had been known at college as Beauty Steele, and who was still so spoken of familiarly; or was called as familiarly, Charley Steele, by people who never had attempted to be familiar with him.

The second day of the trial had ended gloomily for the prisoner. The coil of evidence had drawn so close that extrication seemed impossible. That the evidence was circumstantial, that no sign of the crime was upon the prisoner, that he was found sleeping quietly in his bed when he was arrested, that he had not been seen to commit the deed, did not weigh in the minds of the general public. The man's guilt was freely believed; not even the few who clung to the opinion that Charley Steele would yet

get him off thought that he was innocent. There seemed no flaw in the evidence, once granted its circumstantiality.

During the last two hours of the sitting the prisoner had looked at his counsel in despair, for he seemed perfunctorily conducting the case: was occupied in sketching upon the blotting-pad before him, looking out of the window, or turning his head occasionally towards a corner where sat a half-dozen well-dressed ladies, and more particularly towards one lady who watched him in a puzzled way--more than once with a look of disappointment. Only at the very close of the sitting did he appear to rouse himself. Then, for a brief ten minutes, he cross-examined a friend of the murdered merchant in a fashion which startled the court-room, for he suddenly brought out the fact that the dead man had once struck a woman in the face in the open street. This fact, sharply stated by the prisoner's counsel, with no explanation and no comment, seemed uselessly intrusive and malicious. His ironical smile merely irritated all concerned. The thin, clean-shaven face of the prisoner grew more pinched and downcast, and he turned almost pleadingly towards the judge. The judge pulled his long side-whiskers nervously, and looked over his glasses in severe annoyance, then hastily adjourned the sitting and left the bench, while the prisoner saw with dismay his lawyer leave the court-room with not even a glance towards him.

On the morning of the third day Charley Steele's face, for the first time, wore an expression which, by a stretch of imagination, might be called anxious. He also took out his monocle frequently, rubbed it with his handkerchief, and screwed it in again, staring straight before him much of the time. But twice he spoke to the prisoner in a low voice, and was hurriedly answered in French as crude as his own was perfect. When he spoke, which was at rare intervals, his voice was without feeling, concise, insistent, unappealing. It was as though the business before him was wholly alien to him, as though he were held there against his will, but would go on with his task bitterly to the bitter end.

The court adjourned for an hour at noon. During this time Charley refused to see any one, but sat alone in his office with a few biscuits and an ominous bottle before him, till the time came for him to go back to the court-house. Arrived there he entered by a side door, and was not seen until the court opened once more.

For two hours and a half the crown attorney mercilessly made out his case against the prisoner. When he sat down, people glanced meaningly at each other, as though the last word had been said, then looked at the prisoner, as at one already condemned.

Yet Charley Steele was to reply. He was not now the same man that had conducted the case during the past two days and a half. Some great change had passed over him. There was no longer abstraction, indifference, or apparent boredom, or disdain, or distant stare. He was human, intimate and eager, yet concentrated and impelling: he was quietly, unnoticeably drunk.

He assured the prisoner with a glance of the eye, with a word scarce above a whisper, as he slowly rose to make his speech for the defence.

His first words caused a new feeling in the courtroom. He was a new presence; the personality had a changed significance. At first the public, the jury, and the judge were curiously attracted, surprised into a fresh interest. The voice had an insinuating quality, but it also had

a measured force, a subterranean insistence, a winning tactfulness. Withal, a logical simplicity governed his argument. The flaneur, the poseur--if such he was--no longer appeared. He came close to the jurymen, leaned his hands upon the back of a chair--as it were, shut out the public, even the judge, from his circle of interest--and talked in a conversational tone. An air of confidence passed from him to the amazed yet easily captivated jury; the distance between them, so gaping during the last two days, closed suddenly up. The tension of the past estrangement, relaxing all at once, surprised the jury into an almost eager friendliness, as on a long voyage a sensitive traveller finds in some exciting accident a natural introduction to an exclusive fellow-passenger, whom he discovers as human as he had thought him offensively distant.

Charley began by congratulating the crown attorney on his statement of the case. He called it masterly; he said that in its presentations it was irrefutable; as a precis of evidence purely circumstantial it was--useful and interesting. But, speech-making aside, and ability--and rhetoric--aside, and even personal conviction aside, the case should stand or fall by its total, not its comparative, soundness. Since the evidence was purely circumstantial, there must be no flaw in its cable of assumption, it must be logically inviolate within itself. Starting with assumption only, there must be no straying possibilities, no loose ends of certainty, no invading alternatives. Was this so in the case of the man before them? They were faced by a curious situation. So far as the trial was concerned, the prisoner himself was the only person who could tell them who he was, what was his past, and, if he committed the crime, what was--the motive of it: out of what spirit--of revenge, or hatred--the dead man had been sent to his account. Probably in the whole history of crime there never was a more peculiar case. Even himself the prisoner's counsel was dealing with one whose life was hid from him previous to the day the murdered man was discovered by the roadside. The prisoner had not sought to prove an alibi; he had done no more than formally plead not guilty. There was no material for defence save that offered by the prosecution. He had undertaken the defence of the prisoner because it was his duty as a lawyer to see that the law justified itself; that it satisfied every demand of proof to the last atom of certainty; that it met the final possibility of doubt with evidence perfect and inviolate if circumstantial, and uncontradictory if eye-witness, if tell-tale incident, were to furnish basis of proof.

Judge, jury, and public riveted their eyes upon Charley Steele. He had now drawn a little farther away from the jury-box; his eye took in the judge as well; once or twice he turned, as if appealingly and confidently, to the people in the room. It was terribly hot, the air was sickeningly close, every one seemed oppressed--every one save a lady sitting not a score of feet from where the counsel for the prisoner stood. This lady's face was not one that could flush easily; it belonged to a temperament as even as her person was symmetrically beautiful. As Charley talked, her eyes were fixed steadily, wonderingly upon him. There was a question in her gaze, which never in the course of the speech was quite absorbed by the admiration--the intense admiration--she was feeling for him. Once as he turned with a concentrated earnestness in her direction his eyes met hers. The message he flashed her was sub-conscious, for his mind never wavered an instant from the cause in hand, but it said to her:

"When this is over, Kathleen, I will come to you." For another quarter of an hour he exposed the fallacy of purely circumstantial evidence; he

raised in the minds of his hearers the painful responsibility of the law, the awful tyranny of miscarriage of justice; he condemned prejudice against a prisoner because that prisoner demanded that the law should prove him guilty instead of his proving himself innocent. If a man chose to stand to that, to sternly assume this perilous position, the law had no right to take advantage of it. He turned towards the prisoner and traced his possible history: as the sensitive, intelligent son of godly Catholic parents from some remote parish in French Canada. He drew an imaginary picture of the home from which he might have come, and of the parents and brothers and sisters who would have lived weeks of torture knowing that their son and brother was being tried for his life. It might at first glance seem quixotic, eccentric, but was it unnatural that the prisoner should choose silence as to his origin and home, rather than have his family and friends face the undoubted peril lying before him? Besides, though his past life might have been wholly blameless, it would not be evidence in his favour. It might, indeed, if it had not been blameless, provide some element of unjust suspicion against him, furnish some fancied motive. The prisoner had chosen his path, and events had so far justified him. It must be clear to the minds of judge and jury that there were fatally weak places in the circumstantial evidence offered for the conviction of this man.

There was the fact that no sign of the crime, no drop of blood, no weapon, was found about him or near him, and that he was peacefully sleeping at the moment the constable arrested him.

There was also the fact that no motive for the crime had been shown. It was not enough that he and the dead man had been heard quarrelling. Was there any certainty that it was a quarrel, since no word or sentence of the conversation had been brought into court? Men with quick tempers might quarrel over trivial things, but exasperation did not always end in bodily injury and the taking of life; imprecations were not so uncommon that they could be taken as evidence of wilful murder. The prisoner refused to say what that troubled conversation was about, but who could question his right to take the risk of his silence being misunderstood?

The judge was alternately taking notes and looking fixedly at the prisoner; the jury were in various attitudes of strained attention; the public sat open mouthed; and up in the gallery a woman with white face and clinched hands listened moveless and staring. Charley Steele was holding captive the emotions and the judgments of his hearers. All antipathy had gone; there was a strange eager intimacy between the jurymen and himself. People no longer looked with distant dislike at the prisoner, but began to see innocence in his grim silence, disdain only in his surly defiance.

But Charley Steele had preserved his great stroke for the psychological moment. He suddenly launched upon them the fact, brought out in evidence, that the dead man had struck a woman in the face a year ago; also that he had kept a factory girl in affluence for two years. Here was motive for murder--if motive were to govern them--far greater than might be suggested by excited conversation which listeners who could not hear a word construed into a quarrel--listeners who bore the prisoner at the bar ill-will because he shunned them while in the lumber-camp. If the prisoner was to be hanged for motive untraceable, why should not these two women be hanged for motive traceable!

Here was his chance. He appeared to impeach subtly every intelligence in the room for having had any preconception about the prisoner's guilt. He

compelled the jury to feel that they, with him, had made the discovery of the unsound character of the evidence. The man might be guilty, but their personal guilt, the guilt of the law, would be far greater if they condemned the man on violable evidence. With a last simple appeal, his hands resting on the railing before the seat where the jury sat, his voice low and conversational again, his eyes running down the line of faces of the men who had his client's life in their hands, he said:

"It is not a life only that is at stake, it is not revenge for a life snatched from the busy world by a brutal hand that we should heed to-day, but the awful responsibility of that thing we call the State, which, having the power of life and death without gainsay or hindrance, should prove to the last inch of necessity its right to take a human life. And the right and the reason should bring conviction to every honest human mind. That is all I have to say."

The crown attorney made a perfunctory reply. The judge's charge was brief, and, if anything, a little in favour of the prisoner--very little, a casuist's little; and the jury filed out of the room. They were gone but ten minutes. When they returned, the verdict was given: "Not guilty, your Honour!"

Then it was that a woman laughed in the gallery. Then a whispering voice said across the railing which separated the public from the lawyers: "Charley! Charley!"

Though Charley turned and looked at the lady who spoke, he made no response.

A few minutes later, outside the court, as he walked quickly away, again inscrutable and debonair, the prisoner, Joseph Nadeau, touched him on the arm and said:

"M'sieu', M'sieu', you have saved my life--I thank you, M'sieu'!"

Charley Steele drew his arm away with disgust. "Get out of my sight! You're as guilty as hell!" he said.

