

The Right of Way, Volume 2.

Gilbert Parker

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THE RIGHT OF WAY

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

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CHAPTER IX

OLD DEBTS FOR NEW

Jo Portugais was breaking the law of the river--he was running a little raft down the stream at night, instead of tying up at sundown and camping on the shore, or sitting snugly over cooking-pot by the little wooden caboose on his raft. But defiance of custom and tradition was a habit with Jo Portugais. He had lived in his own way many a year, and he was likely to do so till the end, though he was a young man yet. He had many professions, or rather many gifts, which he practised as it pleased him. He was river-driver, woodsman, hunter, carpenter, guide, as whim or opportunity came to him. On the evening when Charley Steele met with his mishap he was a river-driver--or so it seemed. He had been up nor'west a hundred and fifty miles, and he had come down-stream alone with his raft--which in the usual course should take two men to guide it--through slides, over rapids, and in strong currents. Defying the code of the river, with only one small light at the rear of his raft, he voyaged the swift current towards his home, which, when he arrived opposite the Cote Dorion, was still a hundred miles below. He had watched the lights in the river-drivers' camps, had seen the men beside the fires, and had drifted on, with no temptation to join in the songs floating out over the dark water, to share the contents of the jugs raised to boisterous lips, or to thrust his hand into the greasy cooking-pot for a succulent bone.

He drifted on until he came opposite Charlemagne's tavern. Here the current carried him inshore. He saw the dim light, he saw dark figures in the bar-room, he even got a glimpse of Suzon Charlemagne. He dropped the house behind quickly, but looked back, leaning on the oar and thinking how swift was the rush of the current past the tavern. His eyes were on the tavern door and the light shining through it. Suddenly the light disappeared, and the door vanished into darkness. He heard a scuffle, and then a heavy splash.

"There's trouble there," said Jo Portugais, straining his eyes through

the night, for a kind of low roar, dwindling to a loud whispering, and then a noise of hurrying feet, came down the stream, and he could dimly see dark figures running away into the night by different paths.

"Some dirty work, very sure," said Jo Portugais, and his eyes travelled back over the dark water like a lynx's, for the splash was in his ear, and a sort of prescience possessed him. He could not stop his raft. It must go on down the current, or be swerved to the shore, to be fastened.

"God knows, it had an ugly sound," said Jo Portugais, and again strained his eyes and ears. He shifted his position and took another oar, where the raft-lantern might not throw a reflection upon the water. He saw a light shine again through the tavern doorway, then a dark object block the light, and a head thrust forward towards the river as though listening.

At this moment he fancied he saw something in the water nearing him. He stretched his neck. Yes, there was something.

"It's a man. God save us--was it murder?" said Jo Portugais, and shuddered. "Was it murder?"

The body moved more swiftly than the raft. There was a hand thrust up--two hands.

"He's alive!" said Jo Portugais, and, hurriedly pulling round his waist a rope tied to a timber, jumped into the water.

Three minutes later, on the raft, he was examining a wound in the head of an insensible man.

As his hand wandered over the body towards the heart, it touched something that rattled against a button. He picked it up mechanically and held it to the light. It was an eye-glass.

"My God!" said Jo Portugais, and peered into the man's face. "It's him." Then he remembered the last words the man had spoken to him--"Get out of my sight. You're as guilty as hell!" But his heart yearned towards the man nevertheless.

CHAPTER X

THE WAY IN AND THE WAY OUT

In his own world of the parish of Chaudiere Jo Portugais was counted a widely travelled man. He had adventured freely on the great rivers and in the forests, and had journeyed up towards Hudson's Bay farther than any man in seven parishes.

Jo's father and mother had both died in one year--when he was twenty-five. That year had turned him from a clean-shaven cheerful boy into a morose bearded man who looked forty, for it had been marked by his disappearance from Chaudiere and his return at the end of it, to find his mother dead and his father dying broken-hearted. What had driven Jo from home only his father knew; what had happened to him during that year only Jo himself knew, and he told no one, not even his dying father.

A mystery surrounded him, and no one pierced it. He was a figure apart in Chaudiere parish. A dreadful memory that haunted him, carried him out of the village, which clustered round the parish church, into Vadrome Mountain, three miles away, where he lived apart from all his kind. It was here he brought the man with the eye-glass one early dawn, after two nights and two days on the river, pulling him up the long hill in a low cart with his strong faithful dogs, hitching himself with them and toiling upwards through the dark. In his three-roomed hut he laid his charge down upon a pile of bear-skins, and tended him with a strange gentleness, bathing the wound in the head and binding it again and again.

The next morning the sick man opened his eyes heavily. He then began fumbling mechanically on his breast. At last his fingers found his monocle. He feebly put it to his eye, and looked at Jo in a strange, questioning, uncomprehending way.

"I beg--your pardon," he said haltingly, "have I ever--been intro--" Suddenly his eyes closed, a frown gathered on his forehead. After a minute his eyes opened again, and he gazed with painful, pathetic seriousness at Jo. This grew to a kind of childish terror; then slowly, as a shadow passes, the perplexity, anxiety and terror cleared away, and left his forehead calm, his eyes unvexed and peaceful. The monocle dropped, and he did not heed it. At length he said wearily, and with an incredibly simple dependence:

"I am thirsty now."

Jo lifted a wooden bowl to his lips, and he drank, drank, drank to repletion. When he had finished he patted Jo's shoulder.

"I am always thirsty," he said. "I shall be hungry too. I always am."

Jo brought him some milk and bread in a bowl. When the sick man had eaten and drunk the bowlful to the last drop and crumb, he lay back with a sigh of content, but trembling from weakness and the strain, though Jo's hand had been under his head, and he had been fed like a little child.

All day he lay and watched Jo as he worked, as he came and went. Sometimes he put his hand to his head and said to Jo: "It hurts." Then Jo would cool the wound with fresh water from the mountain spring, and he would drag down the bowl to drink from it greedily.

It was as though he could never get enough water to drink. So the first day in the hut at Vadrome Mountain passed without questioning on the part of either Charley Steele or his host.

With good reason. Jo Portugais saw that memory was gone; that the past was blotted out. He had watched that first terrible struggle of memory to reassert itself, as the eyes mechanically looked out upon new and strange surroundings, but it was only the automatic habit of the sight, the fumbling of the blind soul in its cell-fumbling for the latch which it could not find, for the door which would not open. The first day on the raft, as Charley had opened his eyes upon the world again after that awful night at the Cote Dorion, Jo had seen that same blank uncomprehending look--as it were, the first look of a mind upon the world. This time he saw, and understood what he saw, and spoke as men speak, but with no knowledge or memory behind it--only the involuntary

action of muscle and mind repeated from the vanished past.

Charley Steele was as a little child, and having no past, and comprehending in the present only its limited physical needs and motions, he had no hope, no future, no understanding. In three days he was upon his feet, and in four he walked out of doors and followed Jo into the woods, and watched him fell a tree and do a woodsman's work. Indoors he regarded all Jo did with eager interest and a pleased, complacent look, and readily did as he was told. He seldom spoke--not above three or four times a day, and then simply and directly, and only concerning his wants. From first to last he never asked a question, and there was never any inquiry by look or word. A hundred and twenty miles lay between him and his old home, between him and Kathleen and Billy and Jean Jolicoeur's saloon, but between him and his past life the unending miles of eternity intervened. He was removed from it as completely as though he were dead and buried.

A month went by. Sometimes Jo went down to the village below, and then, at first, he locked the door of the house behind him upon Charley. Against this Charley made no motion and said no word, but patiently awaited Jo's return. So it was that, at last, Jo made no attempt to lock the door, but with a nod or a good-bye left him alone. When Charley saw him returning he would go to meet him, and shake hands with him, and say "Good-day," and then would come in with him and help him get supper or do the work of the house.

Since Charley came no one had visited the house, for there were no paths beyond it, and no one came to the Vadrome Mountain, save by chance. But after two months had gone the Cure came. Twice a year the Cure made it a point to visit Jo in the interests of his soul, though the visits came to little, for Jo never went to confession, and seldom to mass. On this occasion the Cure arrived when Jo was out in the woods. He discovered Charley. Charley made no answer to his astonished and friendly greeting, but watched him with a wide-eyed anxiety till the Cure seated himself at the door to await Jo's coming. Presently, as he sat there, Charley, who had studied his face as a child studies the unfamiliar face of a stranger, brought him a bowl of bread and milk and put it in his hands. The Cure smiled and thanked him, and Charley smiled in return and said: "It is very good."

As the Cure ate, Charley watched him with satisfaction, and nodded at him kindly.

When Jo came he lied to the Cure. He said he had found Charley wandering in the woods, with a wound in his head, and had brought him home with him and cared for him. Forty miles away he had found him.

The Cure was perplexed. What was there to do? He believed what Jo said. So far as he knew, Jo had never lied to him before, and he thought he understood Jo's interest in this man with the look of a child and no memory: Jo's life was terribly lonely; he had no one to care for, and no one cared for him; here was what might comfort him! Through this helpless man might come a way to Jo's own good. So he argued with himself.

What to do? Tell the story to the world by writing to the newspaper at Quebec? Jo pooh-poohed this. Wait till the man's memory came back? Would it come back--what chance was there of its ever coming back? Jo said that they ought to wait and see--wait awhile, and then, if his

memory did not return, they would try to find his friends, by publishing his story abroad.

Chaudiere was far from anywhere: it knew little of the world, and the world knew naught of it, and this was a large problem for the Cure. Perhaps Jo was right, he thought. The man was being well cared for, and what more could be wished at the moment? The Cure was a simple man, and when Jo urged that if the sick man could get well anywhere in the world it would be at Vadrome Mountain in Chaudiere, the Cure's parochial pride was roused, and he was ready to believe all Jo said. He also saw reason in Jo's request that the village should not be told of the sick man's presence. Before he left, the Cure knelt down and prayed, "for the good of this poor mortal's soul and body."

As he prayed, Charley knelt down also, and kept his eyes-calm unwondering eyes-full fixed on the good M. Loisel, whose grey hair, thin peaceful face, and dark brown eyes made a noble picture of patience and devotion.

When the Cure shook him by the hand, murmuring in good-bye, "God be gracious to thee, my son," Charley nodded in a friendly way. He watched the departing figure till it disappeared over the crest of the hill.

This day marked an epoch in the solitude of the hut on Vadrome Mountain. Jo had an inspiration. He got a second set of carpenter's tools, and straightway began to build a new room to the house. He gave the extra set of tools to Charley with an encouraging word. For the first time since he had been brought here, Charley's face took on a look of interest. In half-an-hour he was at work, smiling and perspiring, and quickly learning the craft. He seldom spoke, but he sometimes laughed a mirthful, natural boy's laugh of good spirits and contentment. From that day his interest in things increased, and before two months went round, while yet it was late autumn, he looked in perfect health. He ate moderately, drank a great deal of water, and slept half the circle of the clock each day. His skin was like silk; the colour of his face was as that of an apple; he was more than ever Beauty Steele. The Cure came two or three times, and Charley spoke to him but never held conversation, and no word concerning the past ever passed his tongue, nor did he have memory of what was said to him from one day to the next. A hundred ways Jo had tried to rouse his memory. But the words Cote Dorion had no meaning to him, and he listened blankly to all names and phrases once so familiar. Yet he spoke French and English in a slow, passive, involuntary way. All was automatic, mechanical.

The weeks again wore on, and autumn became winter, and then at last one day the Cure came, bringing his brother, a great Parisian surgeon lately arrived from France on a short visit. The Cure had told his brother the story, and had been met by a keen, astonished interest in the unknown man on Vadrome Mountain. A slight pressure on the brain from accident had before now produced loss of memory--the great man's professional curiosity was aroused: he saw a nice piece of surgical work ready to his hand; he asked to be taken to Vadrome Mountain.

Now the Cure had lived long out of the world, and was not in touch with the swift-minded action and adventuring intellects of such men as his brother, Marcel Loisel. Was it not tempting Providence, a surgical operation? He was so used to people getting ill and getting well without a doctor--the nearest was twenty miles distant--or getting ill and dying in what seemed a natural and preordained way, that to cut open a man's head and look into his brain, and do this or that to his skull, seemed

almost sinful. Was it not better to wait and see if the poor man would not recover in God's appointed time?

In answer to his sensitively eager and diverse questions, Marcel Loisel replied that his dear Cure was merely mediaeval, and that he had sacrificed his mental powers on the altar of a simple faith, which might remove mountains but was of no value in a case like this, where, clearly, surgery was the only providence.

At this the Cure got to his feet, came over, laid his hand on his brother's shoulder, and said, with tears in his eyes:

"Marcel, you shock me. Indeed you shock me!"

Then he twisted a knot in his cassock cords, and added "Come then, Marcel. We will go to him. And may God guide us aright!"

That afternoon the two grey-haired men visited Vadrome Mountain, and there they found Charley at work in the little room that the two men had built. Charley nodded pleasantly when the Cure introduced his brother, but showed no further interest at first. He went on working at the cupboard under his hand. His cap was off and his hair was a little rumpled where the wound had been, for he had a habit of rubbing the place now and then--an abstracted, sensitive motion--although he seemed to suffer no pain. The surgeon's eyes fastened on the place, and as Charley worked and his brother talked, he studied the man, the scar, the contour of the head. At last he came up to Charley and softly placed his fingers on the scar, feeling the skull. Charley turned quickly.

There was something in the long, piercing look of the surgeon which seemed to come through limitless space to the sleeping and imprisoned memory of Charley's sick mind. A confused, anxious, half-fearful look crept into the wide blue eyes. It was like a troubled ghost, flitting along the boundaries of sight and sense, and leaving a chill and a horrified wonder behind. The surgeon gazed on, and the trouble in Charley's eye passed to his face, stayed an instant. Then he turned away to Jo Portugais. "I am thirsty now," he said, and he touched his lips in the way he was wont to do in those countless ages ago, when, millions upon millions of miles away, people said: "There goes Charley Steele!"

"I am thirsty now," and that touch of the lip with the tongue, were a revelation to the surgeon.

A half-hour later he was walking homeward with the Cure. Jo accompanied them for a distance. As they emerged into the wider road-paths that began half-way down the mountain, the Cure, who had watched his brother's face for a long time in silence, said:

"What is in your mind, Marcel?" The surgeon turned with a half-smile.

"He is happy now. No memory, no conscience, no pain, no responsibility, no trouble--nothing behind or before. Is it good to bring him back?"

The Cure had thought it all over, and he had wholly changed his mind since that first talk with his brother. "To save a mind, Marcel!" he said.

"Then to save a soul?" suggested the surgeon. "Would he thank me?"

"It is our duty to save him."

"Body and mind and soul, eh? And if I look after the body and the mind?"

"His soul is in God's hands, Marcel."

"But will he thank me? How can you tell what sorrows, what troubles, he has had? What struggles, temptations, sins? He has none now, of any sort; not a stain, physical or moral."

"That is not life, Marcel."

"Well, well, you have changed. This morning it was I who would, and you hesitated."

"I see differently now, Marcel."

The surgeon put a hand playfully on his brother's shoulder.

"Did you think, my dear Prosper, that I should hesitate? Am I a sentimentalist? But what will he say?"

"We need not think of that, Marcel."

"But yet suppose that with memory come again sin and shame--even crime?"

"We will pray for him." "But if he isn't a Catholic?"

"One must pray for sinners," said the Curb, after a silence.

This time the surgeon laid a hand on the shoulder of his brother affectionately. "Upon my soul, dear Prosper, you almost persuade me to be reactionary and mediaeval."

The Curb turned half uneasily towards Jo, who was following at a little distance. This seemed hardly the sort of thing for him to hear.

"You had better return now, Jo," he said.

"As you wish, M'sieu'," Jo answered, then looked inquiringly at the surgeon.

"In about five days, Portugais. Have you a steady hand and a quick eye?"

Jo spread out his hands in deprecation, and turned to the Curb, as though for him to answer.

"Jo is something of a physician and surgeon too, Marcel. He has a gift. He has cured many in the parish with his herbs and tinctures, and he has set legs and arms successfully."

The surgeon eyed Jo humorously, but kindly. "He is probably as good a doctor as some of us. Medicine is a gift, surgery is a gift and an art. You shall hear from me, Portugais." He looked again keenly at Jo. "You have not given him 'herbs and tinctures'?"

"Nothing, M'sieu'."

"Very sensible. Good-day, Portugais."

"Good-day, my son," said the priest, and raised his fingers in benediction, as Jo turned and quickly retraced his steps.

"Why did you ask him if he had given the poor man any herbs or tinctures, Marcel?" said the priest.

"Because those quack tinctures have whiskey in them."

"What do you mean?"

"Whiskey in any form would be bad for him," the surgeon answered evasively.

But to himself he kept saying: "The man was a drunkard--he was a drunkard."

CHAPTER XI

THE RAISING OF THE CURTAIN

M. Marcel Loisel did his work with a masterly precision, with the aid of his brother and Portugais. The man under the instruments, not wholly insensible, groaned once or twice. Once or twice, too, his eyes opened with a dumb hunted look, then closed as with an irresistible weariness. When the work was over, and every stain or sign of surgery removed, sleep came down on the bed--a deep and saturating sleep, which seemed to fill the room with peace. For hours the surgeon sat beside the couch, now and again feeling the pulse, wetting the hot lips, touching the forehead with his palm. At last, with a look of satisfaction, he came forward to where Jo and the Cure sat beside the fire.

"It is all right," he said. "Let him sleep as long as he will." He turned again to the bed. "I wish I could stay to see the end of it. Is there no chance, Prosper?" he added to the priest.

"Impossible, Marcel. You must have sleep. You have a seventy-mile drive before you to-morrow, and sixty the next day. You can only reach the port now by starting at daylight to-morrow."

So it was that Marcel Loisel, the great surgeon, was compelled to leave Chaudiere before he knew that the memory of the man who had been under his knife had actually returned to him. He had, however, no doubt in his own mind, and he was confident that there could be no physical harm from the operation. Sleep was the all-important thing. In it lay the strength for the shock of the awakening--if awakening of memory there was to be.

Before he left he stooped over Charley and said musingly: "I wonder what you will wake up to, my friend?" Then he touched the wound with a light caressing finger. "It was well done, well done," he murmured proudly.

A moment afterwards he was hurrying down the hill to the open road, where a cariole awaited the Cure and himself.

For a day and a half Charley slept, and Jo watched him with an

affectionate solicitude. Once or twice, becoming anxious, because of the heavy breathing and the motionless sleep, he had forced open the teeth, and poured a little broth between.

Just before dawn on the second morning, worn out and heavy with slumber, Jo lay down by the piled-up fire and dropped into a sleep that wrapped him like a blanket, folding him away into a drenching darkness.

For a time there was a deep silence, troubled only by Jo's deep breathing, which seemed itself like the pulse of the silence. Charley appeared not to be breathing at all. He was lying on his back, seemingly lifeless. Suddenly on the snug silence there was a sharp sound. A tree outside snapped with the frost.

Charley awoke. The body seemed not to awake, for it did not stir, but the eyes opened wide and full, looking straight before them--straight up to the brown smoke-stained rafters, along which were ranged guns and fishing-tackle, axes and bear-traps. Full clear blue eyes, healthy and untired as a child's fresh from an all-night's drowse, they looked and looked. Yet, at first, the body did not stir; only the mind seemed to be awakening, the soul creeping out from slumber into the day. Presently, however, as the eyes gazed, there stole into them a wonder, a trouble, an anxiety. For a moment they strained at the rafters and the crude weapons and implements there, then the body moved, quickly, eagerly, and turned to see the flickering shadows made by the fire and the simple order of the room.

A minute more, and Charley was sitting on the side of his couch, dazed and staring. This hut, this fire, the figure by the hearth in a sound sleep--his hand went to his head: it felt the bandage there!

He remembered now! Last night at the Cote Dorion! Last night he had talked with Suzon Charlemagne at the Cote Dorion; last night he had drunk harder than he had ever drunk in his life, he had defied, chaffed, insulted the river-drivers. The whole scene came back: the faces of Suzon and her father; Suzon's fingers on his for an instant; the glass of brandy beside him; the lanterns on the walls; the hymn he sang; the sermon he preached--he shuddered a little; the rumble of angry noises round him; the tumbler thrown; the crash of the lantern, and only one light left in the place! Then Jake Hough and his heavy hand, the flying monocle, and his disdainful, insulting reply; the sight of the pistol in the hand of Suzon's father; then a rush, a darkness, and his own fierce plunge towards the door, beyond which were the stars and the cool night and the dark river. Curses, hands that battered and tore at him, the doorway reached, and then a blow on the head and--falling, falling, falling, and distant noises growing more distant, and suddenly and sweetly--absolute silence.

Again he shuddered. Why? He remembered that scene in his office yesterday with Kathleen, and the one later with Billy. A sensitive chill swept all over him, making his flesh creep, and a flush sped over his face from chin to brow. To-day he must pick up all these threads again, must make things right for Billy, must replace the money he had stolen, must face Kathleen again he shuddered. Was he at the Cote Dorion still? He looked round him. No, this was not the sort of house to be found at the Cote Dorion. Clearly this was the hut of a hunter. Probably he had been fished out of the river by this woodsman and brought here. He felt his head. The wound was fresh and very sore. He had played for death, with an insulting disdain, yet here he was alive.

Certainly he was not intended to be drowned or knifed--he remembered the knives he saw unsheathed--or kicked or pummelled into the hereafter. It was about ten o'clock when he had had his "accident"--he affected a smile, yet somehow he did not smile easily--it must be now about five, for here was the morning creeping in behind the deer-skin blind at the window.

Strange that he felt none the worse for his mishap, and his tongue was as clean and fresh as if he had been drinking milk last night, and not very doubtful brandy at the Cote Dorion. No fever in his hands, no headache, only the sore skull, so well and tightly bandaged but a wonderful thirst, and an intolerable hunger. He smiled. When had he ever been hungry for breakfast before? Here he was with a fine appetite: it was like coals of fire heaped on his head by Nature for last night's business at the Cote Dorion. How true it was that penalties did not always come with--indiscretions. Yet, all at once, he flushed again to the forehead, for a curious sense of shame flashed through his whole being, and one Charley Steele--the Charley Steele of this morning, an unknown, unadventuring, onlooking Charley Steele--was viewing with abashed eyes the Charley Steele who had ended a doubtful career in the coarse and desperate proceedings of last night. With a nervous confusion he sought refuge in his eye-glass. His fingers fumbled over his waistcoat, but did not find it. The weapon of defence and attack, the symbol of interrogation and incomprehensibility, was gone. Beauty Steele was under the eyes of another self, and neither disdain, nor contempt, nor the passive stare, were available. He got suddenly to his feet, and started forward, as though to find refuge from himself.

The abrupt action sent the blood to his head, and feeling a blindness come over him, he put both hands up to his temples, and sank back on the couch, dizzy and faint.

His motions waked Jo Portugais, who scrambled from the floor, and came towards him.

"M'sieu'," he said, "you must not. You are faint." He dropped his hands supportingly to Charley's shoulders.

Charley nodded, but did not yet look up. His head throbbed sorely. "Water--please!" he said.

In an instant Jo was beside him again, with a bowl of fresh water at his lips. He drank, drank, drank, until the great bowl was drained to the last drop.

"Whew! That was good!" he said, and looked up at Jo with a smile. "Thank you, my friend; I haven't the honour of your acquaintance, but--"

He stopped suddenly and stared at Jo. Inquiry, mystification, were in his look.

"Have I ever seen you before?" he said. "Who knows, M'sieu'!"

Since Jo had stood before Charley in the dock near six years ago he had greatly changed. The marks of smallpox, a heavy beard, grey hair, and solitary life had altered him beyond Charley's recognition.

Jo could hardly speak. His legs were trembling under him, for now he

knew that Charley Steele was himself again. He was no longer the simple, quiet man-child of three days ago, and of these months past, but the man who had saved him from hanging, to whom he owed a debt he dare not acknowledge. Jo's brain was in a muddle. Now that the great crisis was over, now that the expected thing had come, and face to face with the cure, he had neither tongue, nor strength, nor wit. His words stuck in his throat where his heart was, and for a minute his eyes had a kind of mist before them.

Meanwhile Charley's eyes were upon him, curious, fixed, abstracted.

"Is this your house?"

"It is, M'sieu'."

"You fished me out of the river by the Cote Dorion?" He still held his head with his hands, for it throbbed so, but his eyes were intent on his companion.

"Yes, M'sieu'."

Charley's hand mechanically fumbled for his monocle. Jo turned quickly to the wall, and taking it by its cord from the nail where it had been for these long months, handed it over. Charley took it and mechanically put it in his eye. "Thank you, my friend," he said. "Have I been conscious at all since you rescued me last night?" he asked.

"In a way, M'sieu'."

"Ah, well, I can't remember, but it was very kind of you--I do thank you very much. Do you think you could find me something to eat? I beg your pardon--it isn't breakfast-time, of course, but I was never so hungry in my life!"

"In a minute, M'sieu'--in one minute. But lie down, you must lie down a little. You got up too quick, and it makes your head throb. You have had nothing to eat."

"Nothing, since yesterday noon, and very little then. I didn't eat anything at the Cote Dorion, I remember." He lay back on the couch and closed his eyes. The throbbing in his head presently stopped, and he felt that if he ate something he could go to sleep again, it was so restful in this place--a whole day's sleep and rest, how good it would be after last night's racketing! Here was primitive and material comfort, the secret of content, if you liked! Here was this poor hunter-fellow, with enough to eat and to drink, earning it every day by every day's labour, and, like Robinson Crusoe no doubt, living in a serene self-sufficiency and an elysian retirement. Probably he had no responsibilities in the world, with no one to say him nay, himself only to consider in all the universe: a divine conception of adequate life. Yet himself, Charley Steele, an idler, a waster, with no purpose in life, with scarcely the necessity to earn his bread--never, at any rate, until lately--was the slave of the civilisation to which he belonged. Was civilisation worth the game?