CHAPTER II

WHAT CAME OF THE TRIAL

"When this is over, Kathleen, I will come to you." So Charley Steele's eyes had said to a lady in the court room on that last day of the great trial. The lady had left the court-room dazed and exalted. She, with hundreds of others, had had a revelation of Charley Steele; had had also the great emotional experience of seeing a crowd make the 'volte face' with their convictions; looking at a prisoner one moment with eyes of loathing and anticipating his gruesome end, the next moment seeing him as the possible martyr to the machinery of the law. She whose heart was used to beat so evenly had felt it leap and swell with excitement, awaiting the moment when the jury filed back into the court-room. Then it stood still, as a wave might hang for an instant at its crest ere it swept down to beat upon the shore.

With her as with most present, the deepest feeling in the agitated

suspense was not so much that the prisoner should go free, as that the prisoner's counsel should win his case. It was as if Charley Steele were on trial instead of the prisoner. He was the imminent figure; it was his fate that was in the balance--such was the antic irony of suggestion. And the truth was, that the fates of both prisoner and counsel had been weighed in the balance that sweltering August day.

The prisoner was forgotten almost as soon as he had left the court-room a free man, but wherever men and women met in Montreal that day, one name was on the lips of all-Charley Steele! In his speech he had done two things: he had thrown down every barrier of reserve--or so it seemed--and had become human and intimate. "I could not have believed it of him," was the remark on every lip. Of his ability there never had been a moment's doubt, but it had ever been an uncomfortable ability, it had tortured foes and made friends anxious. No one had ever seen him show feeling. If it was a mask, he had worn it with a curious consistency: it had been with him as a child, at school, at college, and he had brought it back again to the town where he was born. It had effectually prevented his being popular, but it had made him--with his foppishness and his originality--an object of perpetual interest. Few men had ventured to cross swords with him. He left his fellow-citizens very much alone. He was uniformly if distantly courteous, and he was respected in his own profession for his uncommon powers and for an utter indifference as to whether he had cases in court or not.

Coming from the judge's chambers after the trial he went to his office, receiving as he passed congratulations more effusively offered than, as people presently found, his manner warranted.

For he was again the formal, masked Charley Steele, looking calmly through the interrogative eye-glass. By the time he reached his office, greetings became more subdued. His prestige had increased immensely in a few short hours, but he had no more friends than before. Old relations were soon re-established. The town was proud of his ability as it had always been, irritated by his manner as it had always been, more prophetic of his future than it had ever been, and unconsciously grateful for the fact that he had given them a sensation which would outlast the summer.

All these things concerned him little. Once the business of the court-room was over, a thought which had quietly lain in waiting behind the strenuous occupations of his brain leaped forward to exclude all others.

As he entered his office he was thinking of that girl's face in the court-room, with its flush of added beauty which he and his speech had brought there. "What a perfect loveliness!" he said to himself as he bathed his face and hands, and prepared to go into the street again. "She needed just such a flush to make her supreme Kathleen!" He stood, looking out into the square, out into the green of the trees where the birds twittered. "Faultless--faultless in form and feature. She was so as a child, she is so as a woman." He lighted a cigarette, and blew away little clouds of smoke. "I will do it. I will marry her. She will have me: I saw it in her eye. Fairing doesn't matter. Her uncle will never consent to that, and she doesn't care enough for him. She cares, but she doesn't care enough. . . . I will do it."

He turned towards a cupboard into which he had put a certain bottle before he went to the court-room two hours before. He put the key in the lock, then stopped. "No, I think not!" he said. "What I say to her

shall not be said forensically. What a discovery I've made! I was dull, blank, all iron and ice; the judge, the jury, the public, even Kathleen, against me; and then that bottle in there--and I saw things like crystal! I had a glow in my brain, I had a tingle in my fingers; and I had success, and"--his face clouded--"He was as guilty as hell!" he added, almost bitterly, as he put the key of the cupboard into his pocket again.

There was a knock at the door, and a youth of about nineteen entered.

"Hello!" he said. "I say, sir, but that speech of yours struck us all where we couldn't say no. Even Kathleen got in a glow over it. Perhaps Captain Fairing didn't, for he's just left her in a huff, and she's looking--you remember those lines in the school-book:

"A red spot burned upon her cheek,
Streamed her rich tresses down--"

He laughed gaily. "I've come to ask you up to tea," he added. "The Unclekins is there. When I told him that Kathleen had sent Fairing away with a flea in his ear, he nearly fell off his chair. He lent me twenty dollars on the spot. Are you coming our way?" he continued, suddenly trying to imitate Charley's manner. Charley nodded, and they left the office together and moved away under a long avenue of maples to where, in the shade of a high hill, was the house of the uncle of Kathleen Wantage, with whom she and her brother Billy lived. They walked in silence for some time, and at last Billy said, 'a propos' of nothing:

"Fairing hasn't a red cent."

"You have a perambulating mind, Billy," said Charley, and bowed to a young clergyman approaching them from the opposite direction.

"What does that mean?" remarked Billy, and said "Hello!" to the young clergyman, and did not wait for Charley's answer.

The Rev. John Brown was by no means a conventional parson. He was smoking a cigarette, and two dogs followed at his heels. He was certainly not a foggy. He had more than a little admiration for Charley Steele, but he found it difficult to preach when Charley was in the congregation. He was always aware of a subterranean and half-pitying criticism going on in the barrister's mind. John Brown knew that he could never match his intelligence against Charley's, in spite of the theological course at Durham, so he undertook to scotch the snake by kindness. He thought that he might be able to do this, because Charley, who was known to be frankly agnostical, came to his church more or less regularly.

The Rev. John Brown was not indifferent to what men thought of him. He had a reputation for being "independent," but his chief independence consisted in dressing a little like a layman, posing as the athletic parson of the new school, consorting with ministers of the dissenting denominations when it was sufficiently effective, and being a "good fellow" with men easily bored by church and churchmen. He preached theatrical sermons to societies and benevolent associations. He wanted to be thought well of on all hands, and he was shrewd enough to know that if he trimmed between ritualism on one hand and evangelicism on the other, he was on a safe road. He might perforate old dogmatical prejudices with a good deal of freedom so long as he did not begin bringing "millinery" into the service of the church. He invested his own

personal habits with the millinery. He looked a picturesque figure with his blond moustache, a little silk-lined brown cloak thrown carelessly over his shoulder, a gold-headed cane, and a brisk jacket half ecclesiastical, half military.

He had interested Charley Steele, also he had amused him, and sometimes he had surprised him into a sort of admiration; for Brown had a temperament capable of little inspirations--such a literary inspiration as might come to a second-rate actor--and Charley never belittled any man's ability, but seized upon every sign of knowledge with the appreciation of the epicure.

John Brown raised his hat to Charley, then held out a hand. "Masterly-masterly!" he said. "Permit my congratulations. It was the one thing to do. You couldn't have saved him by making him an object of pity, by appealing to our sympathies."

"What do you take to be the secret, then?" asked Charley, with a look half abstracted, half quizzical. "Terror--sheer terror. You startled the conscience. You made defects in the circumstantial evidence, the imminent problems of our own salvation. You put us all on trial. We were under the lash of fear. If we parsons could only do that from the pulpit!"

"We will discuss that on our shooting-trip next week. Duck-shooting gives plenty of time for theological asides. You are coming, eh?"

John Brown scarcely noticed the sarcasm, he was so delighted at the suggestion that he was to be included in the annual duck-shoot of the Seven, as the little yearly party of Charley and his friends to Lake Aubergine was called. He had angled for this invitation for two years.

"I must not keep you," Charley said, and dismissed him with a bow. "The sheep will stray, and the shepherd must use his crook."

Brown smiled at the badinage, and went on his way rejoicing in the fact that he was to share the amusements of the Seven at Lake Aubergine--the Lake of the Mad Apple. To get hold of these seven men of repute and position, to be admitted into this good presence!--He had a pious exaltation, but whether it was because he might gather into the fold erratic and agnostical sheep like Charley Steele, or because it pleased his social ambitions, he had occasion to answer in the future. He gaily prepared to go to the Lake of the Mad Apple, where he was fated to eat of the tree of knowledge.

Charley Steele and Billy Wantage walked on slowly to the house under the hill.

"He's the right sort," said Billy. "He's a sport. I can stand that kind. Did you ever hear him sing? No? Well, he can sing a comic song fit to make you die. I can sing a bit myself, but to hear him sing 'The Man Who Couldn't Get Warm' is a show in itself. He can play the banjo too, and the guitar--but he's best on the banjo. It's worth a dollar to listen to his Epha-haam--that's Ephraim, you know--Ephahaam Come Home,' and 'I Found Y' in de Honeysuckle Paitch."

"He preaches, too!" said Charley drily.

They had reached the door of the house under the hill, and Billy had no

time for further remark. He ran into the drawing-room, announcing Charley with the words: "I say, Kathleen, I've brought the man that made the judge sit up."

Billy suddenly stopped, however, for there sat the judge who had tried the case, calmly munching a piece of toast. The judge did not allow himself the luxury of embarrassment, but bowed to Charley with a smile, which he presently turned on Kathleen, who came as near being disconcerted as she had ever been in her life.

Kathleen had passed through a good deal to look so unflurried. She had been on trial in the court-room as well as the prisoner. Important things had been at stake with her. She and Charley Steele had known each other since they were children. To her, even in childhood, he had been a dominant figure. He had judicially and admiringly told her she was beautiful--when he was twelve and she five. But he had said it without any of those glances which usually accompanied the same sentiments in the mouths of other lads. He had never made boy-love to her, and she had thrilled at the praise of less splendid people than Charley Steele. He had always piqued her, he was so superior to the ordinary enchantments of youth, beauty, and fine linen.

As he came and went, growing older and more characteristic, more and more "Beauty Steele," accompanied by legends of wild deeds and days at college, by tales of his fopperies and the fashions he had set, she herself had grown, as he had termed it, more "decorative." He had told her so, not in the least patronisingly, but as a simple fact in which no sentiment lurked. He thought her the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, but he had never regarded her save as a creation for the perfect pleasure of the eye; he thought her the concrete glory of sensuous purity, no more capable of sentiment than himself. He had said again and again, as he grew older and left college and began the business of life after two years in Europe, that sentiment would spoil her, would scatter the charm of her perfect beauty; it would vitalise her too much, and her nature would lose its proportion; she would be decentralised! She had been piqued at his indifference to sentiment; she could not easily be content without worship, though she felt none. This pique had grown until Captain Tom Fairing crossed her path.

Fairing was the antithesis of Charley Steele. Handsome, poor, enthusiastic, and none too able, he was simple and straightforward, and might be depended on till the end of the chapter. And the end of it was, that in so far as she had ever felt real sentiment for anybody, she felt it for Tom Fairing of the Royal Fusileers. It was not love she felt in the old, in the big, in the noble sense, but it had behind it selection and instinct and natural gravitation.