His hand involuntarily went to his head. It changed the course of his thoughts. He must go back to-day to put Billy's crime right, to replace the trust-moneys Billy had taken by forging his brother-in-law's name. Not a moment must be lost. No doubt he was within driving distance of

his office, and, bandaged head or no bandaged head, last night's disgraceful doings notwithstanding, it was his duty to face the wondering eyes--what did he care for wondering eyes? hadn't he been making eyes wonder all his life?--face the wondering eyes in the little city, and set a crooked business straight. Fool and scoundrel certainly Billy was, but there was Kathleen!

His lips tightened; he had a strange anxious flutter of the heart. When had his heart fluttered like this? When had he ever before considered Kathleen's feelings as to his personal conduct so delicately? Well, since yesterday he did feel it, and a sudden sense of pity sprang up in him--vague, shamefaced pity, which belied the sudden egotistical flourish with which he put his monocle to his eye and tried futilely to smile in the old way.

He had lain with his eyes closed. They opened now, and he saw his host spreading a newspaper as a kind of cloth on a small rough table, and putting some food upon it--bread, meat, and a bowl of soup. It was thoughtful of this man to make his soup overnight--he saw Jo lift it from beside the fire where it had been kept hot. A good fellow--an excellent fellow, this woodsman.

His head did not throb now, and he drew himself up slowly on his elbow--then, after a moment, lifted himself to a sitting posture.

"What is your name, my friend?" he said.

"Jo Portugais, M'sieu'," Jo answered, and brought a candle and put it on the table, then lifted the tin-plate from over the bowl of savoury soup.

Never before had Charley Steele sat down to such a breakfast. A roll and a cup of coffee had been enough, and often too much, for him. Yet now he could not wait to eat the soup with a spoon, but lifted the bowl and took a long draught of it, and set it down with a sigh of content. Then he broke bread into the soup--large pieces of black oat bread--until the bowl was a mass of luscious pulp. This he ate almost ravenously, his eye wandering avidly the while to the small piece of meat beside the bowl. What meat was it? It looked like venison, yet summer was not the time for venison. What did it matter! Jo sat on a bench beside the fire, his face turned towards his guest, dreading the moment when the man he had nursed and cared for, with whom he had eaten and drunk for so long, should know the truth about himself. He could not tell him all there was to tell, he was taking another means of letting him know.

Charley did not speak. Hunger was a new sensation, a delicious thing, too good to be broken by talking. He ate till he had cleared away the last crumbs of bread and meat and drunk the last drop of soup. He looked at the woodsman as though wondering if he would bring more. Jo evidently thought he had had enough, for he did not move. Charley's glance withdrew from Jo, and busied itself with the few crumbs remaining upon the table. He saw a little piece of bread on the floor. He picked it up and ate it with relish, laughing to himself.

"How long will it take us to get to town? Can we do it this morning?"

"Not this morning, M'sieu'," said Jo, in a sort of hoarse whisper.

"How many hours would it take?"

He was gathering the last crumbs of his feast with his hand, and looking casually down at the newspaper spread as a table-cloth.

All at once his hand stopped, his eyes became fixed on a spot in the paper. He gave a hoarse, guttural cry, like an animal in agony. His lips became dry, his hand wiped a blinding mist from his eyes.

Jo watched him with an intense alarm and a horrified curiosity. He felt a base coward for not having told Charley what this paper contained. Never had he seen such a look as this. He felt his beads, and told them over and over again, as Charley Steele, in a dry, croaking sort of whisper, read, in letters that seemed monstrous symbols of fire, a record of himself:

"To-day, by special license from the civil and ecclesiastical courts [the paragraph in the paper began], was married, at St. Theobald's Church, Mrs. Charles Steele, daughter of the late Hon. Julien Wantage, and niece of the late Eustace Wantage, Esq., to Captain Thomas Fairing, of the Royal Fusileers--"

Charley snatched at the top of the paper and read the date "Tenth of February, 18-!" It was August when he was at the Cote Dorion, the 5th August, 18-, and this paper was February 10th, 18-. He read on, in the month-old paper, with every nerve in his body throbbing now: a fierce beating that seemed as if it must burst the heart and the veins:

"--Captain Thomas Fairing, of the Royal Fusileers, whose career in our midst has been marked by an honourable sense of public and private duty. Our fellow-citizens will unite with us in congratulating the bride, whose previous misfortunes have only increased the respect in which she is held. If all remember the obscure death of her first husband (though the body was not found, there has never been a doubt of his death), and the subsequent discovery that he had embezzled trust-moneys to the extent of twenty-five thousand dollars, thereby setting the final seal of shame upon a misspent life, destined for brilliant and powerful uses, all have conspired to forget the association of our beautiful and admired townswoman with his career. It is painful to refer to these circumstances, but it is only within the past few days that the estate of the misguided man has been wound up, and the money he embezzled restored to its rightful owners; and it is better to make these remarks now than repeat them in the future, only to arouse painful memories in quarters where we should least desire to wound.

"In her new life, blessed by a romantic devotion known and admired by all, Mrs. Fairing and her husband will be followed by the affectionate good wishes of the whole community."

The man on the hearth-stone shrank back at the sight of the still, white face, in which the eyes were like sparks of fire. His impulse had been to go over and offer the hand of sympathy to the stricken man, but his simple mind grasped the fact that no one might, with impunity, invade this awful quiet. Charley was frozen in body, but his brain was awake with the heat of "a burning fiery furnace."

Seven months of unconscious life--seven months of silence--no sight, no seeing, no knowing; seven months of oblivion, in which the world had buried him out of ken in an unknown grave of infamy! Seven months--and Kathleen was married again to the man she had always loved. To the world he himself was a rogue and thief. Billy had remained silent--Billy, whom

he had so befriended, had let decent men heap scorn and reproaches on his memory. Here was what the world thought of him--he read the lines over again, his eyes scorching, but his finger steady, as it traced the lines slowly: "the obscure death" "embezzled trustmoneys" "the final seal of shame upon a misspent life!"

These were the epitaphs on the tombstone of Charley Steele; dead and buried, out of sight, out of repute, soon to be out of mind and out of memory, save as a warning to others--an old example raked out of the dust-bin of time by the scavengers of morality, to toss at all who trod the paths of dalliance.

What was there to do? Go back? Go back and knock at Kathleen's door, another Enoch Arden, and say: "I have come to my own again?" Return and tell Tom Fairing to go his way and show his face no more? Break up this union, this marriage of love in which these two rejoiced? Summon Kathleen out of her illegal intercourse with the man who had been true to her all these years?

To what end? What had he ever done for her that he might destroy her now? What sort of Spartan tragedy was this, that the woman who had been the victim of circumstances, who had been the slave to a tie he never felt, yet which had been as iron-bound to her, should now be brought out to be mangled body and soul for no fault of her own? What had she done? What had she ever done to give him right to touch so much as a hair of her head?

Go back, and bring Billy to justice, and clear his own name? Go back, and send Kathleen's brother, the forger, to jail? What an achievement in justice! Would not the world have a right to say that the only decent thing he could do was to eliminate himself from the equation? What profit for him in the great summing-up, that he was technically innocent of this one thing, and that to establish his innocence he broke a woman's heart and destroyed a boy's life? To what end! It was the murderer coming back as a ghost to avenge himself for being hanged. Suppose he went back--the death's-head at the feast--what would there be for himself afterwards; for any one for whom he was responsible? Living at that price?

To die and end it all, to disappear from this petty life where he had done so little, and that little ill? To die?

No. There was in him some deep, if obscure, fatalism after all. If he had been meant to die now, why had he not gone to the bottom of the river that yesterday at the Cote Dorion? Why had he been saved by this yokel at the fire, and brought here to lie in oblivion in this mountain hut, wrapped in silence and lost to the world? Why had his brain and senses lain fallow all these months, a vacuous vegetation, an empty consciousness? Was it fate? Did it not seem probable that the Great Machine had, in its automatic movement, tossed him up again on the shores of Time because he had not fallen on the trap-door predestined for his eternal exit?

It was clear to him that death by his own hand was futile, and that if there were trap-doors set for him alone, it were well to wait until he trod upon them and fell through in his appointed hour in the movement of the Great Machine.

What to do--where to live--how to live?

He got slowly to his feet and took a step forward half blindly. The man on the bench stirred. Crossing the room he dropped a hand on the man's shoulder. "Open the blind, my friend."

Jo Portugais got to his feet quickly, eyes averted--he did not dare look into Charley's face--and went over and drew back the deer-skin blind. The clear, crisp sunlight of a frosty morning broke gladly into the room. Charley turned and blew out the candle on the table where he had eaten, then walked feebly to the window. Standing on the crest of the mountain the hut looked down through a clearing, flanked by forest trees.

It was a goodly scene. The green and frosted foliage of the pines and cedars; the flowery tracery of frost hanging like cobwebs everywhere; the poudre sparkle in the air; the hills of silver and emerald sloping down to the valley miles away, where the village clustered about the great old parish church; the smoke from a hundred chimneys, in purple spirals, rising straight up in the windless air; over all peace and a perfect silence.

Charley mechanically fixed his eye-glass and stood with hands resting on the window-sill, looking, looking out upon a new world.

At length he turned.

"Is there anything I can do for you, M'sieu'?" said Jo huskily.

Charley held out his hand and clasped Jo's. "Tell me about all these months," he said.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMING OF ROSALIE

Charley Steele saw himself as he had been through the eyes of another. He saw the work that he had done in the carpentering shed, and had no memory of it. The real Charley Steele had been enveloped in oblivion for seven months. During that time a mild phantom of himself had wandered, as it were in a somnambulistic dream, through the purlieus of life. Open-eyed, but with the soul asleep, all idiosyncrasy laid aside, all acquired impressions and influences vanished, he had been walking in the world with no more complexity of mind than a new-born child, nothing intervening between the sight of the eyes and the original sense.

Now, when the real Charley Steele emerged again, the folds of mind and soul unrolling to the million-voiced creation and touched by the antenna of a various civilisation, the phantom Charley was gone once more into obscurity. The real Charley could remember naught of the other, could feel naught, save, as in the stirring industrious day, one remembers that he has dreamed a strange dream the night before, and cannot recall it, though the overpowering sense of it remains.

He saw the work of his hands, the things he had made with adze and plane, with chisel and hammer, but nothing seemed familiar save the smell of the glue pot, which brought back in a cloudy impression curious unfamiliar feelings. Sights, sounds, motions, passed in a confused way through his

mind as the smell of the glue crept through his nostrils; and he struggled hard to remember. But no--seven months of his life were gone for ever. Yet he knew and felt that a vast change had gone over him, had passed through him. While the soul had lain fallow, while the body had been growing back to childlike health again, and Nature had been pouring into his sick senses her healing balm; while the medicaments of peace and sleep and quiet labour had been having their way with him, he had been reorganised, renewed, flushed of the turgid silt of dissipation. For his sins and weaknesses there had been no gall and vinegar to drink.

As Charley stood looking round the workshop, Jo entered, shaking the snow from his moccasined feet. "The Cure, M'sieu' Loisel, has come," he said. Charley turned, and, without a word, followed Jo into the house. There, standing at the window and looking down at the village beneath, was the Cure. As Charley entered, M. Loisel came forward with outstretched hand.

"I am glad to see you well again, Monsieur," he said, and his cool thin hand held Charley's for a moment, as he looked him benignly in the eye.

With a kind of instinct as to the course he must henceforth pursue, Charley replied simply, dropping his eye-glass as he met that clear soluble look of the priest--such a well of simplicity he had never before seen. Only naked eye could meet that naked eye, imperfect though his own sight was.

"It is good of you to feel so, and to come and tell me so," he answered quietly. "I have been a great trouble, I know."

There was none of the old pose in his manner, none of the old cryptic quality in his words.

"We were anxious for your sake--and for the sake of your friends, Monsieur."

Charley evaded the suggestion. "I cannot easily repay your kindness and that of Jo Portugais, my good friend here," he rejoined.

"M'sieu'," replied Jo, his face turned away, and his foot pushing a log on the fire, "you have repaid it."

Charley shook his head. "I am in a conspiracy of kindness," he said. "It is all a mystery to me. For why should one expect such treatment from strangers, when, besides all, one can never make any real return, not even to pay for board and lodging!"

"I was a stranger and ye took me in," said the Cure, smiling by no means sentimentally. "So said the Friend of the World."

Charley looked the Cure steadily in the eyes. He was thinking how simply this man had said these things; as if, indeed, they were part of his life; as though it were usual speech with him, a something that belonged, not an acquired language. There was the old impulse to ask a question, and he put the monocle to his eye, but his lips did not open, and the eye-glass fell again. He had seen familiarity with sacred names and things in the uneducated, in excited revivalists, worked up to a state clairvoyant and conversational with the Creator; but he had never heard an educated man speak as this man did.

At last Charley said: "Your brother--Portugais tells me that your brother, the surgeon, has gone away. I should have liked to thank him --if no more."

"I have written him of your good recovery. He will be glad, I know. But my brother, from one stand-point--a human stand-point--had scruples. These I did not share, but they were strong in him, Monsieur. Marcel asked himself--" He stopped suddenly and looked towards Jo.

Charley saw the look, and said quickly: "Speak plainly. Portugais is my friend."

Jo turned slowly towards him, and a light seemed to come to his eyes--a shining something that resolved itself into a dog-like fondness, an utter obedience, a strange intense gratitude.

"Marcel asked himself," the Cure continued, "whether you would thank him for bringing you back to--to life and memory. I fear he was trying to see what I should say--I fear so. Marcel said, 'Suppose that he should curse me for it? Who knows what he would be brought back to--to what suffering and pain, perhaps?' Marcel said that."

"And you replied, Monsieur le Cure?"

"I replied that Nature required you to answer that question for yourself, and whether bitterly or gladly, it was your duty to take up your life and live it out. Besides, it was not you alone that had to be considered. One does not live alone or die alone in this world. There were your friends to consider."

"And because I had no friends here, you were compelled to think for me!" answered Charley calmly. "Truth is, it was not a question of my friends, for what I was during those seven months, or what I am now, can make no difference to them."

He looked the Cure in the eyes steadily, and as though he would convey his intentions without words. The Cure understood. The habit of listening to the revelations of the human heart had given him something of that clairvoyance which can only be pursued by the primitive mind, unvexed by complexity.

"It is, then, as though you had not come to life again? It is as though you had no past, Monsieur?"

"It is that, Monsieur."

Jo suddenly turned and left the room, for he heard a step on the frosty snow without.

"You will remain here, Monsieur?" said the Cure. "I cannot tell."

The Cure had the bravery of simple souls with a duty to perform. He fastened his eyes on Charley. "Monsieur, is there any reason why you should not stay here? I ask it now, man to man--not as a priest of my people, but as man to man."

Charley did not answer for a moment. He was wondering how he should put his reply. But his look did not waver, and the Cure saw the honesty of the gaze. At length he replied: "If you mean, have I committed any crime

which the law may punish?--I answer no, Monsieur. If you mean, have I robbed or killed, or forged--or wronged a woman as men wrong women? No. These, I take it, are the things that matter first. For the rest, you can think of me as badly as you will, or as well, for what I do henceforth is the only thing that really concerns the world, Monsieur le Cure."

The Cure came forward and put out his hand with a kindly gesture. "Monsieur, you have suffered," he said.

"Never, never at all, Monsieur. Never for a moment, until I was dropped down here like a stone from a sling. I had life by the throat; now it has me there--that is all."

"You are not a Catholic, Monsieur?" asked the priest, almost pleadingly, and as though the question had been much on his mind.

"No, Monsieur."

The Cure made no rejoinder. If he was not a Catholic, what matter what he was? If he was not a Catholic, were he Buddhist, pagan, or Protestant, the position for them personally was the same. "I am very sorry," he said gently. "I might have helped you had you been a Catholic."

The eye-glass came like lightning to the eye, and a caustic, questioning phrase was on the tongue, but Charley stopped himself in time. For, apart from all else, this priest had been his friend in calamity, had acted with a charming sensibility. The eye-glass troubled the Cure, and the look on Charley's face troubled him still more, but it passed as Charley said, in a voice as simple as the Cure's own:

"You may still help me as you have already done. I give you my word, too"--strange that he touched his lips with his tongue as he did in the old days when his mind turned to Jean Jolicoeur's saloon--"that I will do nothing to cause regret for your humanity and--and Christian kindness." Again the tongue touched the lips--a wave of the old life had swept over him, the old thirst had rushed upon him. Perhaps it was the force of this feeling which made him add, with a curious energy, "I give you my word, Monsieur le Cure." At that moment the door opened and Jo entered.

"M'sieu'," he said to Charley, "a registered parcel has come for you. It has been brought by the postmaster's daughter. She will give it to no one but yourself."

Charley's face paled, and the Cure's was scarcely less pale. In Charley's mind was the question, Who had discovered his presence here? Was he not, then, to escape? Who should send him parcels through the post?

The Cure was perturbed. Was he, then, to know who this man was--his name and history? Was the story of his life now to be told?

Charley broke the silence. "Tell the girl to come in." Instantly afterwards the postmaster's daughter entered. The look of the girl's face, at once delicate and rosy with health, almost put the question of the letter out of his mind for an instant. Her dark eyes met his as he came forward with outstretched hand.

"This is addressed, as you will see, 'To the Sick Man at the House of Jo Portugais, at Vadrome Mountain.' Are you that person, Monsieur?" she asked.

As she handed the parcel, Charley's eyes scanned her face quickly. How did this habitant girl come by this perfect French accent, this refined manner? He did not know the handwriting on the parcel; he hastily tore it open. Inside were a few dozen small packets. Here also was a sheet of paper. He opened and read it quickly. It said:

Monsieur, I am not sure that you have recovered your memory and your health, and I am also not sure that in such case you will thank me for my work. If you think I have done you an injury, pray accept my profound apologies. Monsieur, you have been a drunkard. If you would reverse the record now, these powders, taken at opportune moments, will aid you. Monsieur, with every expression of my goodwill, and the hope that you will convey to me without reserve your feelings on this delicate matter, I append my address in Paris, and I have the honour to subscribe myself, with high consideration,

Monsieur, yours faithfully,

MARCEL LOISEL.

The others looked at him with varied feelings as he read. Curiosity, inquiry, expectation, were common to them all, but with each was a different personal feeling. The Cure's has been described. Jo Portugais' mind was asking if this meant that the man who had come into his life must now go out of it; and the girl was asking who was this mysterious man, like none she had ever seen or known.

Without hesitation Charley handed over the letter to the Cure, who took it with surprise, read it with amazement, and handed it back with a flush on his face.

"Thank you," said Charley to the girl. "It is good of you to bring it all this way. May I ask--"

"She is Mademoiselle Rosalie Evanturel," said the Cure smiling.

"I am Charles Mallard," said Charley slowly. "Thank you. I will go now, Monsieur Mallard," the girl said, lifting her eyes to his face. He bowed. As she turned and went towards the door her eyes met his. She blushed.

"Wait, Mademoiselle; I will go back with you," said the Cure kindly. He turned to Charley and held out his hand. "God be with you, Monsieur--Charles," he said. "Come and see me soon." Remembering that his brother had written that the man was a drunkard, his eyes had a look of pity. This was the man's own secret and his. It was a way to the man's heart; he would use it.

As the two went out of the door, the girl looked back. Charley was putting the surgeon's letter into the fire, and did not see her; yet she blushed again.

HOW CHARLEY WENT ADVENTURING AND WHAT HE FOUND

A week passed. Charley's life was running in a tiny circle, but his mind was compassing large revolutions. The events of the last few days had cut deep. His life had been turned upside down. All his predispositions had been suddenly brought to check, his habits turned upon the flank and routed, his mental postures flung into confusion. He had to start life again; but it could not be in the way of any previous travel of mind or body. The line of cleavage was sharp and wide, and the only connection with the past was in the long-reaching influence of evil habits, which crept from their coverts, now and again, to mock him as his old self had mocked life--to mock him and to tempt him. Through seven months of healthy life for his body, while brain and will were sleeping, the whole man had made long strides towards recreation. But with the renewal of will and mind the old weaknesses, roused by memory, began to emerge intermittently, as water rises from a spring. There was something terrible in this repetition of sensation--the law of habit answering to the machine-like throbbing of memory, as, a kaleidoscope turning, turning, its pictures pass a certain point at fixed intervals--an automatic recurrence. He found himself at times touching his lips with his tongue, and with this act came the dry throat, the hot eye, the restless hand feeling for a glass that eluded his fingers.

Twice in one week did this fever surge up in him, and it caught him in those moments when, exhausted by the struggle of his mind to adapt itself to the new conditions, his senses were delicately susceptible. Visions of Jolicoeur's saloon came to his mind's eye. With a singular separateness, a new-developed dual sense, he saw himself standing in the summer heat, looking over to the cool dark doorway of the saloon, and he caught again the smell of the fresh-drawn beer. He was conscious of watching himself do this and that, of seeing himself move here and there. He began to look upon Charley Steele as a man he had known--he, Charles Mallard, had known--while he had to suffer for what Charley Steele had done. Then, all at once, as he was thinking and dreaming and seeing, there would seize upon him the old appetite, coincident with the seizure of his brain by the old sense of cynicism at its worst--such a worst as had made him insult Jake Hough when the rough countryman was ready to take his part that wild night at the Cote Dorion.

At such moments life became a conflict--almost a terror--for as yet he had not swung into line with the new order of things. In truth, there was no order of things; for one life was behind him and the new one was not yet decided upon, save that here he would stay--here out of the world, out of the game, far from old associations, cut off, and to be for ever cut off, from all that he had ever known or seen or felt or loved! . . . Loved! When did he ever love? If love was synonymous with unselfishness, with the desire to give greater than the desire to get, then he had never known love. He realised now that he had given Kathleen only what might be given across a dinner-table--the sensuous tribute of a temperament, passionate without true passion or faith or friendship. Kathleen had known that he gave her nothing worth the having; for in some meagre sense she knew what love was, and had given it meagrely, after her nature, to another man, preserving meanwhile the letter of the law, respecting that bond which he had shamed by his excesses.

Kathleen was now sitting at another man's table--no, probably at his own table--his, Charley Steele's own table in his own house--the house he had given her by deed of gift the day he died. Tom Fairing was sitting where he used to sit, talking across the table--not as he used to talk--looking

into Kathleen's face as he had never looked. He was no more to them than a dark memory. "Well, why should I be more?" he asked himself. "I am dead, if not buried. They think me down among the fishes. My game is done; and when she gets older and understands life better, Kathleen will say, 'Poor Charley--he might have been anything!' She'll be sure to say that some day, for habit and memory go round in a circle and pass the same point again and again. For me--they take me by the throat--" He put his hand up as if to free his throat from a grip, his tongue touched his lips, his hands grew restless.

"It comes back on me like a fit of ague, this miserable thirst. If I were within sight of Jolicoeur's saloon, I should be drinking hard this minute. But I'm here, and--" His hand felt his pocket, and he took out the powders the great surgeon had sent him.

"He knew--how did he know that I was a drunkard? Does a man carry in his face the tale he would not tell? Jo says I didn't talk of the past, that I never had delirium, that I never said a word to suggest who I was, or where I came from. Then how did the doctor--man know? I suppose every particular habit carries its own signal, and the expert knows the ciphers." He opened the paper containing the powders, and looked round for water, then paused, folded the paper up, and put it in his pocket again. He went over to the window and looked out. His shoulders set square. "No, no, no, not a speck on my tongue!" he said. "What I can't do of my own will is not worth doing. It's too foolish, to yield to the shadow of an old appetite. I play this game alone--here in Chaudiere."

He looked out and down. The sweet sun of early spring was shining hard, and the snow was beginning to pack, to hang like a blanket on the branches, to lie like a soft coverlet over all the forest and the fields. Far away on the frozen river were saplings stuck up to show where the ice was safe--a long line of poles from shore to shore--and carioles were hurrying across to the village. Being market-day, the place was alive with the cheerful commerce of the habitant. The bell of the parish church was ringing. The sound of it came up distantly and peacefully. Charley drew a long breath, turned away to a pail of water, filled a dipper half full, and drank it off gaspingly. Then he returned to the window with a look of relief.

"That does it," he said. "The horrible thing is gone again--out of my brain and out of my throat."

As he stood there, Jo came up the hill with a bundle in his arms. Charley watched him for a moment, half whimsically, half curiously. Yet he sighed once too as Portugais opened the door and came into the room. "Well done, Jo!" said he. "You have 'em?"

"Yes, M'sieu'. A good suit, and I believe they'll fit. Old Trudel says it's the best suit he's made in a year. I'm afraid he'll not make many more suits, old Trudel.

"He's very bad. When he goes there'll be no tailor--ah, old Trudel will be missed for sure, M'sieu'!"

Jo spread the clothes out on the table--a coat, waistcoat, and trousers of fulled cloth, grey and bulky, and smelling of the loom and the tailor's iron. Charley looked at them interestedly, then glanced at the clothes he had on, the suit that had belonged to him last year--grave-clothes.

He drew himself up as though rousing from a dream. "Come, Jo, clear out, and you shall have your new habitant in a minute," he said. Portugais left the room, and when he came back, Charley was dressed in the suit of grey fulled cloth. It was loose, but comfortable, and save for the refined face--on which a beard was growing now--and the eye-glass, he might easily have passed for a farmer. When he put on the dog-skin fur cap and a small muffler round his neck, it was the costume of the habitant complete.

Yet it was no disguise, for it was part of the life that Charles Mallard, once Charley Steele, should lead henceforth.