Fairing declared his love. She would give him no answer. For as soon as she was presented with the issue, the destiny, she began to look round her anxiously. The first person to fill the perspective was Charley Steele. As her mind dwelt on him, her uncle gave forth his judgment, that she should never have a penny if she married Tom Fairing. This only irritated her, it did not influence her. But there was Charley. He was a figure, was already noted in his profession because of a few masterly successes in criminal cases, and if he was not popular, he was distinguished, and the world would talk about him to the end. He was handsome, and he was well-to-do--he had a big unoccupied house on the hill among the maples. How many people had said, What a couple they would make--Charley Steele and Kathleen Wantage!

So, as Fairing presented an issue to her, she concentrated her thoughts as she had never done before on the man whom the world set apart for her, in a way the world has.

As she looked and looked, Charley began to look also. He had not been enamoured of the sordid things of the world; he had been merely curious. He thought vice was ugly; he had imagination and a sense of form. Kathleen was beautiful. Sentiment had, so he thought, never seriously disturbed her; he did not think it ever would. It had not affected him. He did not understand it. He had been born non-intime. He had had acquaintances, but never friendships, and never loves or love. But he had a fine sense of the fitting and the proportionate, and he worshipped beauty in so far as he could worship anything. The homage was cerebral, intellectual, temperamental, not of the heart. As he looked out upon the world half pityingly, half ironically, he was struck with wonder at the disproportion which was engendered by "having heart," as it was called. He did not find it necessary.

Now that he had begun to think of marriage, who so suitable as Kathleen? He knew of Fairing's adoration, but he took it as a matter of course that she had nothing to give of the same sort in return. Her beauty was still serene and unimpaired. He would not spoil it by the tortures of emotion. He would try to make Kathleen's heart beat in harmony with his own; it should not thunder out of time. He had made up his mind that he would marry her.

For Kathleen, with the great trial, the beginning of the end had come. Charley's power over her was subtle, finely sensuous, and, in deciding, there were no mere heart-impulses working for Charley. Instinct and impulse were working in another direction. She had not committed her mind to either man, though her heart, to a point, was committed to Fairing.

On the day of the trial, however, she fell wholly under that influence which had swayed judge, jury, and public. To her the verdict of the jury was not in favour of the prisoner at the bar--she did not think of him. It was in favour of Charley Steele.

And so, indifferent as to who heard, over the heads of the people in front of her, to the accused's counsel inside the railings, she had called, softly: "Charley! Charley!"

Now, in the house under the hill, they were face to face, and the end was at hand: the end of something and the beginning of something.

There was a few moments of casual conversation, in which Billy talked as much as anybody, and then Kathleen said:

"What do you suppose was the man's motive for committing the murder?"

Charley looked at Kathleen steadily, curiously, through his monocle. It was a singular compliment she paid him. Her remark took no heed of the verdict of the jury. He turned inquiringly towards the judge, who, though slightly shocked by the question, recovered himself quickly.

"What do you think it was, sir?" Charley asked quietly.

"A woman--and revenge, perhaps," answered the judge, with a matter-of-

course air.

A few moments afterwards the judge was carried off by Kathleen's uncle to see some rare old books; Billy, his work being done, vanished; and Kathleen and Charley were left alone.

"You did not answer me in the court-room," Kathleen said. "I called to you."

"I wanted to hear you say them here," he rejoined. "Say what?" she asked, a little puzzled by the tone of his voice.

"Your congratulations," he answered.

She held out a hand to him. "I offer them now. It was wonderful. You were inspired. I did not think you could ever let yourself go."

He held her hand firmly. "I promise not to do it again," he said whimsically.

"Why not?"

"Have I not your congratulations?" His hand drew her slightly towards him; she rose to her feet.

"That is no reason," she answered, confused, yet feeling that there was a double meaning in his words.

"I could not allow you to be so vain," he said. "We must be companionable. Henceforth I shall congratulate myself--Kathleen."

There was no mistaking now. "Oh, what is it you are going to say to me?" she asked, yet not disengaging her hand.

"I said it all in the court-room," he rejoined; "and you heard."

"You want me to marry you--Charley?" she asked frankly.

"If you think there is no just impediment," he answered, with a smile.

She drew her hand away, and for a moment there was a struggle in her mind--or heart. He knew of what she was thinking, and he did not consider it of serious consequence. Romance was a trivial thing, and women were prone to become absorbed in trivialities. When the woman had no brains, she might break her life upon a trifle. But Kathleen had an even mind, a serene temperament. Her nerves were daily cooled in a bath of nature's perfect health. She had never had an hour's illness in her life.

"There is no just or unjust impediment, Kathleen," he added presently, and took her hand again.

She looked him in the eyes clearly. "You really think so?" she asked.

"I know so," he answered. "We shall be two perfect panels in one picture of life."

CHAPTER III

AFTER FIVE YEARS

"You have forgotten me?"

Charley Steele's glance was serenely non-committal as he answered drily:

"I cannot remember doing so."

The other man's eyelids drew down with a look of anger, then the humour of the impertinence worked upon him, and he gave a nervous little laugh and said: "I am John Brown."

"Then I'm sure my memory is not at fault," remarked Charley, with an outstretched hand. "My dear Brown! Still preaching little sermons?"

"Do I look it?" There was a curious glitter in John Brown's eyes. "I'm not preaching little sermons, and you know it well enough." He laughed, but it was a hard sort of mirth. "Perhaps you forgot to remember that, though," he sneeringly added. "It was the work of your hands."

"That's why I should remember to forget it--I am the child of modesty." Charley touched the corners of his mouth with his tongue, as though his lips were dry, and his eyes wandered to a saloon a little farther down the street.

"Modesty is your curse," rejoined Brown mockingly.

"Once when you preached at me you said that beauty was my curse." Charley laughed a curt, distant little laugh which was no more the spontaneous humour lying for ever behind his thoughts than his eye-glass was the real sight of his eyes, though since childhood this laugh and his eye-glass were as natural to all expression of himself as John Brown's outward and showy frankness did not come from the real John Brown.

John Brown looked him up and down quickly, then fastened his eyes on the ruddy cheeks of his old friend. "Do they call you Beauty now as they used to?" he asked, rather insolently.

"No. They only say, 'There goes Charley Steele!'" The tongue again touched the corners of the mouth, and the eyes wandered to the doorway down the street, over which was written in French: "Jean Jolicoeur, Licensed to sell wine, beer, and other spirituous and fermented liquors."

Just then an archdeacon of the cathedral passed them, bowed gravely to Charley, glanced at John Brown, turned colour slightly, and then with a cold stare passed on too quickly for dignity.

"I'm thinking of Bunyan," said the aforetime friend of Charley Steele. "I'll paraphrase him and say: 'There, but for beauty and a monocle, walks John Brown.'"

Under the bitter sarcasm of the man, who, five years ago, had gone down at last beneath his agnostic raillery, Charley's blue eye did not waver, not a nerve stirred in his face, as he replied: "Who knows!"

"That was what you always said--who knows! That did for John Brown."

Charley seemed not to hear the remark. "What are you doing now?" he asked, looking steadily at the face whence had gone all the warmth of manhood, all that courage of life which keeps men young. The lean parchment visage had the hunted look of the incorrigible failure, had written on it self-indulgence, cunning, and uncertainty.

"Nothing much," John Brown replied.

"What last?"

"Floated an arsenic-mine on Lake Superior."

"Failed?"

"More or less. There are hopes yet. I've kept the wolf from the door."

"What are you going to do?"

"Don't know--nothing, perhaps; I've not the courage I had."

"I'd have thought you might find arsenic a good thing," said Charley, holding out a silver cigarette-case, his eyes turning slowly from the startled, gloomy face of the man before him, to the cool darkness beyond the open doorway of that saloon on the other side of the street.

John Brown shivered--there was something so cold-blooded in the suggestion that he might have found arsenic a good thing. The metallic glare of Charley's eye-glass seemed to give an added cruelty to the words. Charley's monocle was the token of what was behind his blue eye--one ceaseless interrogation. It was that everlasting questioning, the ceaseless who knows! which had in the end unsettled John Brown's mind, and driven him at last from the church and the possible gaiters of a dean into the rough business of life, where he had been a failure. Yet as Brown looked at Charley the old fascination came on him with a rush. His hand suddenly caught Charley's as he took a cigarette, and he said: "Perhaps I'll find arsenic a good thing yet."

For reply Charley laid a hand on his arm--turned him towards the shade of the houses opposite. Without a word they crossed the street, entered the saloon, and passed to a little back room, Charley giving an unsympathetic stare to some men at the bar who seemed inclined to speak to him.

As the two passed into the small back room with the frosted door, one of the strangers said to the other: "What does he come here for, if he's too proud to speak! What's a saloon for! I'd like to smash that eye-glass for him!"

"He's going down-hill fast," said the other. "He drinks steady--steady."

"Tiens--tiens!" interposed Jean Jolicoeur, the landlord. "It is not harm to him. He drink all day, an' he walk a crack like a bee-line."

"He's got the handsomest wife in this city. If I was him, I'd think more of myself," answered the Englishman.

"How you think more--hein? You not come down more to my saloon?"

"No, I wouldn't come to your saloon, and I wouldn't go to Theophile

Charlemagne's shebang at the Cote Dorion."

"You not like Charlemagne's hotel?" said a huge black-bearded pilot, standing beside the landlord. "Oh, I like Charlemagne's hotel, and I like to talk to Suzon Charlemagne, but I'm not married, Rouge Gosselin--"

"If he go to Charlemagne's hotel, and talk some more too mooch to dat Suzon Charlemagne, he will lose dat glass out of his eye," interrupted Rouge Gosselin.

"Who say he been at dat place?" said Jean Jolicoeur. "He bin dere four times las' month, and dat Suzon Charlemagne talk'bout him ever since. When dat Narcisse Bovin and Jacques Gravel come down de river, he better keep away from dat Cote Dorion," sputtered Rouge Gosselin. "Dat's a long story short, all de same for you--bagosh!"

Rouge Gosselin flung off his glass of white whiskey, and threw after it a glass of cold water.