He turned to the door and opened it. "Good-bye, Portugais," he said.

Jo was startled. "Where are you going, M'sieu'?"

"To the village."

"What to do, M'sieu'?"

"Who knows?"

"You will come back?" Jo asked anxiously.

"Before sundown, Jo. Good-bye!"

This was the first long walk he had taken since he had become himself again. The sweet, cold air, with a bracing wind in his face, gave peace to the nerves but now strained and fevered in the fight with appetite. His mind cleared, and he drank in the sunny air and the pungent smell of the balsams. His feet light with moccasins, he even ran a distance, enjoying the glow from a fast-beating pulse.

As he came into the high-road, people passed him in carioles and sleighs. Some eyed him curiously. What did he mean to do? What object had he in coming to the village? What did he expect? As he entered the village his pace slackened. He had no destination, no object. He was simply aware that his new life was beginning.

He passed a little house on which was a sign, "Narcisse Dauphin, Notary." It gave him a curious feeling. It was the old life before him. "Charles Mallard, Notary?"--No, that was not for him. Everything that reminded him of the past, that brought him in touch with it, must be set aside. He moved on. Should he go to the Cure? No; one thing at a time, and today he wanted his thoughts for himself. More people passed him, and spoke of him to each other, though there was no coarse curiosity--the habitant has manners.

Presently he passed a low shop with a divided door. The lower half was closed, the upper open, and the winter sun was shining full into the room, where a bright fire burned.

Charley looked up. Over the door was painted, in straggling letters: "Louis Trudel, Tailor." He looked inside. There, on a low table, bent over his work, with a needle in his hand, sat Louis Trudel the tailor. Hearing footsteps, feeling a shadow, he looked up. Charley started at the look of the shrunken, yellow face; for if ever death had set his seal, it was on that haggard parchment. The tailor's yellow eyes ran

from Charley's face to his clothes.

"I knew they'd fit," he said, with a snarl. "Drove me hard, too!"

Charley had an inspiration. He opened the halfdoor, and entered.

"Do you want help?" he said, fixing his eyes on the tailor's, steady and persistent.

"What's the good of wanting--I can't get it," was the irritable reply, as he uncrossed his legs.

Charley took the iron out of his hand. "I'll press, if you'll show me how," he said.

"I don't want a fiddling ten-minutes' help like that."

"It isn't fiddling. I'm going to stay, if you think I'll do."

"You are going to stop--every day?" The old man's voice quavered a little.

"Precisely that." Charley wetted a seam with water as he had often seen tailors do. He dropped the hot iron on the seam, and sniffed with satisfaction.

"Who are you?" said the tailor.

"A man who wants work. The Cure knows. It's all right. Shall I stay?"

The tailor nodded, and sat down with a colour in his face.

CHAPTER XIV

ROSALIE, CHARLEY, AND THE MAN THE WIDOW PLOMONDON JILTED

From the moment there came to the post-office the letter addressed to "The Sick Man at the House of Jo Portugais at Vadrome Mountain," Rosalie Evanturel dreamed dreams. Mystery, so fascinating a thing in all the experiences of life, took hold of her. The strange man in the lonely hut on the hill, the bandaged head, the keen, piercing blue eyes, the monocle, like a masked battery of the mind, levelled at her--all appealed to that life she lived apart from the people with whom she had daily commerce. Her world was a world of books and dreams, and simple, practical duties of life. Most books were romance to her, for most were of a life to which she had not been educated. Even one or two purely Protestant books of missionary enterprise, found in a box in her dead mother's room, had had all the charms of poetry and adventure. It was all new, therefore all delightful, even when the Protestant sentiments shocked her as being not merely untrue, but hurting that aesthetic sense never remote from the mind of the devout Catholic.

She had blushed when monsieur had first looked at her, in the hut on Vadrome Mountain, not because there was any soft sentiment about him in her heart--how could there be for a man she had but just seen!--but because her feelings, her imagination, were all at high temperature;

because the man compelled attention. The feeling sprang from a deep sensibility, a natural sense, not yet made incredulous by the ironies of life. These had never presented themselves to her in a country, in a parish, where people said of fortune and misfortune, happiness and sorrow, "C'est le bon Dieu!"--always "C'est le bon Dieu!"

In some sense it was a pity that she had brains above the ordinary, that she had had a good education and nice tastes. It was the cultivation of the primitive and idealistic mind, which could not rationalise a sense of romance, of the altruistic, by knowledge of life. As she sat behind the post-office counter she read all sorts of books that came her way. When she learned English so as to read it almost as easily as she read French, her greatest joy was to pore over Shakespeare, with a heart full of wonder, and, very often, eyes full of tears--so near to the eyes of her race. Her imagination inhabited Chaudiere with a different folk, living in homes very unlike these wide, sweeping-roofed structures, with double windows and clean-scrubbed steps, tall doors, and wide, uncovered stoops. Her people--people of bright dreaming--were not quarrelsome, or childish, or merely traditional, like the habitants. They were picturesque and able and simple, doing good things in disguise, succouring distress, yielding their lives without thought for a cause, or a woman, and loving with an undying love.

Charley was of these people--from the first instant she saw him. The Cure, the Avocat, and the Seigneur were also of them, but placidly, unimportantly. "The Sick Man at Jo Portugais' House" came out of a mysterious distance. Something in his eyes said, "I have seen, I have known," told her that when he spoke she would answer freely, that they were kinsfolk in some hidden way. Her nature was open and frank; she lived upon the house-tops, as it were, going in and out of the lives of the people of Chaudiere with neighbourly sympathy and understanding. Yet she knew that she was not of them, and they knew that, poor as she was, in her veins flowed the blood of the old nobility of France. For this the Cure could vouch. Her official position made her the servant of the public, and she did her duty with naturalness.

She had been a figure in the parish ever since the day she returned from the convent at Quebec, and took her dead mother's place in the home and the parish. She had a quick temper, but there was not a cheerless note in her nature, and there was scarce a dog or a horse in the parish but knew her touch, and responded to it. Squirrels ate out of her hand, she had even tamed two partridges, and she kept in her little garden a bear she had brought up from a cub. Her devotion to her crippled father was in keeping with her quick response to every incident of sorrow or joy in the parish--only modified by wilful prejudices scarcely in keeping with her unselfishness.

As Mrs. Flynn, the Seigneur's Irish cook, said of her: "Shure, she's not made all av wan piece, the darlin'! She'll wear like silk, but she's not linen for everybody's washin'." And Mrs. Flynn knew a thing or two, as was conceded by all in Chaudiere. No gossip was Mrs. Flynn, but she knew well what was going on in the parish, and she had strong views upon all subjects, and a special interest in the welfare of two people in Chaudiere. One of these was the Seigneur, who, when her husband died, leaving behind him a name for wit and neighbourliness, and nothing else, proposed that she should come to be his cook. In spite of her protest that what was "fit for Teddy was not fit for a gintleman of quality," the Seigneur had had his way, never repenting of his choice. Mrs. Flynn's cooking was not her only good point. She had the rarest sense and an

unfailing spring of good-nature--life bubbled round her. It was she that had suggested the crippled M. Evanturel to the Seigneur when the office of postmaster became vacant, and the Seigneur had acted on her suggestion, henceforth taking greater interest in Rosalie.

It was Mrs. Flynn who gave Rosalie information concerning Charley's arrival at the shop of Louis Trudel the tailor. The morning after Charley came, Mrs. Flynn had called for a waistcoat of the Seigneur, who was expected home from a visit to Quebec. She found Charley standing at a table pressing seams, and her quick eye took him in with knowledge and instinct. She was the one person, save Rosalie, who could always divert old Louis, and this morning she puckered his sour face with amusement by the story of the courtship of the widow Plomondon and Germain Boily the horse-trainer, whose greatest gift was animal-training, and greatest weakness a fondness for widows, temporary and otherwise. Before she left the shop, with the stranger's smile answering to her nod, she had made up her mind that Charley was a tailor by courtesy only. So she told Rosalie a few moments afterwards.

"'Tis a man, darlin', that's seen the wide wuruld. 'Tis himisperes he knows, not parrishes. Fwhat's he doin' here, I dun'no'. Fwhere's he come from, I dun'no'. French or English, I dun'no'. But a gintleman born, I know. 'Tis no tailor, darlin', but tailorin' he'll do as aisy as he'll do a hunderd other things anny day. But how he shipped in here, an' when he shipped in here, an' what's he come for, an' how long he's stayin', an' meanin' well, or doin' ill, I dun'no', darlin', I dun' no'."

"I don't think he'll do ill, Mrs. Flynn," said Rosalie, in English.

"An' if ye haven't seen him, how d'ye know?" asked Mrs. Flynn, taking a pinch of snuff.

"I have seen him--but not in the tailor-shop. I saw him at Jo Portugais' a fortnight ago."

"Aisy, aisy, darlin'. At Jo Portugais'--that's a quare place for a stranger. 'Tis not wid Jo's introducshun I'd be comin' to Chaudiere."

"He comes with the Cure's introduction."

"An' how d'ye know that, darlin'?"

"The Curb was at Jo Portugais' with monsieur when I went there."

"You wint there!"

"To take him a letter--the stranger." "What's his name, darlin'?"

"The letter I took him was addressed, 'To the Sick Man at Jo Portugais' House at Vadrome Mountain.'"

"Ah, thin, the Cure knows. 'Tis some rich man come to get well, and plays at bein' tailor. But why didn't the letther come to his name, I wander now? That's what I wander."

Rosalie shook her head, and looked reflectively through the window towards the tailor-shop.

"How many times have ye seen him?"

"Only once;" answered Rosalie truthfully. She did not, however, tell Mrs. Flynn that she had thrice walked nearly to Vadrome Mountain in the hope of seeing him again; and that she had gone to her favourite resort, the Rest of the Flax-Beaters, lying in the way of the riverpath from Vadrome Mountain, on the chance of his passing. She did not tell Mrs. Flynn that there had scarcely been a waking hour when she had not thought of him.

"What Portugais knows, he'll not be tellin'," said Mrs. Flynn, after a moment. "An' 'tis no business of ours, is it, darlin'? Shure, there's Jo comin' out of the tailor-shop now!"

They both looked out of the window, and saw Jo encounter Filion Lacasse the saddler, and Maximilian Cour the baker. The three stood in the middle of the street for a minute, Jo talking freely. He was usually morose and taciturn, but now he spoke as though eager to unburden his mind--Charley and he had agreed upon what should be said to the people of Chaudiere.

The sight of the confidences among the three was too much for Mrs. Flynn. She opened the door of the post office and called to Jo. "Like three crows shtandin' there!" she said. "Come in--ma'm'selle says come in, and tell your tales here, if they're fit to hear, Jo Portugais. Who are you to say no when ma'm'selle bids!" she added.

Very soon afterwards Jo was inside the post-office, telling his tale with the deliberation of a lesson learned by heart.

"It's all right, as ma'm'selle knows," he said. "The Cure was there when ma'm'selle brought a letter to M'sieu' Mallard. The Cure knows all. M'sieu' come to my house sick-and he stayed there. There is nothing like the pine-trees and the junipers to cure some things. He was with me very quiet some time. The Cure come and come. He knows. When m'sieu' got well, he say, 'I will not go from Chaudiere; I will stay. I am poor, and I will earn my bread here.' At first, when he is getting well, he is carpent'ring. He makes cupboards and picture-frames. The Cure has one of the cupboards in the sacristy; the frames he puts on the Stations of the Cross in the church."

"That's good enough for me!" said Maximilian Cour. "Did he make them for nothing?" asked Filion Lacasse solemnly.

"Not one cent did he ask. What's more, he's working for Louis Trudel for nothing. He come through the village yesterday; he see Louis old and sick on his bench, and he set down and go to work."

"That's good enough for me," said the saddler. "If a man work for the Church for nothing, he is a Christian. If he work for Louis Trudel for nothing, he is a fool--first-class--or a saint. I wouldn't work for Louis Trudel if he give me five dollars a day."

"Tiens! the man that work for Louis Trudel work for the Church, for all old Louis makes goes to the Church in the end--that is his will. The Notary knows," said Maximilian Cour.

"See there, now," interposed Mrs. Flynn, pointing across the street to the tailor-shop. "Look at that grocer-man stickin' in his head; and

there's Magloire Cadoret and that pig of a barber, Moise Moisan, starin' through the dure, an'--"

As she spoke, the barber and his companion suddenly turned their faces to the street, and started forward with startled exclamations, the grocer following. They all ran out from the post-office. Not far up the street a crowd was gathering. Rosalie locked the office-door and followed the others quickly.

In front of the Hotel Trois Couronnes a painful thing was happening. Germain Boily, the horse-trainer, fresh from his disappointment with the widow Plomondon, had driven his tamed moose up to the Trois Couronnes, and had drunk enough whiskey to make him ill-tempered. He had then begun to "show off" the animal, but the savage instincts of the moose being roused, he had attacked his master, charging with wide-branching horns, and striking with his feet. Boily was too drunk to fight intelligently. He went down under the hoofs of the enraged animal, as his huge boar-hound, always with him, fastened on the moose's throat, dragged him to the ground, and tore gaping wounds in his neck.