"Tiens! you know not M'sieu' Charley Steele," said Jean Jolicoeur, and turned on his heel, nodding his head sagely.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLEY MAKES A DISCOVERY

A hot day a month later Charley Steele sat in his office staring before him into space, and negligently smoking a cigarette. Outside there was a slow clacking of wheels, and a newsboy was crying "La Patrie! La Patrie! All about the War in France! All about the massacre!" Bells--wedding-bells--were ringing also, and the jubilant sounds, like the call of the newsboy, were out of accord with the slumberous feeling of the afternoon. Charley Steele turned his head slowly towards the window. The branches of a maple-tree half crossed it, and the leaves moved softly in the shadow they made. His eye went past the tree and swam into the tremulous white heat of the square, and beyond to where in the church-tower the bells were ringing-to the church doors, from which gaily dressed folk were issuing to the carriages, or thronged the pavement, waiting for the bride and groom to come forth into a new-created world--for them.

Charley looked through his monocle at the crowd reflectively, his head held a little to one side in a questioning sort of way, on his lips the ghost of a smile--not a reassuring smile. Presently he leaned forward slightly and the monocle dropped from his eye. He fumbled for it, raised it, blew on it, rubbed it with his handkerchief, and screwed it carefully into his eye again, his rather bushy brow gathering over it strongly, his look sharpened to more active thought. He stared straight across the square at a figure in heliotrope, whose face was turned to a man in scarlet uniform taller than herself two glowing figures towards whom many other eyes than his own were directed, some curiously, some disdainfully, some sadly. But Charley did not see the faces of those who looked on; he only saw two people--one in heliotrope, one in scarlet.

Presently his white firm hand went up and ran through his hair nervously, his comely figure settled down in the chair, his tongue touched the corners of his red lips, and his eyes withdrew from the woman in

heliotrope and the man in scarlet, and loitered among the leaves of the tree at the window. The softness of the green, the cool health of the foliage, changed the look of his eye from something cold and curious to something companionable, and scarcely above a whisper two words came from his lips:

"Kathleen! Kathleen!"

By the mere sound of the voice it would have been hard to tell what the words meant, for it had an inquiring cadence and yet a kind of distant doubt, a vague anxiety. The face conveyed nothing--it was smooth, fresh, and immobile. The only point where the mind and meaning of the man worked according to the law of his life was at the eye, where the monocle was caught now as in a vise. Behind this glass there was a troubled depth which belied the self-indulgent mouth, the egotism speaking loudly in the red tie, the jewelled finger, the ostentatiously simple yet sumptuous clothes.

At last he drew in a sharp, sibilant breath, clicked his tongue--a sound of devil-may-care and hopelessness at once--and turned to a little cupboard behind him. The chair squeaked on the floor as he turned, and he frowned, shivered a little, and kicked it irritably with his heel.

From the cupboard he took a bottle of liqueur, and, pouring out a small glassful, drank it off eagerly. As he put the bottle away, he said again, in an abstracted fashion, "Kathleen!"

Then, seating himself at the table, as if with an effort towards energy, he rang a bell. A clerk entered. "Ask Mr. Wantage to come for a moment," he said. "Mr. Wantage has gone to the church--to the wedding," was the reply.

"Oh, very well. He will be in again this afternoon?"

"Sure to, sir."

"Just so. That will do."

The clerk retired, and Charley, rising, unlocked a drawer, and taking out some books and papers, laid them on the table. Intently, carefully, he began to examine them, referring at the same time to a letter which had lain open at his hand while he had been sitting there. For a quarter of an hour he studied the books and papers, then, all at once, his fingers fastened on a point and stayed. Again he read the letter lying beside him. A flush crimsoned his face to his hair--a singular flush of shame, of embarrassment, of guilt--a guilt not his own. His breath caught in his throat.

"Billy!" he gasped. "Billy, by God!"

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN IN HELIOTROPE

The flush was still on Charley's face when the door opened slowly, and a lady dressed in heliotrope silk entered, and came forward. Without a

word Charley rose, and, taking a step towards her, offered a chair; at the same time noticing her heightened colour, and a certain rigid carriage not in keeping with her lithe and graceful figure. There was no mistaking the quiver of her upper lip--a short lip which did not hide a wonderfully pretty set of teeth.

With a wave of the hand she declined the seat. Glancing at the books and papers lying on the table, she flashed an inquiry at his flushed face, and, misreading the cause, with slow, quiet point, in which bitterness or contempt showed, she said meaningly:

"What a slave you are!"

"Behold the white man work!" he said good-naturedly, the flush passing slowly from his face. With apparent negligence he pushed the letter and the books and papers a little to one side, but really to place them beyond the range of her angry eyes. She shrugged her shoulders at his action.

"For 'the fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed?'" she said, not concealing her malice, for at the wedding she had just left all her married life had rushed before her in a swift panorama, and the man in scarlet had fixed the shooting pictures in her mind.

Again a flush swept up Charley's face and seemed to blur his sight. His monocle dropped the length of its silken tether, and he caught it and slowly adjusted it again as he replied evenly:

"You always hit the nail on the head, Kathleen." There was a kind of appeal in his voice, a sort of deprecation in his eye, as though he would be friends with her, as though, indeed, there was in his mind some secret pity for her.

Her look at his face was critical and cold. It was plain that she was not prepared for any extra friendliness on his part--there seemed no reason why he should add to his usual courtesy a note of sympathy to the sound of her name on his lips. He had not fastened the door of the cupboard from which he had taken the liqueur, and it had swung open a little, disclosing the bottle and the glass. She saw. Her face took on a look of quiet hardness.

"Why did you not come to the wedding? She was your cousin. People asked where you were. You knew I was going."

"Did you need me?" he asked quietly, and his eyes involuntarily swept to the place where he had seen the heliotrope and scarlet make a glow of colour on the other side of the square. "You were not alone."

She misunderstood him. Her mind had been overwrought, and she caught insinuation in his voice. "You mean Tom Fairing!" Her eyes blazed. "You are quite right--I did not need you. Tom Fairing is a man that all the world trusts save you."

"Kathleen!" The words were almost a cry. "For God's sake! I have never thought of 'trusting' men where you are concerned. I believe in no man"--his voice had a sharp bitterness, though his face was smooth and unemotional--"but I trust you, and believe in you. Yes, upon my soul and honour, Kathleen."

As he spoke she turned quickly and stepped towards the window, an involuntary movement of agitation. He had touched a chord. But even as she reached the window and glanced down to the hot, dusty street, she heard a loud voice below, a reckless, ribald sort of voice, calling to some one to, "Come and have a drink."

"Billy!" she said involuntarily, and looked down, then shrank back quickly. She turned swiftly on her husband. "Your soul and honour, Charley!" she said slowly. "Look at what you've made of Billy! Look at the company he keeps--John Brown, who hasn't even decency enough to keep away from the place he disgraced. Billy is always with him. You ruined John Brown, with your dissipation and your sneers at religion and your-'I-wonder-nows!' Of what use have you been, Charley? Of what use to anyone in the world? You think of nothing but eating, and drinking, and playing the fop."

He glanced down involuntarily, and carefully flicked some cigarette-ash from his waistcoat. The action arrested her speech for a moment, and then, with a little shudder, she continued: "The best they can say of you is, 'There goes Charley Steele!'"

"And the worst?" he asked. He was almost smiling now, for he admired her anger, her scorn. He knew it was deserved, and he had no idea of making any defence. He had said all in that instant's cry, "Kathleen!" --that one awakening feeling of his life so far. She had congealed the word on his lips by her scorn, and now he was his old debonair, dissipated self, with the impertinent monocle in his eye and a jest upon his tongue.

"Do you want to know the worst they say?" she asked, growing pale to the lips. "Go and stand behind the door of Jolicoeur's saloon. Go to any street corner, and listen. Do you think I don't know what they say? Do you think the world doesn't talk about the company you keep? Haven't I seen you going into Jolicoeur's saloon when I was walking on the other side of the street? Do you think that all the world, and I among the rest, are blind? Oh, you fop, you fool, you have ruined my brother, you have ruined my life, and I hate and despise you for a cold-blooded, selfish coward!"

He made a deprecating gesture and stared--a look of most curious inquiry. They had been married for five years, and during that time they had never been anything but persistently courteous to each other. He had never on any occasion seen her face change colour, or her manner show chagrin or emotion. Stately and cold and polite, she had fairly met his ceaseless foppery and preciseness of manner. But people had said of her, "Poor Kathleen Steele!" for her spotless name stood sharply off from his negligence and dissipation. They called her "Poor Kathleen Steele!" in sympathy, though they knew that she had not resisted marriage with the well-to-do Charley Steele, while loving a poor captain in the Royal Fusiliers. She preserved social sympathy by a perfect outward decorum, though the man of the scarlet coat remained in the town and haunted the places where she appeared, and though the eyes of the censorious world were watching expectantly. No voice was raised against her. Her cold beauty held the admiration of all women, for she was not eager for men's company, and she kept her poise even with the man in scarlet near her, glacially complacent, beautifully still, disconcertingly emotionless. They did not know that the poise with her was to an extent as much a pose as Charley's manner was to him.

"I hate you and despise you for a cold-blooded, selfish coward!" So that was the way Kathleen felt! Charley's tongue touched his lips quickly, for they were arid, and he slowly said:

"I assure you I have not tried to influence Billy. I have no remembrance of his imitating me in anything. Won't you sit down? It is very fatiguing, this heat."

Charley was entirely himself again. His words concerning Billy Wantage might have been either an impeachment of Billy's character and, by deduction, praise of his own, or it may have been the insufferable egoism of the fop, well used to imitators. The veil between the two, which for one sacred moment had seemed about to lift, was fallen now, leaded and weighted at the bottom.

"I suppose you would say the same about John Brown! It is disconcerting at least to think that we used to sit and listen to Mr. Brown as he waved his arms gracefully in his surplice and preached sentimental sermons. I suppose you will say, what we have heard you say before, that you only asked questions. Was that how you ruined the Rev. John Brown--and Billy?"

Charley was very thirsty, and because of that perhaps, his voice had an unusually dry tone as he replied: "I asked questions of John Brown; I answer them to Billy. It is I that am ruined!"

There was that in his voice she did not understand, for though long used to his paradoxical phrases and his everlasting pose--as it seemed to her and all the world--there now rang through his words a note she had never heard before. For a fleeting instant she was inclined to catch at some hidden meaning, but her grasp of things was uncertain. She had been thrown off her balance, or poise, as Charley had, for an unwonted second, been thrown off his pose, and her thought could not pierce beneath the surface.

"I suppose you will be flippant at Judgment Day," she said with a bitter laugh, for it seemed to her a monstrous thing that they should be such an infinite distance apart.

"Why should one be serious then? There will be no question of an alibi, or evidence for the defence--no cross-examination. A cut-and-dried verdict!"

She ignored his words. "Shall you be at home to dinner?" she rejoined coldly, and her eyes wandered out of the window again to that spot across the square where heliotrope and scarlet had met.

"I fancy not," he answered, his eyes turned away also--towards the cupboard containing the liqueur. "Better ask Billy; and keep him in, and talk to him--I really would like you to talk to him. He admires you so much. I wish--in fact I hope you will ask Billy to come and live with us," he added half abstractedly. He was trying to see his way through a sudden confusion of ideas. Confusion was rare to him, and his senses, feeling the fog, embarrassed by a sudden air of mystery and a cloud of futurity, were creeping to a mind-path of understanding.

"Don't be absurd," she said coldly. "You know I won't ask him, and you don't want him."

"I have always said that decision is the greatest of all qualities--even when the decision is bad. It saves so much worry, and tends to health." Suddenly he turned to the desk and opened a tin box. "Here is further practice for your admirable gift." He opened a paper. "I want you to sign off for this building--leaving it to my absolute disposal." He spread the paper out before her.

She turned pale and her lips tightened. She looked at him squarely in the eyes. "My wedding-gift!" she said. Then she shrugged her shoulders. A moment she hesitated, and in that moment seemed to congeal. "You need it?" she asked distantly.

He inclined his head, his eye never leaving hers. With a swift angry motion she caught the glove from her left hand, and, doubling it back, dragged it off. A smooth round ring came off with it and rolled upon the floor.

Stooping, he picked up the ring, and handed it back to her, saying: "Permit me." It was her wedding-ring. She took it with a curious contracted look and put it on the finger again, then pulled off the other glove quietly. "Of course one uses the pen with the right hand," she said calmly.

"Involuntary act of memory," he rejoined slowly, as she took the pen in her hand. "You had spoken of a wedding, this was a wedding-gift, and--that's right, sign there!"

There was a brief pause, in which she appeared to hesitate, and then she wrote her name in a large firm hand, and, throwing down the pen, caught up her gloves, and began to pull them on viciously.

"Thanks. It is very kind of you," he said. He put the document in the tin box, and took out another, as without a word, but with a grave face in which scorn and trouble were mingled, she now turned towards the door.

"Can you spare a minute longer?" he said, and advanced towards her, holding the new document in his hand. "Fair exchange is no robbery. Please take this. No, not with the right hand; the left is better luck --the better the hand, the better the deed," he added with a whimsical squint and a low laugh, and he placed the paper in her left hand. "Item No. 2 to take the place of item No. 1."

She scrutinised the paper. Wonder filled her face. "Why, this is a deed of the homestead property--worth three times as much!" she said. "Why--why do you do this?"

"Remember that questions ruin people sometimes," he answered, and stepped to the door and turned the handle, as though to show her out. She was agitated and embarrassed now. She felt she had been unjust, and yet she felt that she could not say what ought to be said, if all the rules were right.

"Thank you," she said simply. "Did you think of this when--when you handed me back the ring?"

"I never had an inspiration in my life. I was born with a plan of campaign."

"I suppose I ought to--kiss you!" she said in some little confusion.

"It might be too expensive," he answered, with a curious laugh. Then he added lightly: "This was a fair exchange"--he touched the papers--"but I should like you to bear witness, madam, that I am no robber!" He opened the door. Again there was that curious penetrating note in his voice, and that veiled look. She half hesitated, but in the pause there was a loud voice below and a quick foot on the stairs.

"It's Billy!" she said sharply, and passed out.

CHAPTER VI

THE WIND AND THE SHORN LAMB

A half-hour later Charley Steele sat in his office alone with Billy Wantage, his brother-in-law, a tall, shapely fellow of twenty-four. Billy had been drinking, his face was flushed, and his whole manner was indolently careless and irresponsible. In spite of this, however, his grey eyes were nervously fixed on Charley, and his voice was shaky as he said, in reply to a question as to his finances: "That's my own business, Charley."

Charley took a long swallow from the tumbler of whiskey and soda beside him, and, as he drew some papers towards him, answered quietly: "I must make it mine, Billy, without a doubt."

The tall youth shifted in his chair and essayed to laugh.

"You've never been particular about your own business. Pshaw, what's the use of preaching to me!"

Charley pushed his chair back, and his look had just a touch of surprise, a hint of embarrassment. This youth, then, thought him something of a fool: read him by virtue of his ornamentations, his outer idiosyncrasy! This boy, whose iniquity was under his finger on that table, despised him for his follies, and believed in him less than his wife--two people who had lived closer to him than any others in the world. Before he answered he lifted the glass beside him and drank to the last drop, then slowly set it down and said, with a dangerous smile:

"I have always been particular about other people's finances, and the statement that you haven't isn't preaching, it's an indictment--so it is, Billy."

"An indictment!" Billy bit his finger-nails now, and his voice shook.

"That's what the jury would say, and the judge would do the preaching. You have stolen twenty-five thousand dollars of trust-moneys!"

For a moment there was absolute silence in the room. From outside in the square came the Marche-t'en! of a driver, and the loud cackling laugh of some loafer at the corner. Charley's look imprisoned his brother-in-law, and Billy's eyes were fixed in a helpless stare on Charley's finger, which held like a nail the record of his infamy.

Billy drew himself back with a jerk of recovery, and said with bravado, but with fear in look and motion: "Don't stare like that. The thing's done, and you can't undo it, and that's all there is about it." Charley had been staring at the youth-staring and not seeing him really, but seeing his wife and watching her lips say again: "You are ruining Billy!" He was not sober, but his mind was alert, his eccentric soul was getting kaleidoscopic glances at strange facts of life as they rushed past his mind into a painful red obscurity.

"Oh yes, it can be undone, and it's not all there is about it!" he answered quietly.

He got up suddenly, went to the door, locked it, put the key in his pocket, and, coming back, sat down again beside the table.

Billy watched him with shrewd, hunted eyes. What did Charley mean to do? To give him in charge? To send him to jail? To shut him out from the world where he had enjoyed himself so much for years and years? Never to go forth free among his fellows! Never to play the gallant with all the pretty girls he knew! Never to have any sports, or games, or tobacco, or good meals, or canoeing in summer, or tobogganing in winter, or moose-hunting, or any sort of philandering!

The thoughts that filled his mind now were not those of regret for his crime, but the fears of the materialist and sentimentalist, who revolted at punishment and all the shame and deprivation it would involve.

"What did you do with the money?" said Charley, after a minute's silence, in which two minds had travelled far.

"I put it into mines."

"What mines?"

"Out on Lake Superior."

"What sort of mines?"

"Arsenic."

Charley's eye-glass dropped, and rattled against the gold button of his white waistcoat.

"In arsenic-mines!" He put the monocle to his eye again. "On whose advice?"

"John Brown's."

"John Brown's!" Charley Steele's ideas were suddenly shaken and scattered by a man's name, as a bolting horse will crumple into confusion a crowd of people. So this was the way his John Brown had come home to roost. He lifted the empty whiskey-glass to his lips and drained air. He was terribly thirsty; he needed something to pull himself together. Five years of dissipation had not robbed him of his splendid native ability, but it had, as it were, broken the continuity of his will and the sequence of his intellect.

"It was not investment?" he asked, his tongue thick and hot in his mouth.

"No. What would have been the good?"

"Of course. Speculation--you bought heavily to sell on an expected rise?"

"Yes."

There was something so even in Charley's manner and tone that Billy misinterpreted it. It seemed hopeful that Charley was going to make the best of a bad job.

"You see," Billy said eagerly, "it seemed dead certain. He showed me the way the thing was being done, the way the company was being floated, how the market in New York was catching hold. It looked splendid. I thought I could use the money for a week or so, then put it back, and have a nice little scoop, at no one's cost. I thought it was a dead-sure thing--and I was hard up, and Kathleen wouldn't lend me any more. If Kathleen had only done the decent thing--"

A sudden flush of anger swept over Charley's face--never before in his life had that face been so sensitive, never even as a child. Something had waked in the odd soul of Beauty Steele.

"Don't be a sweep--leave Kathleen out of it!" he said, in a sharp, querulous voice--a voice unnatural to himself, suggestive of little use, as though he were learning to speak, using strange words stumblingly through a melee of the emotions. It was not the voice of Charley Steele the fop, the poseur, the idlest man in the world.

"What part of the twenty-five thousand went into the arsenic?" he said, after a pause. There was no feeling in the voice now; it was again even and inquiring.

"Nearly all."

"Don't lie. You've been living freely. Tell the truth, or--or I'll know the reason why, Billy."

"About two-thirds--that's the truth. I had debts, and I paid them."

"And you bet on the races?"

"Yes."

"And lost?"

"Yes. See here, Charley; it was the most awful luck--"

"Yes, for the fatherless children and widows, and all that are oppressed!"

Charley's look again went through and beyond the culprit, and he recalled his wife's words and his own reply. A quick contempt and a sort of meditative sarcasm were in the tone. It was curious, too, that he could smile, but the smile did not encourage Billy Wantage now.

"It's all gone, I suppose?" he added.

"All but about a hundred dollars."

"Well, you have had your game; now you must pay for it."

Billy had imagination, and he was melodramatic. He felt danger ahead.

"I'll go and shoot myself!" he said, banging the table with his fist so that the whiskey-tumbler shook.

He was hardly prepared for what followed. Charley's nerves had been irritated; his teeth were on edge. This threat, made in such a cheap, insincere way, was the last thing in the world he could bear to hear. He knew that Billy lied; that if there was one thing Billy would not do, shooting himself was that one thing. His own life was very sweet to Billy Wantage. Charley hated him the more at that moment because he was Kathleen's brother. For if there was one thing he knew of Kathleen, it was that she could not do a mean thing. Cold, unsympathetic she might be, cruel at a pinch perhaps, but dishonourable--never! This weak, cowardly youth was her brother! No one had ever seen such a look on Charley Steele's face as came upon it now--malicious, vindictive. He stooped over Billy in a fury.

"You think I'm a fool and an ass--you ignorant, brainless, lying cub! You make me a thief before all the world by forging my name, and stealing the money for which I am responsible, and then you rate me so low that you think you'll bamboozle me by threats of suicide. You haven't the courage to shoot yourself--drunk or sober. And what do you think would be gained by it? Eh, what do you think would be gained? You can't see that you'd insult your sister as well as--as rob me."