It was all the work of a moment. People ran from the doorways and sidewalks, but stayed at a comfortable distance until the moose was dragged down; then they made to approach the insensible man. Before any one could reach him, however, the great hound, with dripping fangs, rushed to his master's body, and, standing over it, showed his teeth savagely. The hotel-keeper approached, but the bristles of the hound stood up, he prepared to attack, and the landlord drew back in haste. Then M. Dauphin, the Notary, who had joined the crowd, held out a hand coaxingly, and with insinuating rhetoric drew a little nearer than the landlord had done; but he retreated precipitously as the hound crouched back for a spring. Some one called for a gun, and Filion Lacasse ran into his shop. The animal had now settled down on his master's body, his bloodshot eyes watching in menace. The one chance seemed to be to shoot him, and there must be no bungling, lest his prostrate master suffer at the same time. The crowd had melted away into the houses, and were now standing at doorways and windows, ready for instant retreat.

Filion Lacasse's gun was now at disposal, but who would fire it? Jo Portugais was an expert shot, and he reached out a hand for the weapon.

As he did so, Rosalie Evanturel cried: "Wait, oh, wait!" Before any one could interfere she moved along the open space to the mad beast, speaking soothingly, and calling his name.

The crowd held their breath. A woman fainted. Some wrung their hands, and Jo Portugais, with blanched face, stood with gun half raised. With assured kindness of voice and manner, Rosalie walked deliberately over to the hound. At first the animal's bristles came up, and he prepared to spring, but murmuring to him, she held out her hand, and presently laid it on his huge head. With a growl of subjection, the dog drew from the body of his master, and licked Rosalie's fingers as she knelt beside Boily and felt his heart. She put her arm round the dog's neck, and said to the crowd, "Some one come--only one--ah, yes, you, Monsieur!" she added, as Charley, who had just arrived on the scene, came forward. "Only you, if you can lift him. Take him to my house."

Her arm still round the dog, she talked to him, as Charley came forward, and, lifting up the body of the little horse-trainer, drew him across his shoulder. The hound at first resented the act, but under Rosalie's touch

became quiet, and followed at their heels towards the post-office, licking the wounded man's hands as they hung down. Inside M. Evanturel's house the injured man was laid upon a couch. Charley examined his wounds, and, finding them severe, advised that the Cure be sent for, while he and Jo Portugais set about restoring him to consciousness. Jo had skill of a sort, and his crude medicaments were efficacious.

When the Cure came, the injured man was handed over to his care, and he arranged that in the evening Boily should be removed to his house, to await the arrival of the doctor from the next parish.

This was Charley's public introduction to the people of Chaudiere, and it was his second meeting with Rosalie Evanturel.

The incident brought him into immediate prominence. Before he left the post-office, Fillion Lacasse, Maximilian Cour, and Mrs. Flynn had given forth his history, as related by Jo Portugais. The village was agog with excitement.

But attention was not centred on himself, for Rosalie's courage had set the parish talking. When the Notary stood on the steps of the saddler's shop, and with fine rhetoric proposed a vote of admiration for the girl, the cheering could be heard inside the post-office, and it brought Mrs. Flynn outside.

"'Tis for her, the darlin'--for Ma'm'selle Rosalie--they're splittin' their throats!" she said to Charley as he was making his way from the sick man's room to the street door. "Did ye iver see such an eye an' hand? That avil baste that's killed two Injins already--an' all the men o' the place sneakin' behind dures, an' she walkin' up cool as leaf in mornin' dew, an' quietin' the divil's own! Did ye iver see annything like it, sir--you that's seen so much?"

"Madame, it is not touch of hand alone, or voice alone," answered Charley.

"Shure, 'tis somethin' kin in baste an' maid, you're manin' thin?"

"Quite so, Madame."

"Simple like, an' understandin' what Noah understood in that ark av his --for talk to the bastes he must have, explainin' what was for thim to do."

"Like that, Madame."

"Thru for you, sir, 'tis as you say. There's language more than tongue of man can shpake. But listen, thin, to me"--her voice got lower-- "for 'tis not the furst time, a thing like that, the lady she is-- granddaughter of a Seigneur, and descinded from nobility in France! 'Tis not the furst time to be doin' brave things. Just a shlip of a girl she was, three years ago, affther her mother died, an' she was back from convint. A woman come to the parish an' was took sick in the house of her brother--from France she was. Small-pox they said at furst. 'Twas no small-pox, but plague, got upon the seas. Alone she was in the house --her brother left her alone, the black-hearted coward. The people wouldn't go near the place. The Cure was away. Alone the woman was-- poor soul! Who wint--who wint and cared for her? Who do ye think, sir?"

"Mademoiselle?"

"None other. 'Go tell Mrs. Flynn,' says she, 'to care for my father till I come back,' an' away she wint to the house of plague. A week she stayed, an' no one wint near her. Alone she was with the woman and the plague. 'Lave her be,' said the Cure when he come back; 'tis for the love of God. God is with her--lave her be, and pray for her,' says he. An' he wint himself, but she would not let him in. 'Tis my work,' says she. 'Tis God's work for me to do,' says she. 'An' the woman will live if 'tis God's will,' says she. 'There's an agnus dei on her breast,' says she. 'Go an' pray,' says she. Pray the Cure did, an' pray did we all, but the woman died of the plague. All alone did Rosalie draw her to the grave on a stone-boat down the lane, an' over the hill, an' into the churchyard. An' buried her with her own hands at night, no one knowin' till the mornin', she did. So it was. An' the burial over, she wint back an' burned the house to the ground--sarve the villain right that lave the sick woman alone! An' her own clothes she burned, an' put on the clothes I brought her wid me own hand. An' for that thing she did, the love o' God in her heart, is it for Widdy Flynn or Cure or anny other to forgit? Shure the Cure was for iver broken-hearted, for that he was sick abed for days an' could not go to the house when the woman died, an' say to Rosalie, 'Let me in for her last hour.' But the word of Rosalie --shure 'twas as good as the words of a praste, savin' the Cure prisince wheriver he may be!"

This was the story of Rosalie which Mrs. Flynn told Charley, as he stood at the street door of the post-office. When she had finished, Charley went back into the room where Rosalie sat beside the sick man's couch, the hound at her feet. She came forward, surprised, for he had bade her good-bye but a few minutes before.

"May I sit and watch for an hour longer, Mademoiselle?" he said. "You will have your duties in the post-office."

"Monsieur--it is good of you," she answered.

For two hours Charley watched her going in and out, whispering directions to Mrs. Flynn, doing household duty, bringing warmth in with her, and leaving light behind her.

It was afternoon when he returned to his bench in the tailor-shop, and was received by old Louis Trudel in peevish silence. For an hour they worked in silence, and then the tailor said:

"A brave girl--that. We will work till nine to-night!"

CHAPTER XV

THE MARK IN THE PAPER

Chaudiere was nearing the last of its nine-days' wonder. It had filed past the doorway of the tailor-shop; it had loitered on the other side of the street; it had been measured for more clothes than in three months past--that it might see Charley at work in the shop, cross-legged on a bench, or wielding the goose, his eye glass in his eye. Here was sensation indeed, for though old M. Rossignol, the Seigneur, had an eye-

glass, it was held to his eye--a large bone-bound thing with a little gold handle; but no one in Chaudiere had ever worn a glass in his eye like that. Also, no one in Chaudiere had ever looked quite like "M'sieu'"--for so it was that, after the first few days (a real tribute to his importance and sign of the interest he created) Charley came to be called "M'sieu'," and the Mallard was at last entirely dropped.

Presently people came and stood at the tailor's door and talked, or listened to Louis Trudel and M'sieu' talking. And it came to be noised abroad that the stranger talked as well as the Cure and better than the Notary. By-and-by they associated his eye-glass with his talent, so that it seemed, as it were, to be the cause of it. Yet their talk was ever of simple subjects, of everyday life about them, now and then of politics, occasionally of the events of the world filtered to them through vast tracts of country. There was one subject which, however, was barred; perhaps because there was knowledge abroad that M'sieu' was not a Catholic, perhaps because Charley himself adroitly changed the conversation when it veered that way.

Though the parish had not quite made up its mind about him, there were a number of things in his favour. In the first place, the Cure seemed satisfied; secondly, he minded his own business. Also, he was working for Louis Trudel for nothing. These things Jo Portugais diligently impressed on the minds of all who would listen.

From above the frosted part of the windows of the post-office, in the corner where she sorted letters, Rosalie could look over at the tailor's shop at an angle; could sometimes even see M'sieu' standing at the long table with a piece of chalk, a pair of shears, or a measure. She watched the tailor-shop herself, but it annoyed her when she saw any one else do so. She resented--she was a woman and loved monopoly--all inquiry regarding M'sieu', so frequently addressed to her.

One afternoon, as Charley came out, on his way to the house on Vadrome Mountain, she happened to be outside. He saw her, paused, lifted his fur cap, and crossed the street to her.

"Have you, perhaps, paper, pens, and ink for sale, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, oh yes; come in, Monsieur Mallard."

"Ah, it is nice of you to remember me," he answered. "I see you every day--often," she answered.

"Of course, we are neighbours," he responded. "The man--the horse-trainer--is quite well again?"

"He has gone home almost well," she answered. She placed pens, paper, and ink before him. "Will these do?"

"Perfectly," he answered mechanically, and laid a few pens and a bottle of ink beside the paper.

"You were very brave that day," he said--they had not talked together since, though seeing each other so often.

"Oh, no; I knew he would make friends with me--the hound."

"Of course," he rejoined.

"We should show animals that we trust them," she said, in some confusion, for being near him made her heart throb painfully.

He did not answer. Presently his eye glanced at the paper again, and was arrested. He ran his fingers over it, and a curious look flashed across his face. He held the paper up to the light quickly, and looked through it. It was thin, half-foreign paper, without lines, and there was a water-mark in it--large, shadowy, filmy--Kathleen.

It was paper made in the mills which had belonged to Kathleen's uncle. This water-mark was made to celebrate their marriage-day. Only for one year had this paper been made, and then the trade in it was stopped. It had gone its ways down the channels of commerce, and here it was in his hand, a reminder, not only of the old life, but, as it were, the parchment for the new. There it was, a piece of plain good paper, ready for pen and ink and his letter to the Cure's brother in Paris--the only letter he would ever write, ever again until he died, so he told himself; but hold it up to the light and there was the name over which his letter must be written--Kathleen, invisible but permanent, obscured, but brought to life by the raising of a hand.

The girl caught the flash of feeling in his face, saw him holding the paper up to the light, and then, with an abstracted air, calmly lay it down.

"That will do, thank you," he said. "Give me the whole packet." She wrapped it up for him without a word, and he laid down a two-dollar note, the last he had in the world.

"How much of this paper have you?" he asked. The girl looked under the counter. "Six packets," she said. "Six, and a few sheets over."

"I will take it all. But keep it for me, for a week, or perhaps a fortnight, will you?" He did not need all this paper to write letters upon, yet he meant to buy all the paper of this sort that the shop contained. But he must get money from Louis Trudel--he would speak about it to-morrow.

"Monsieur does not want me to sell even the loose sheets?"

"No. I like the paper, and I will take it all."

"Very good, Monsieur."

Her heart was beating hard. All this man did had peculiar significance to her. His look seemed to say: "Do not fear. I will tell you things."

She gave him the parcel and the change, and he turned to go. "You read much?" he asked, almost casually, yet deeply interested in the charm and intelligence of her face.

"Why, yes, Monsieur," she answered quickly. "I am always reading."

He did not speak at once. He was wondering whether, in this primitive place, such a mind and nature would be the wiser for reading; whether it were not better to be without a mental aspiration, which might set up false standards.

"What are you reading now?" he asked, with his hand on the door.

"Antony and Cleopatra, also Enoch Arden," she answered, in good English, and without accent.

His head turned quickly towards her, but he did not speak.

"Enoch Arden is terrible," she added eagerly. "Don't you think so, Monsieur?"

"It is very painful," he answered. "Good-night." He opened the door and went out.

She ran to the door and watched him go down the street. For a little she stood thinking, then, turning to the counter, and snatching up a sheet of the paper he had bought, held it up to the light. She gave a cry of amazement.

"Kathleen!" she exclaimed.

She thought of the start he gave when he looked at the water-mark; she thought of the look on his face when he said he would buy all this paper she had.

"Who was Kathleen?" she whispered, as though she was afraid some one would hear. "Who was Kathleen!" she said again resentfully.

CHAPTER XVI

MADAME DAUPHIN HAS A MISSION

One day Charley began to know the gossip of the village about him from a source less friendly than Jo Portugais. The Notary's wife, bringing her boy to be measured for a suit of broadcloth, asked Charley if the things Jo had told about him were true, and if it was also true that he was a Protestant, and perhaps an Englishman. As yet, Charley had been asked no direct questions, for the people of Chaudiere had the consideration of their temperament; but the Notary's wife was half English, and being a figure in the place, she took to herself more privileges than did old Madame Dugal, the Cure's sister.