Billy Wantage cowered. This was not the Charley Steele he had known, not like the man he had seen since a child. There was something almost uncouth in this harsh high voice, these gauche words, this raw accent; but it was powerful and vengeful, and it was full of purpose. Billy quivered, yet his adroit senses caught at a straw in the words, "as rob me!" Charley was counting it a robbery of himself, not of the widows and orphans! That gave him a ray of hope. In a paroxysm of fear, joined to emotional excitement, he fell upon his knees, and pleaded for mercy--for the sake of one chance in life, for the family name, for Kathleen's sake, for the sake of everything he had ruthlessly dishonoured. Tears came readily to his eyes, real tears--of excitement; but he could measure, too, the strength of his appeal.

"If you'll stand by me in this, I'll pay you back every cent, Charley," he cried. "I will, upon my soul and honour! You shan't lose a penny, if you'll only see me through. I'll work my fingers off to pay it back till the last hour of my life. I'll be straight till the day I die--so help me God!"

Charley's eyes wandered to the cupboard where the liqueurs were. If he could only decently take a drink! But how could he with this boy kneeling before him? His breath scorched his throat.

"Get up!" he said shortly. "I'll see what I can do--to-morrow. Go away home. Don't go out again to-night. And come here at ten o'clock in the morning."

Billy took up his hat, straightened his tie, carefully brushed the dust from his knees, and, seizing Charley's hand, said: "You're the best

fellow in the world, Charley." He went towards the door, dusting his face of emotion as he had dusted his knees. The old selfish, shrewd look was again in his eyes. Charley's gaze followed him gloomily. Billy turned the handle of the door. It was locked.

Charley came forward and unlocked it. As Billy passed through, Charley, looking sharply in his face, said hoarsely: "By Heaven, I believe you're not worth it!" Then he shut the door again and locked it.

He almost ran back and opened the cupboard. Taking out the bottle of liqueur, he filled a glass and drank it off. Three times he did this, then seated himself at the table with a sigh of relief and no emotion in his face.

CHAPTER VII

"PEACE, PEACE, AND THERE IS NO PEACE"

The sun was setting by the time Charley was ready to leave his office. Never in his life had he stayed so late in "the halls of industry," as he flippantly called his place of business. The few cases he had won so brilliantly since the beginning of his career, he had studied at night in his luxurious bedroom in the white brick house among the maples on the hill. In every case, as at the trial of Joseph Nadeau, the man who murdered the timber-merchant, the first prejudice of judge and jury had given way slowly before the deep-seeing mind, which had as rare a power of analysis as for generalisation, and reduced masses of evidence to phrases; and verdicts had been given against all personal prejudice--to be followed outside the court by the old prejudice, the old look askance at the man called Beauty Steele.

To him it had made no difference at any time. He cared for neither praise nor blame. In his actions a materialist, in his mind he was a watcher of life, a baffled inquirer whose refuge was irony, and whose singular habits had in five years become a personal insult to the standards polite society and Puritan morality had set up. Perhaps the insult had been intended, for irregularities were committed with an insolent disdain for appearances. He did nothing secretly; his page of life was for him who cared to read. He played cards, he talked agnosticism, he went on shooting expeditions which became orgies, he drank openly in saloons, he whose forefathers had been gentlemen of King George, and who sacrificed all in the great American revolution for honour and loyalty--statesmen, writers, politicians, from whom he had direct inheritance, through stirring, strengthening forces, in the building up of laws and civilisation in a new land. Why he chose to be what he was--if he did choose--he alone could answer. His personality had impressed itself upon his world, first by its idiosyncrasies and afterwards by its enigmatical excesses.

What was he thinking of as he laid the papers away in the tin box in a drawer, locked it, and put the key in his pocket? He had found to the smallest detail Billy's iniquity, and he was now ready to shoulder the responsibility, to save the man, who, he knew, was scarce worth the saving. But Kathleen--there was what gave him pause. As he turned to the window and looked out over the square he shuddered. He thought of the exchange of documents he had made with her that day, and he had a

sense of satisfaction. This defalcation of Billy's would cripple him, for money had flown these last few years. He had had heavy losses, and he had dug deep into his capital. Down past the square ran a cool avenue of beeches to the water, and he could see his yacht at anchor. On the other side of the water, far down the shore, was a house which had been begun as a summer cottage, and had ended in being a mansion. A few Moorish pillars, brought from Algiers for the decoration of the entrance, had necessitated the raising of the roof, and then all had to be in proportion, and the cottage became like an appanage to a palace. So it had gone, and he had cared so little about it all, and for the consequences. He had this day secured Kathleen from absolute poverty, no matter what happened, and that had its comfort. His eyes wandered among the trees. He could see the yellow feathers of the oriole and catch the note of the whippoorwill, and from the great church near the voices of the choir came over. He could hear the words "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word."

Depart in peace--how much peace was there in the world? Who had it? The remembrance of what Kathleen said to him at the door--"I suppose I ought to kiss you"--came to him, was like a refrain in his ears.

"Peace is the penalty of silence and inaction," he said to himself meditatively. "Where there is action there is no peace. If the brain and body fatten, then there is peace. Kathleen and I have lived at peace, I suppose. I never said a word to her that mightn't be put down in large type and pasted on my tombstone, and she never said a word to me--till to-day--that wasn't like a water-colour picture. Not till to-day, in a moment's strife and trouble, did I ever get near her. And we've lived in peace. Peace? Where is the right kind of peace? Over there is old Sainton. He married a rich woman, he has had the platter of plenty before him always, he wears ribbons and such like baubles given by the Queen, but his son had to flee the country. There's Herring. He doesn't sleep because his daughter is going to marry an Italian count. There's Latouche. His place in the cabinet is begotten in corruption, in the hotbed of faction war. There's Kenealy. His wife has led him a dance of deep damnation. There's the lot of them--every one, not an ounce of peace among them, except with old Casson, who weighs eighteen stone, lives like a pig, grows stuffer in mind and body every day, and drinks half a bottle of whiskey every night. There's no one else--yes, there is!"

He was looking at a small black-robed figure with clean-shaven face, white hair, and shovel-hat, who passed slowly along the wooden walk beneath, with meditative content in his face.

"There's peace," he said with a laugh. "I've known Father Hallon for twenty-five years, and no man ever worked so hard, ever saw more trouble, ever shared other people's bad luck mere than he; ever took the bit in his teeth, when it was a matter of duty, stronger than he; and yet there's peace; he has it; a peace that passes all understanding--mine anyhow. I've never had a minute's real peace. The World, or Nature, or God, or It, whatever the name is, owes me peace. And how is It to give it? Why, by answering my questions. Now it's a curious thing that the only person I ever met who could answer any questions of mine--answer them in the way that satisfies--is Suzon. She works things down to phrases. She has wisdom in the raw, and a real grip on life, and yet all the men she has known have been river-drivers and farmers, and a few men from town who mistook the sort of Suzon she is. Virtuous and straight, she's a born child of Aphrodite too--by nature. She was made for love.

A thousand years ago she would have had a thousand loves! And she thinks the world is a magnificent place, and she loves it, and wallows--fairly wallows--in content. Now which is right: Suzon or Father Hallon--Aphrodite or the Nazarene? Which is peace--as the bird and the beast of the field get it--the fallow futile content, or--"

He suddenly stopped, hiccoughed, then hurriedly drawing paper before him, he sat down. For an hour he wrote. It grew darker. He pushed the table nearer the window, and the singing of the choir in the church came in upon him as his pen seemed to etch words into the paper, firm, eccentric, meaning. What he wrote that evening has been preserved, and the yellow sheets lie loosely in a black despatch-box which contains the few records Charley Steele left behind him. What he wrote that night was the note of his mind, the key to all those strange events through which he began to move two hours after the lines were written:

Over thy face is a veil of white sea-mist,
Only thine eyes shine like stars; bless or blight me,
I will hold close to the leash at thy wrist,
O Aphrodite!

Thou in the East and I here in the West,
Under our newer skies purple and pleasant:
Who shall decide which is better--attest,
Saga or peasant?

Thou with Serapis, Osiris, and Isis,
I with Jehovah, in vapours and shadows;
Thou with the gods' joy-enhancing devices,
Sweet-smelling meadows!

What is there given us?--Food and some raiment,
Toiling to reach to some Patmian haven,
Giving up all for uncertain repayment,
Feeding the raven!

Striving to peer through the infinite azure,
Alternate turning to earthward and falling,
Measuring life with Damastian measure,
Finite, appalling.

What does it matter! They passed who with Homer
Poured out the wine at the feet of their idols:
Passing, what found they? To-come a misnomer,
It and their idols?

Sacristan, acolyte, player, or preacher,
Each to his office, but who holds the key?
Death, only Death--thou, the ultimate teacher
Wilt show it to me.

And when the forts and the barriers fall,
Shall we then find One the true, the almighty,
Wisely to speak with the worst of us all--
Ah, Aphrodite!

Waiting, I turn from the futile, the human,
Gone is the life of me, laughing with youth
Steals to learn all in the face of a woman,

Mendicant Truth!

Rising with a bitter laugh, and murmuring the last lines, he thrust the papers into a drawer, locked it, and going quickly from the room, he went down-stairs. His horse and cart were waiting for him, and he got in.

The groom looked at him inquiringly. "The Cote Dorion!" he said, and they sped away through the night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COST OF THE ORNAMENT

One, two, three, four, five, six miles. The sharp click of the iron hoofs on the road; the strong rush of the river; the sweet smell of the maple and the pungent balsam; the dank rich odour of the cedar swamp; the cry of the loon from the water; the flaming crane in the fishing-boat; the fisherman, spear in hand, staring into the dark waters tinged with sombre red; the voice of a lonely settler keeping time to the ping of the axe as, lengthening out his day to nightly weariness, he felled a tree; river-drivers' camps spotted along the shore; huge cribs or rafts which had swung down the great stream for scores of miles, the immense oars motionless, the little houses on the timbers blinking with light; and from cheerful raftsmen coming the old familiar song of the rivers:

"En roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule!"

Not once had Charley Steele turned his head as the horse sped on. His face was kept straight along the line of the road; he seemed not to see or to hear, to be unresponsive to sound or scene. The monocle at his eye was like a veil to hide the soul, a defence against inquiry, itself the unceasing question, a sort of battery thrown forward, a kind of field-casemate for a lonely besieged spirit.

It was full of suggestion. It might have been the glass behind which showed some mediaeval relic, the body of some ancient Egyptian king whose life had been spent in doing wonders and making signs--the primitive, anthropomorphic being. He might have been a stone man, for any motion that he made. Yet looking at him closely you would have seen discontent in the eye, a kind of glaze of the sardonic over the whole face.

What is the good! the face asked. What is there worth doing? it said. What a limitless futility! it urged, fain to be contradicted too, as the grim melancholy of the figure suggested.

"To be an animal and soak in the world," he thought to himself--" that is natural; and the unnatural is civilisation, and the cheap adventure of the mind into fields of baffling speculation, lighted by the flickering intelligences of dead speculators, whose seats we have bought in the stock-exchange of mortality, and exhaust our lives in paying for. To eat, to drink, to lie fallow, indifferent to what comes after, to roam like the deer, and to fight like the tiger--"

He came to a dead stop in his thinking. "To fight like the tiger!" He turned his head quickly now to where upon a raft some river-drivers were

singing:

"And when a man in the fight goes down,
Why, we will carry him home!"

"To fight like the tiger!" Ravage--the struggle to possess from all the world what one wished for one's self, and to do it without mercy and without fear--that was the clear plan in the primitive world, where action was more than speech and dominance than knowledge. Was not civilisation a mistake, and religion the insinuating delusion designed to cover it up; or, if not designed, accepted by the original few who saw that humanity could not turn back, and must even go forward with illusions, lest in mere despair all men died and the world died with them?

His eyes wandered to the raft where the men were singing, and he remembered the threat made: that if he came again to the Cote Dorion he "would get what for!" He remembered the warning of Rouge Gosselin conveyed by Jolicoeur, and a sinister smile crossed over his face. The contradictions of his own thoughts came home to him suddenly, for was it not the case that his physical strength alone, no matter what his skill, would be of small service to him in a dark corner of contest? Primitive ideas could only hold in a primitive world. His real weapon was his brain, that which civilisation had given him in lieu of primitive prowess and the giant's strength.

They had come to a long piece of corduroy-road, and the horse's hoofs struck rumbling hollow sounds from the floor of cedar logs. There was a swamp on one side where fire-flies were flickering, and there flashed into Charley Steele's mind some verses he had once learned at school:

"They made her a grave too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true--"

It kept repeating itself in his brain in a strange dreary monotone.

"Stop the horse. I'll walk the rest of the way," he said presently to the groom. "You needn't come for me, Finn; I'll walk back as far as the Marochal Tavern. At twelve sharp I'll be there. Give yourself a drink and some supper"--he put a dollar into the man's hand--"and no white whiskey, mind: a bottle of beer and a leg of mutton, that's the thing." He nodded his head, and by the light of the moon walked away smartly down the corduroy-road through the shadows of the swamp. Finn the groom looked after him.

"Well, if he ain't a queer dick! A reg'lar 'centric--but a reg'lar brick, cutting a wide swathe as he goes. He's a tip-topper; and he's a sort of tough too--a sort of a kind of a tough. Well, it's none of my business. Get up!" he added to the horse, and turning round in the road with difficulty, he drove back a mile to the Tavern Marochal for his beer and mutton--and white whiskey.

Charley stepped on briskly, his shining leather shoes, straw hat, and light cane in no good keeping with his surroundings. He was thinking that he had never been in such a mood for talk with Suzon Charlemagne. Charlemagne's tavern of the Cote Dorion was known over half a province, and its patrons carried news of it half across a continent. Suzon Charlemagne--a girl of the people, a tavern-girl, a friend of sulking, coarse river-drivers! But she had an alert precision of brain, an instinct that clove through wastes of mental underbrush to the tree of

knowledge. Her mental sight was as keen and accurate as that which runs along the rifle-barrel of the great hunter with the red deer in view. Suzon Charlemagne no company for Charley Steele? What did it matter! He had entered into other people's lives to-day, had played their games with them and for them, and now he would play his own game, live his own life in his own way through the rest of this day. He thirsted for some sort of combat, for the sharp contrasts of life, for the common and the base; he thirsted even for the white whiskey against which he had warned his groom. He was reckless--not blindly, but wilfully, wildly reckless, caring not at all what fate or penalty might come his way.

"What do I care!" he said to himself. "I shall never squeal at any penalty. I shall never say in the great round-up that I was weak and I fell. I'll take my gruel expecting it, not fearing it--if there is to be any gruel anywhere, or any round-up anywhere!"

A figure suddenly appeared coming round the bend of the road before him. It was Rouge Gosselin. Rouge Gosselin was inclined to speak. Some satanic whim or malicious foppery made Charley stare him blankly in the face. The monocle and the stare stopped the bon soir and the friendly warning on Rouge Gosselin's tongue, and the pilot passed on with a muttered oath.

Gosselin had not gone far, however, before he suddenly stopped and laughed outright, for at the bottom he had great good-nature, in keeping with his "six-foot" height, and his temper was friendly if quick. It seemed so absurd, so audacious, that a man could act like Charley Steele, that he at once became interested in the phenomenon, and followed slowly after Charley, saying as he went: "Tiens, there will be things to watch to-night!"

Before Charley was within five hundred yards of the tavern he could hear the laughter and song coming from the old seigneury which Theophile Charlemagne called now the Cote Dorion Hotel, after the name given to the point on which the house stood. Low and wide-roofed, with dormer windows and a wide stoop in front, and walls three feet thick, behind, on the river side, it hung over the water, its narrow veranda supported by piles, with steps down to the water-side. Seldom was there an hour when boats were not tied to these steps. Summer and winter the tavern was a place of resort. Inside, the low ceiling, the broad rafters, the great fireplace, the well-worn floor, the deep windows, the wooden cross let into the wall, and the varied and picturesque humanity frequenting this great room, gave it an air of romance. Yet there were people who called the tavern a "shebang"--slander as it was against Suzon Charlemagne, which every river-driver and woodsman and habitant who frequented the place would have resented with violence. It was because they thought Charley Steele slandered the girl and the place in his mind, that the river-drivers had sworn they would make it hot for him if he came again. Charley was the last man in the world to undeceive them by words.

When he coolly walked into the great room, where a half-dozen of them were already assembled, drinking white "whiskey-wine," he had no intention of setting himself right. He raised his hat cavalierly to Suzon and shook hands with her.

He took no notice of the men around him. "Brandy, please!" he said. "Why do I drink, do you say?" he added, as Suzon placed the bottle and glass before him.

She was silent for an instant, then she said gravely: "Perhaps because you like it; perhaps because something was left out of you when you were made, and--"

She paused and went no further, for a red-shirted river-driver with brass rings in his ears came close to them, and called gruffly for whiskey. He glowered at Charley, who looked at him indolently, then raised his glass towards Suzon and drank the brandy.

"Pish!" said Red Shirt, and, turning round, joined his comrades. It was clear he wanted a pretext to quarrel.

"Perhaps because you like it; perhaps because something was left out of you when you were made--" Charley smiled pleasantly as Suzon came over to him again. "You've answered the question," he said, "and struck the thing at the centre. Which is it? The difficulty to decide which has divided the world. If it's only a physical craving, it means that we are materialists naturally, and that the soil from which the grape came is the soil that's in us; that it is the body feeding on itself all the time; that like returns to like, and we live a little together, and then mould together for ever and ever, amen. If it isn't a natural craving--like to like--it's a proof of immortality, for it represents the wild wish to forget the world, to be in another medium.

"I am only myself when I am drunk. Liquor makes me human. At other times I'm merely Charley Steele! Now isn't it funny, this sort of talk here?"

"I don't know about that," she answered, "if, as you say, it's natural. This tavern's the only place I have to think in, and what seems to you funny is a sort of ordinary fact to me."

"Right again, ma belle Suzon. Nothing's incongruous. I've never felt so much like singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs as when I've been drinking. I remember the last time I was squiffy I sang all the way home that old nursery hymn:

"On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for you.
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for you!"

"I should have liked to hear you sing it--sure!" said Suzon, laughing.

Charley tossed off a quarter-tumbler of brandy, which, instead of flushing the face, seemed only to deepen the whiteness of the skin, showing up more brightly the spots of colour in the cheeks, that white and red which had made him known as Beauty Steele. With a whimsical humour, behind which was the natural disposition of the man to do what he listed without thinking of the consequences, he suddenly began singing, in a voice shaken a little now by drink, but full of a curious magnetism:

"On the other side of Jordan--"

"Oh, don't; please don't!" said the girl, in fear, for she saw two river-drivers entering the door, one of whom had sworn he would do for

Charley Steele if ever he crossed his path.

"Oh, don't--M'sieu' Charley!" she again urged. The "Charley" caught his ear, and the daring in his eye brightened still more. He was ready for any change or chance to-night, was standing on the verge of any adventure, the most reckless soul in Christendom.

"On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for you!"

What more incongruous thing than this flaneur in patent leathers and red tie, this "hell-of-a-fellow with a pane of glass in his eye," as Jake Hough, the horse-doctor, afterwards said, surrounded by red and blue-shirted river-men, woodsmen, loafers, and toughs, singing a sacred song with all the unction of a choir-boy; with a magnetism, too, that did its work in spite of all prejudice? It was as if he were counsel in one of those cases when, the minds and sympathies of judge and jury at first arrayed against him, he had irresistibly cloven his way to their judgment--not stealing away their hearts, but governing, dominating their intelligences. Whenever he had done this he had been drinking hard, was in a mental world created by drink, serene, clear-eyed, in which his brain worked like an invincible machine, perfect and powerful. Was it the case that, as he himself suggested, he was never so natural as when under this influence? That then and only then the real man spoke, that then and only then the primitive soul awakened, that it supplied the thing left out of him at birth?

"There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for you!"

One, two verses he sang as the men, at first snorting and scornful, shuffled angrily; then Jake Hough, the English horse-doctor, roared in the refrain:

"There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for you!"

Upon which, carried away, every one of them roared, gurgled, or shouted

"There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for you!"

Rouge Gosselin, who had entered during the singing, now spoke up quickly in French:

"A sermon now, M'sieu'!"

Charley took his monocle out of his eye and put it back again. Now each man present seemed singled out for an attack by this little battery of glass. He did not reply directly to Rouge Gosselin, but standing perfectly still, with one hand resting on the counter at which Suzon stood, he prepared to speak.

Suzon did not attempt to stop him now, but gazed at him in a sort of awe. These men present were Catholics, and held religion in superstitious

respect, however far from practising its precepts. Many of them had been profane and blasphemous in their time; may have sworn "sacre bapteme!" one of the worst oaths of their race; but it had been done in the wildness of anger, and they were little likely to endure from Charley Steele any word that sounded like blasphemy. Besides, the world said that he was an infidel, and that was enough for bitter prejudice.

In the pause--very short--before Charley began speaking, Suzon's fingers stole to his on the counter and pressed them quickly. He made no response; he was scarcely aware of it. He was in a kind of dream. In an even, conversational tone, in French at once idiomatic and very simple, he began:

"My dear friends, this is a world where men get tired. If they work they get tired, and if they play they get tired. If they look straight ahead of them they walk straight, but then they get blind by-and-by; if they look round them and get open-eyed, their feet stumble and they fall. It is a world of contradictions. If a man drinks much he loses his head, and if he doesn't drink at all he loses heart. If he asks questions he gets into trouble, and if he doesn't ask them he gets old before his time. Take the hymn we have just sung:

"On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for you!"