To her ill-disguised impertinence in English, as bad as her French and as fluent, Charley listened with quiet interest. When she had finished her voluble statement she said, with a simper and a sneer-for, after all, a Notary's wife must keep her position--"And now, what is the truth about it? And are you a Protestant?"

There was a sinister look in old Trudel's eyes as, cross-legged on his table, he listened to Madame Dauphin. He remembered the time, twenty-five years ago, when he had proposed to this babbling woman, and had been rejected with scorn--to his subsequent satisfaction; for there was no visible reason why any one should envy the Notary, in his house or out of it. Already Trudel had a respect for the tongue of M'sieu'. He had not talked much the few days he had been in the shop, but, as the old man had said to Filion Lacasse the saddler, his brain was like a pair of shears--it went clip, clip, clip right through everything. He now hoped that his

new apprentice, with the hand of a master-workman, would go clip, clip through madame's inquisitiveness. He was not disappointed, for he heard Charley say:

"One person in the witness-box at a time, Madame. Till Jo Portugais is cross-examined and steps down, I don't see what I can do!"

"But you are a Protestant!" said the woman snappishly. This man was only a tailor, dressed in fulled cloth, and no doubt his past life would not bear inspection; and she was the Notary's wife, and had said to people in the village that she would find out the man's history from himself.

"That is one good reason why I should not go to confession," he replied casually, and turned to a table where he had been cutting a waistcoat--for the first time in his life.

"Do you think I'm going to stand your impertinence? Do you know who I am?"

Charley calmly put up his monocle. He looked at the foolish little woman with so cruel a flash of the eye that she shrank back.

"I should know you anywhere," he said.

"Come, Stephan," she said nervously to her boy, and pulled him towards the door.

On the instant Charley's feeling changed. Was he then going to carry the old life into the new, and rebuke a silly garish woman whose faults were generic more than personal? He hurried forward to the door and courteously opened it for her.

"Permit me, Madame," he said.

She saw that there was nothing ironical in this politeness. She had a sudden apprehension of an unusual quality called "the genteel," for no storekeeper in Chaudiere ever opened or shut a shop-door for anybody. She smiled a vacuous smile; she played "the lady" terribly, as, with a curious conception of dignity, she held her body stiff as a ramrod, and with a prim merci sailed into the street.

This gorgeous exit changed her opinion of the man she had been unable to catechise. Undoubtedly he had snubbed her--that was the word she used in her mind--but his last act had enabled her, in the sight of several habitants and even of Madame Dugal, "to put on airs," as the charming Madame Dugal said afterwards.

Thinking it better to give the impression that she had had a successful interview, she shook her head mysteriously when asked about M'sieu', and murmured, "He is quite the gentleman!" which she thought a socially distinguished remark.

When she had gone, Charley turned to old Louis.

"I don't want to turn your customers away," he said quietly, "but there it is! I don't need to answer questions as a part of the business, do I?"

There was a sour grin on the face of old Trudel. He grunted some inaudible answer, then, after a pause, added: "I'd have been hung for murder, if she'd answered the question I asked her once as I wanted her to."

He opened and shut his shears with a sardonic gesture.

Charley smiled, and went to the window. For a minute he stood watching Madame Dauphin and Rosalie at the post-office door. The memory of his talk with Rosalie was vivid to him at the moment. He was thinking also that he had not a penny in the world to pay for the rest of the paper he had bought. He turned round and put on his coat slowly.

"What are you doing that for?" asked the old man, with a kind of snarl, yet with trepidation.

"I don't think I'll work any more to-day."

"Not work! Smoke of the devil, isn't Sunday enough to play in? You're not put out by that fool wife of Dauphin's?"

"Oh no--not that! I want an understanding about wages."

To Louis the dread crisis had come. He turned a little green, for he was very miserly--for the love of God.

He had scarcely realised what was happening when Charley first sat down on the bench beside him. He had been taken by surprise. Apart from the excitement of the new experience, he had profited by the curiosity of the public, for he had orders enough to keep him busy until summer, and he had had to give out work to two extra women in the parish, though he had never before had more than one working for him. But his ruling passion was strong in him. He always remembered with satisfaction that once when the Cure was absent and he was supposed to be dying, a priest from another parish came, and, the ministrations over, he had made an offering of a gold piece. When the young priest hesitated, his fingers had crept back to the gold piece, closed on it, and drawn it back beneath the coverlet again. He had then peacefully fallen asleep. It was a gracious memory.

"I don't need much, I don't want a great deal," continued Charley when the tailor did not answer, "but I have to pay for my bed and board, and I can't do it on nothing."

"How have you done it so far?" peevishly replied the tailor.

"By working after hours at carpentering up there"--he made a gesture towards Vadrome Mountain. "But I can't go on doing that all the time, or I'll be like you too soon."

"Be like me!" The voice of the tailor rose shrilly.

"Be like me! What's the matter with me?"

"Only that you're in a bad way before your time, and that you mayn't get out of this hole without stepping into another. You work too hard, Monsieur Trudel."

"What do you want--wages?"

Charley inclined his head. "If you think I'm worth them."

The tailor viciously snipped a piece of cloth. "How can I pay you wages, if you stand there doing nothing?" "This is my day for doing nothing," Charley answered pleasantly, for the tailor-man amused him, and the whimsical mental attitude of his past life was being brought to the surface by this odd figure, with big spectacles pushed up on a yellow forehead, and shrunken hands viciously clutching the shears.

"You don't mean to say you're not going to work to-day, and this suit of clothes promised for to-morrow night--for the Manor House too!"

With a piece of chalk Charley idly made heads on brown paper. "After all, why should clothes be the first thing in one's mind--when they are some one else's! It's a beautiful day outside. I've never felt the sun so warm and the air so crisp and sweet--never in all my life."

"Then where have you lived?" snapped out the tailor with a sneer. "You must be a Yankee--they have only what we leave over down there!" --he jerked his head southward. "We don't stop to look at weather here. I suppose you did where you come from?"

Charley smiled in a distant sort of way. "Where I came from, when we weren't paid for our work we always stopped to consider our health--and the weather. I don't want a great deal. I put it to you honestly. Do you want me? If you do, will you give me enough to live on--enough to buy a suit of clothes a year, to pay for food and a room? If I work for you for nothing, I have to live on others for nothing, or kill myself as you're doing."

There was no answer at once, and Charley went on: "I came to you because I saw you wanted help badly. I saw that you were hard-pushed and sick--"

"I wasn't sick," interrupted the tailor with a snarl.

"Well, overworked, which is the same thing in the end. I did the best I could: I gave you my hands--awkward enough they were at first, I know, but--"

"It's a lie. They weren't awkward," churlishly cut in the tailor.

"Well, perhaps they weren't so awkward, but they didn't know quite what to do--"

"You knew as well as if you'd been taught," came back in a growl.

"Well, then, I wasn't awkward, and I had a knack for the work. What was more, I wanted work. I wanted to work at the first thing that appealed to me. I had no particular fancy for tailoring--you get bowlegged in time!--the old spirit was fighting with the new--"but here you were at work, and there I was idle, and I had been ill, and some one who wasn't responsible for me--a stranger-worked for me and cared for me. Wasn't it natural, when you were playing the devil with yourself, that I should step in and give you a hand? You've been better since--isn't that so?" The tailor did not answer.

"But I can't go on as we are, though I want only enough to keep me going," Charley continued.

"And if I don't give you what you want, you'll leave?"

"No. I'm never going to leave you. I'm going to stay here, for you'll never get another man so cheap; and it suits me to stay--you need some one to look after you."

A curious soft look suddenly flashed into the tailor's eyes.

"Will you take on the business after I'm gone?" he asked at last. "It's along time to look ahead, I know," he added quickly, for not in words would he acknowledge the possibility of the end.

"I should think so," Charley answered, his eyes on the bright sun and the soft snow on the trees beyond the window.

The tailor snatched up a pattern and figured on it for a moment. Then he handed it to Charley. "Will that do?" he asked with anxious, acquisitive look, his yellow eyes blinking hard.

Charley looked at it musingly, then said "Yes, if you give me a room here."

"I meant board and lodging too," said Louis Trudel with an outburst of eager generosity, for, as it was, he had offered about one-half of what Charley was worth to him.

Charley nodded. "Very well, that will do," he said, and took off his coat and went to work. For a long time they worked silently. The tailor was in great good-humour; for the terrible trial was over, and he now had an assistant who would be a better tailor than himself. There would be more profit, more silver nails for the church door, and more masses for his soul.

"The Cure says you are all right. . . . When will you come here?" he said at last.

"To-morrow night I shall sleep here," answered Charley.

So it was arranged that Charley should come to live in the tailor's house, to sleep in the room which the tailor had provided for a wife twenty-five years before--even for her that was now known as Madame Dauphin.

All morning the tailor chuckled to himself. When they sat down at noon to a piece of venison which Charley had prepared himself--taking the frying-pan out of the hands of Margot Patry, the old servant, and cooking it to a turn--Louis Trudel saw his years lengthen to an indefinite period. He even allowed himself to nervously stand up, bow, shake Charley's hand jerkingly, and say:

"M'sieu', I care not what you are or where you come from, or even if you're a Protestant, perhaps an Englishman. You're a gentleman and a tailor, and old Louis Trudel will not forget you. It shall be as you said this morning--it is no day for work. We will play, and the clothes for the Manor can go to the devil. Smoke of hell-fire, I will go and have a pipe with that, poor wretch the Notary!"

So, a wonderful thing happened. Louis Trudel, on a week-day and a

market-day, went to smoke a pipe with Narcisse Dauphin, and to tell him that M. Mallard was going to stay with him for ever, at fine wages. He also announced that he had paid this whole week's wages in advance; but he did not tell what he did not know--that half the money had already been given to old Margot, whose son lay ill at home with a broken leg, and whose children were living on bread and water. Charley had slowly drawn from the woman the story of her life as he sat by the kitchen fire and talked to her, while her master was talking to the Notary.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TAILOR MAKES A MIDNIGHT FORAY

Since the day Charley had brought home the paper bought at the post-office, and water-marked Kathleen, he had, at odd times, written down his thoughts, and promptly torn the paper up again or put it in the fire. In the repression of the new life, in which he must live wholly alone, so far as all past habits of mind were concerned, it was a relief to record his passing reflections, as he had been wont to do when the necessity for it was less. Writing them here was like the bursting of an imprisoned stream; it was relaxing the ceaseless eye of vigilance; freeing an imprisoned personality. This personality was not yet merged into that which must take its place, must express itself in the involuntary acts which tell of a habit of mind and body--no longer the imitative and the histrionic, but the inherent and the real.

On the afternoon of the day that old Louis agreed to give him wages, and went to smoke a pipe with the Notary, Charley scribbled down his thoughts on this matter of personality and habit.

"Who knows," he wrote, "which is the real self? A child comes into the world gin-begotten, with the instinct for liquor in his brain, like the scent of the fox in the nostrils of the hound. And that seems the real. But the same child caught up on the hands of chance is carried into another atmosphere, is cared for by ginhating minds and hearts: habit fastens on him--fair, decent, and temperate habit--and he grows up like the Cure yonder, a brother of Aaron. Which is the real? Is the instinct for the gin killed, or covered? Is the habit of good living mere habit and mere acting, in which the real man never lives his real life, or is it the real life?"

"Who knows! Here am I, born with a question in my mouth, with the ever-present 'non possumus' in me. Here am I, to whom life was one poor futility; to whom brain was but animal intelligence abnormally developed; to whom speechless sensibility and intelligence was the only reality; to whom nothing from beyond ever sent a flash of conviction, an intimation, into my soul--not one. To me God always seemed a being of dreams, the creation of a personal need and helplessness, the despairing cry of the victims of futility--And here am I flung like a stone from a sling into this field where men believe in God as a present and tangible being; who reply to all life's agonies and joys and exultations with the words 'C'est le bon Dieu.' And what shall I become? Will habit do its work, and shall I cease to be me? Shall I, in the permanency of habit, become like unto this tailor here, whose life narrows into one sole cause; whose only wish is to have the Church draw the coverlet of forgiveness and safety over him; who has solved all questions in a blind belief or an

inherited predisposition--which? This stingy, hard, unhappy man--how should he know what I am denied! Or does he know? Is it all illusion? If there is a God who receives such devotion, to the exclusion of natural demand and spiritual anxieties, why does not this tailor 'let his light so shine before men that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven?' That is it. Therefore, wherefore, tailor-man? Therefore, wherefore, God? Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!"

Seated on his bench in the shop, with his eyes ever and anon raised towards the little post-office opposite, he wrote these words. Afterwards he sat and thought till the shadows deepened, and the tailor came in to supper. Then he took up the pieces of paper, and, going to the fire, which was still lighted of an evening, thrust them inside.

Louis Trudel saw the paper burning, and, glancing down, he noticed that one piece--the last--had slipped to the floor and was lying under the table. He saw the pencil still in Charley's hand. Forthwith his natural suspicion leaped up, and the cunning of the monomaniac was upon him. With all his belief in le bon Dieu and the Church, Louis Trudel trusted no one. One eye was ever open to distrust man, while the other was ever closed with blind belief in Heaven.

As Charley stooped to put wood in the fire, the tailor thrust a foot forward and pushed the piece of paper further under the table.

That night the tailor crept down into the shop, felt for the paper in the dark, found it, and carried it away to his room. All kinds of thoughts had raged through his diseased mind. It was a letter, perhaps, and if a letter, then he would gain some facts about the man's life. But if it was a letter, why did he burn it? It was said that he never received a letter and never sent one, therefore it was little likely to be a letter. If not a letter, then what could it be? Perhaps the man was English and a spy of the English government, for was there not disaffection in some of the parishes? Perhaps it was a plan of robbery. To such a state of hallucination did his weakened mind come, that he forgot the kindly feeling he had had for this stranger who had worked for him without pay. Suspicion, the bane of sick old age, was hot on him. He remembered that M'sieu' had put an arm through his when they went upstairs, and that now increased suspicion. Why should the man have been so friendly? To lull him into confidence, perhaps, and then to rob and murder him in his sleep. Thank God, his ready money was well hid, and the rest was safe in the bank far away! He crept back to his room with the paper in his hand. It was the last sheet of what Charley had written, and had been accidentally brushed off on the floor. It was in French, and, holding the candle close, he slowly deciphered the crabbed, characteristic handwriting.

His eyes dilated, his yellow cheeks took on spots of unhealthy red, his hand trembled. Anger seized him, and he mumbled the words over and over again to himself. Twice or thrice, as the paper lay in one hand, he struck it with the clinched fist of the other, muttering and distraught.

"This tailor here. . . . This stingy, hard, unhappy man. . . . If there is a God! . . . Therefore, wherefore, tailor-man? . . . Therefore, wherefore, God? . . . Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!"

Hatred of himself, blasphemy, the profane and hellish humour of--of the

infidel! A Protestant heretic--he was already damned; a robber--you could put him in jail; a spy--you could shoot him or tar and feather him; a murderer--you could hang him. But an infidel--this was a deadly poison, a black danger, a being capable of all crimes. An infidel--"Therefore, wherefore, tailor-man? . . . Therefore, wherefore, God? . . . Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!"

The devil laughing--the devil incarnate come to mock a poor tailor, to sow plague through a parish where all were at peace in the bosom of the Church. The tailor had three ruling passions--cupidity, vanity, and religion. Charley had now touched the three, and the whole man was alive. His cupidity had been flattered by the unpaid service of a capable assistant, but now he saw that he was paying the devil a wage. His vanity was overwhelmed by a satanic ridicule. His religion and his God had been assaulted in so shameful a way that no punishment could be great enough for the man of hell. In religion he was a fanatic; he was a demented fanatic now.

He thrust the paper into his pocket, then crept out into the hall and to the door of Charley's bedroom. He put his ear to the door. After a moment he softly raised the latch, and opened the door and listened again. 'M'sieu' was in a deep sleep.

Louis Trudel scarcely knew why he had listened, why he had opened the door and stood looking at the figure in the bed, barely definable in the semi-darkness of the room. If he had meant harm to the helpless man, he had brought no weapon; if he had been curious, there the man was peacefully sleeping!

His sick, morbid imagination was so alive, that he scarcely knew what he did. As he stood there listening, hatred and horror in his heart, a voice said to him: "Thou shalt do no murder." The words kept ringing in his ears. Yet he had not thought of murder. The fancied command itself was his first temptation towards such a deed. He had thought of raising the parish, of condign punishment of many sorts, but not this. As he closed the door softly, killing entered his mind and stayed there. "Thou shalt not" had been the first instigation to "Thou shalt."

It haunted him as he returned to his room, undressed himself, and went to bed. He could not sleep. "Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!" The challenge had been to himself. He must respond to it. The duty lay with him; he must answer this black infidel for the Church, for faith, for God.

The more he thought of it, the more Charley's face came before him, with the monocle shining and hard in the eye. The monocle haunted him. That was the infidel's sign. "Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!" What sign should he show?

Presently he sat up straight in bed. In another minute he was out and dressing. Five minutes later he was on his way to the parish church. When he reached it he took a tool from his pocket and unscrewed a small iron cross from the front door. It was a cross which had been blessed by the Pope, and had been brought to Chaudiere by the beloved mother of the Cure, now dead.

"When I have done with it I will put it back," he said, as he thrust it inside his shirt, and hurried stealthily back to his house. As he got into bed he gave a noiseless, mirthless laugh. All night he lay with his

yellow eyes wide open, gazing at the ceiling. He was up at dawn, hovering about the fire in the shop.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STEALING OF THE CROSS

If Charley had been less engaged with his own thoughts, he would have noticed the curious baleful look in the eyes of the tailor; but he was deeply absorbed in a struggle that had nothing to do with Louis Trudel.

The old fever of thirst and desire was upon him. All morning the door of Jolicoeur's saloon was opening and shutting before his mind's eye, and there was a smell of liquor everywhere. It was in his nostrils when the hot steam rose from the clothes he was pressing, in the thick odour of the fulled cloth, in the melting snow outside the door.

Time and again he felt that he must run out of the shop and away to the little tavern where white whiskey was sold to unwise habitants. But he fought on. Here was the heritage of his past, the lengthening chain of slavery to his old self--was it his real self? Here was what would prevent him from forgetting all that he had been and not been, all the happiness he might have had, all that he had lost--the ceaseless reminder. He was still the victim to a poison which gave not only a struggle of body, but a struggle of soul--if he had a soul.

"If he had a soul!" The phrase kept repeating itself to him even as he fought the fever in his throat, resisting the temptation to take that medicine which the Curb's brother had sent him.

"If he had a soul!" The thinking served as an antidote, for by the ceaseless iteration his mind was lulled into a kind of drowse. Again and again he went to the pail of water that stood on the window-sill, and lifting it to his lips, drank deep and full, to quench the wearing thirst.

"If he had a soul!" He looked at Louis Trudel, silent and morose, the clammy yellow of a great sickness in his face and hands, but his mind only intent on making a waistcoat--and the end of all things very near! The words he had written the night before came to him: "Therefore, wherefore, tailor-man? Therefore, wherefore, God? . . . Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!" As if in reply to his thoughts there came the sound of singing, and of bells ringing in the parish church.

A procession with banners was coming near. It was a holy day, and Chaudiere was mindful of its duties. The wanderers of the parish had come home for Easter. All who belonged to Chaudiere and worked in the woods or shanties, or lived in big cities far away, were returned--those who could return--to take the holy communion in the parish church. Yesterday the parish had been alive with a pious hilarity. The great church had been crowded beyond the doors, the streets had been full of cheerily dressed habitants. There had, however, come a sudden chill to the seemly rejoicings--the little iron cross blessed by the Pope had been stolen from the door of the church!

The fact had been told to the Cure as he said the Mass, and from the

altar steps, before going to the pulpit, he referred to the robbery with poignant feeling; for the relic had belonged to a martyr of the Church, who, two centuries before, had laid down his life for the Master on the coast of Africa.

Louis Trudel had heard the Cure's words, and in his place at the rear of the church he smiled sourly to himself. In due time the little cross should be returned, but it had work to do first. He did not take the holy communion this Easter day, or go to confession as was his wont. Not, however, until a certain day later did the Cure realise this, though for thirty years the tailor had never omitted his Easter-time duties.

The people guessed and guessed, but they knew not on whom to cast suspicion at first. No sane Catholic of Chaudiere could possibly have taken the holy thing. Presently a murmur crept about that M'sieu' might have been the thief. He was not a Catholic, and--who could tell? Who knew where he came from? Who knew what he had been? Perhaps a jail-bird-robber-murderer! Charley, however, stitched on, intent upon his own struggle.

The procession passed the doorway: men bearing banners with sacred texts, acolytes swinging censers, a figure of the Saviour carved in wood borne aloft, the Cure under a silk canopy, and a long line of habitants following with sacred song. People fell upon their knees in the street as the procession passed, and the Cure's face was bent here and there, his hand raised in blessing.

Old Louis got up from his bench, and, putting on a coat over his wool jacket, hastened to the doorway, knelt down, made the sign of the cross, and said a prayer. Then he turned quickly towards Charley, who, looking at the procession, then at the tailor, then back again at the procession, smiled.

Charley was hardly conscious of what he did. His mind had ranged far beyond this scene to the large issues which these symbols represented. Was it one universal self-deception? Was this "religion" the pathetic, the soul-breaking make-believe of mortality? So he smiled--at himself, at his own soul, which seemed alone in this play, the skeleton in armour, the thing that did not belong. His own words written that fateful day before he died at the Cote Dorion came to him:

"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!"

He was suddenly startled from his reverie, through which the procession was moving--a cloud of witnesses. It was the voice of Louis Trudel, sharp and piercing:

"Don't you believe in God and the Son of God?"

"God knows!" answered Charley slowly in reply--an involuntary exclamation of helplessness, an automatic phrase deflected from its first significance to meet a casual need of the mind. Yet it seemed like satire, like a sardonic, even vulgar, humour. So it struck Louis Trudel, who snatched up a hot iron from the fire and rushed forward with a snarl. So astounded was Charley that he did not stir. He was not prepared for the sudden onslaught. He did not put up his hand even, but stared at the tailor, who, within a foot of him, stopped short with the iron poised.

Louis Trudel repented in time. With the cunning of the monomaniac he realised that an attack now might frustrate his great stroke. It would bring the village to his shop door, precipitate the crisis upon the wrong incident.

As it chanced, only one person in Chaudiere saw the act. That was Rosalie Evanturel across the way. She saw the iron raised, and looked for M'sieu' to knock the tailor down; but, instead, she beheld the tailor go back and put the iron on the fire again. She saw also that M'sieu' was speaking, though she could hear no words.

Charley's words were simple enough. "I beg your pardon, Monsieur," he said across the room to old Louis; "I meant no offence at all. I was trying to think it out in a human sort of way. I suppose I wanted a sign from Heaven--wanted too much, no doubt."

The tailor's lips twitched, and his hand convulsively clutched the shears at his side.

"It is no matter now," he answered shortly. "I have had signs from Heaven; perhaps you will have one too!"

"It would be worth while," rejoined Charley musingly. Charley wondered bitterly if he had made an irreparable error in saying those ill-chosen words. This might mean a breach between them, and so make his position in the parish untenable. He had no wish to go elsewhere--where could he go? It mattered little what he was, tinker or tailor. He had now only to work his way back to the mind of the peasant; to be an animal with intelligence; to get close to mother earth, and move down the declivity of life with what natural wisdom were possible. It was his duty to adapt himself to the mind of such as this tailor; to acquire what the tailor and his like had found--an intolerant belief and an inexpensive security, to be got through yielding his nature to the great religious dream. And what perfect tranquillity, what smooth travelling found therein.

Gazing across the street towards the little post-office, he saw Rosalie Evanturel at the window. He fell to thinking about her. Rosalie, on her part, kept wondering what old Louis' violence meant.

Presently she saw a half-dozen men come quickly down the street, and, before they reached the tailorshop, stand in a group talking excitedly. Afterwards one came forward from the others quickly--Filion Lacasse the saddler. He stopped short at the tailor's door. Looking at Charley, he exclaimed roughly:

"If you don't hand out the cross you stole from the church door, we'll tar and feather you, M'sieu'." Charley looked up, surprised. It had never occurred to him that they could associate him with the theft. "I know nothing of the cross," he said quietly. "You're the only heretic in the place. You've done it. Who are you? What are you doing here in Chaudiere?"

"Working at my trade," was Charley's quiet answer. He looked towards Louis Trudel, as though to see how he took this ugly charge.

Old Louis responded at once. "Get away with you, Filion Lacasse," he croaked. "Don't come here with your twaddle. M'sieu' hasn't stole the cross. What does he want with a cross? He's not a Catholic."

"If he didn't steal the cross, why, he didn't," answered the saddler; "but if he did, what'll you say for yourself, Louis? You call yourself a good Catholic--bah!--when you've got a heretic living with you."

"What's that to you?" growled the tailor, and reached out a nervous hand towards the iron. "I served at the altar before you were born. Sacre! I'll make your grave-clothes yet, and be a good Catholic when you're in the churchyard. Be off with you. Ach," he sharply added, when Filion did not move, "I'll cut your hair for you!" He scrambled off the bench with his shears.

Filion Lacasse disappeared with his friends, and the old man settled back on his bench.

Charley, looking up quietly from his work, said "Thank you, Monsieur."

He did not notice what an evil look was in Louis Trudel's face as it turned towards him, but Rosalie Evanturel, standing outside, saw it; and she stole back to the post-office ill at ease and wondering.

All that day she watched the tailor's shop, and even when the door was shut in the evening, her eyes were fastened on the windows.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

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Suspicion, the bane of sick old age

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