"We all like that, because we get tired, and it isn't always summer, and nothing blooms all the year round. We get up early and we work late, and we sleep hard, and when the weather is good and wages good, and there's plenty in the house, we stay sober and we sadly sing, 'On the other side of Jordan'; but when the weather's heavy and funds scarce, and the pork and molasses and bread come hard, we get drunk, and we sing the comic chanson 'Brigadier, vows avez raison!' We've been singing a sad song to-night when we're feeling happy. We didn't think whether it was sad or not, we only knew it pleased our ears, and we wanted those sweet fields of Eden, and the blooming tree of life, and the rest under the tree. But ask a question or two. Where is the other side of Jordan? Do you go up to it, or down to it? And how do you go? And those sweet fields of Eden, what do they look like, and how many will they hold? Isn't it clear that the things that make us happiest in this world are the things we go for blind?"

He paused. Now a dozen men came a step or two nearer, and crowded close together, looking over each others' shoulders at him with sharp, wondering eyes.

"Isn't that so?" he continued. "Do you realise that no man knows where that Jordan and those fields are, and what the flower of the tree of life looks like? Let us ask a question again. Why is it that the one being in all the world who could tell us anything about it, the one being who had ever seen Jordan or Eden or that tree of life--in fact, the one of all creation who could describe heaven, never told? Isn't it queer? Here he was--that one man--standing just as I am among you, and round him were the men who followed him, all ordinary men, with ordinary curiosity. And he said he had come down from heaven, and for years they were with him, and yet they never asked him what that heaven was like: what it looked like, what it felt like, what sort of life they lived there, what manner of folk were the angels, what was the appearance of God. Why didn't they

ask, and why didn't he answer? People must have kept asking that question afterwards, for a man called John answered it. He described, as only an oriental Jew would or could, a place all precious stones and gold and jewels and candles, in oriental language very splendid and auriferous. But why didn't those twelve men ask the One Man who knew, and why didn't the One answer? And why didn't the One tell without being asked?"

He paused again, and now there came a shuffling and a murmuring, a curious rumble, a hard breathing, for Charley had touched with steely finger the tender places in the natures of these Catholics, who, whatever their lives, held fast to the immemorial form, the sacredness of Mother Church. They were ever ready to step into the galley which should bear them all home, with the invisible rowers of God at the oars, down the wild rapids, to the haven of St. Peter. There was savagery in their faces now.

He saw, and he could not refrain from smiling as he stretched out his hand to them again with a little quieting gesture, and continued soothingly:

"But why should we ask? There's a thing called electricity. Well, you know that if you take a slice out of anything, less remains behind. We can take the air out of this room, and scarcely leave any in it.

"We take a drink out of a bottle, and certainly there isn't as much left in it! But the queer thing is that with this electricity you take it away and just as much remains. It goes out from your toe, rushes away to Timbuctoo, and is back in your toe before you can wink. Why? No one knows. What's the good of asking? You can't see it: you can only see what it does. What good would it do us if we knew all about it? There it is, and it's going to revolutionise the world. It's no good asking--no one knows what it is and where it comes from, or what it looks like. It's better to go it blind, because you feel the power, though you can't see where it comes from. You can't tell where the fields of Eden are, but you believe they're somewhere, and that you'll get to them some day. So say your prayers, believe all you can, don't ask questions, and don't try to answer 'em; and remember that Charley Steele preached to you the fear of the Lord at the Cote Dorion, and wound up the service with the fine old hymn:

"'I'll away, I'll away, to the promised land--'"

A whole verse of this camp-meeting hymn he sang in an ominous silence now, for it had crept into their minds that the hymn they had previously sung so loudly was a Protestant hymn, and that this was another Protestant hymn of the rankest sort. When he stopped singing and pushed over his glass for Suzon to fill it, the crowd were noiseless and silent for a moment, for the spell was still on them. They did not recover themselves until they saw him lift his glass to Suzon, his back on them, again insolently oblivious of them all. They could not see his face, but they could see the face of Suzon Charlemagne, and they misunderstood the light in her eye, the flush on her cheek. They set it down to a personal interest in Charley Steele.

Charley had, however, thrown a spell over her in another fashion. In her eye, in her face, was admiration, the sympathy of a strong intelligence, the wonder of a mind in the presence of its master, but they thought they saw passion, love, desire, in her face--in the face of their Suzon, the

pride of the river, the flower of the Cote Dorion. Not alone because Charley had blasphemed against religion did they hate him at this moment, but because every heart was scorched with envy and jealousy--the black unreasoning jealousy which the unlettered, the dull, the crude, feels for the lettered, the able and the outwardly refined.

Charley was back again in the unfriendly climate of his natural life. Suzon felt the troubled air round them, saw the dark looks on the faces of the men, and was at once afraid and elated. She loved the glow of excitement, she had a keen sense of danger, but she also felt that in any possible trouble to-night the chances of escape would be small for the man before her.

He pushed out his glass again. She mechanically poured brandy into it.

"You've had more than enough," she said, in a low voice.

"Every man knows his own capacity, Suzon. Love me little, love me long," he added, again raising his glass to her, as the men behind suddenly moved forward upon the bar.

"Don't--for God's sake!" she whispered hastily. "Do go--or there'll be trouble!"

The black face of Theophile Charlemagne was also turned anxiously in Charley's direction as he pushed out glasses for those who called for liquor.

"Oh, do, do go--like a good soul!" Suzon urged. Charley laughed disdainfully. "Like a good soul!" Had it come to this, that Suzon pleaded with him as if he were a foolish, obstreperous child!

"Faithless and unbelieving!" he said to Suzon in English. "Didn't I play my game well a minute ago--eh--eh--eh, Suzon?"

"Oh, yes, yes, M'sieu'," she replied in English; "but now you are differen' and so are they. You must goah, so, you must!"

He laughed again, a queer sardonic sort of laugh, yet he put out his hand and touched the girl's arm lightly with a forefinger. "I am a Quaker born; I never stir till the spirit moves me," he said.

He scented conflict, and his spirits rose at the thought. Some reckless demon of adventure possessed him; some fatalistic courage was upon him. So far as the eye could see, the liquor he had drunk had done no more than darken the blue of his eye, for his hand was steady, his body was well poised, his look was direct; there seemed some strange electric force in leash behind his face, a watchful yet nonchalant energy of spirit, joined to an indolent pose of body. As the girl looked at him something of his unreckoning courage passed into her. Somehow she believed in him, felt that by some wild chance he might again conquer this truculent element now almost surrounding him. She spoke quickly to her step-father. "He won't go. What can we do?"

"You go, and he'll follow," said Theophile, who didn't want a row--a dangerous row-in his house.

"No, he won't," she said; "and I don't believe they'd let him follow me."

There was no time to say more. The crowd were insistent and restless now. They seemed to have a plan of campaign, and they began to carry it out. First one, then another, brushed roughly against Charley. Cool and collected, he refused to accept the insults.

"Pardon," he said, in each case; "I am very awkward."

He smiled all the time; he seemed waiting. The pushing and crowding became worse. "Don't mention it," he said. "You should learn how to carry your liquor in your legs."

Suddenly he changed from apology to attack. He talked at them with a cheerful scorn, a deprecating impertinence, as though they were children; he chided them with patient imprecations. This confused them for a moment and cleared a small space around him. There was no defiance in his aspect, no aggressiveness of manner; he was as quiet as though it were a drawing-room and he a master of monologues. He hurled original epithets at them in well-cadenced French, he called them what he listed, but in language which half-veiled the insults--the more infuriating to his hearers because they did not perfectly understand.

Suddenly a low-set fellow, with brass rings in his ears, pulled off his coat and threw it on the floor. "I'll eat your heart," he said, and rolled up blue sleeves along a hairy arm.

"My child," said Charley, "be careful what you eat. Take up your coat again, and learn that it is only dogs that delight to bark and bite. Our little hands were never made to tear each other's eyes."

The low-set fellow made a rush forward, but Rouge Gosselin held him back. "No, no, Jougon," he said. "I have the oldest grudge."

Jougon struggled with Rouge Gosselin. "Be good, Jougon," said Charley.

As he spoke a heavy tumbler flew from the other side of the room. Charley saw the missile thrown and dodged. It missed his temple, but caught the rim of his straw hat, carrying it off his head, and crashed into a lantern hanging against the wall, putting out the light. The room was only lighted now by another lantern on the other side of the room. Charley stooped, picked up his hat, and put it on his head again coolly.

"Stop that, or I'll clear the bar!" cried Theophile Charlemagne, taking the pistol Suzon slipped into his hand. The sight of the pistol drove the men wild, and more than one snatched at the knife in his belt.

At that instant there pushed forward into the clear space beside Charley Steele the great figure of Jake Hough, the horse-doctor, the strongest man, and the most popular Englishman on the river. He took his stand by Charley, raised his great hand, smote him in the small of his back, and said:

"By the Lord, you have sand, and I'll stand by you!" Under the friendly but heavy stroke the monocle shot from Charley's eye the length of the string. Charley lifted it again, put it up, and staring hard at Jake, coolly said:

"I beg your pardon--but have I ever--been introduced to you?"

What unbelievable indifference to danger, what disdain to friendliness,

made Charley act as he did is a matter for speculation. It was throwing away his one chance; it was foppery on the scaffold--an incorrigible affectation or a relentless purpose.

Jake Hough strode forward into the crowd, rage in his eye. "Go to the devil, then, and take care of yourself!" he said roughly.

"Please," said Charley.

They were the last words he uttered that night, for suddenly the other lantern went out, there was a rush and a struggle, a muffled groan, a shrill woman's voice, a scramble and hurrying feet, a noise of a something splashing heavily in the water outside. When the lights were up again the room was empty, save for Theophile Charlemagne, Jake Hough, and Suzon, who lay in a faint on the floor with a nasty bruise on her forehead.

A score of river-drivers were scattering into the country-side, and somewhere in the black river, alive or dead, was Charley Steele.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

He had had acquaintances, but never friendships, and never loves
He has wheeled his nuptial bed into the street
He left his fellow-citizens very much alone
I am only myself when I am drunk
I should remember to forget it
Liquor makes me human
Nervous legs at a gallop
So say your prayers, believe all you can, don't ask questions
Was not civilisation a mistake
Who knows!

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