



It is easy for interviewers or artists to successfully sketch the man of marked personality,—since words, phrases and similes, colours and curves, may be found wherewith to express his individuality as it betrays itself to the outside world. But to adequately picture the man of unmarked personality—we speak always as of people we meet—the man who in person, manner, or speech, possesses no marked characteristics, the man who, save for the accident of knowledge, we would not distinguish from a thousand,—this is difficult indeed. The artist has the advantage in the possession of colour and line, but the sketcher in language,—what has he for tools save stiff, inflexible and hackneyed words which convey all too much or too little of our meaning?

All of which is but a prelude to a chat about Gilbert Parker.

It was not an interview formally so termed—not at all. But Mr. Parker, during his brief stay in our city, proved the most accessible of men; and we had our twilight hour down in one of the cosy private parlours of the Queen's Hotel, when early April days made a glowing grate and five-o'clock tea an inviting incentive to prolonged gossip between such book-lovers as we three—the famous Canadian author and his two women guests, the little reviewer and her friend.

It was difficult to realise that this slight, well-proportioned, faultlessly groomed young man is the author of "Pierre and His People" and "The Chief Factor"; still more that those poetic little sketches, "In the Vashti Hills," are his creation, since the entire physique and pose indicate rather the man of action and practicalities than of imagination.

Nay; there are the fine-cut, regular features and eyes set beneath that keenly perceptive brow,—luminous eyes of changeable blue and grey tints,—these surely are the eyes of the idealist, the dreamer.

If Mr. Parker is not exceptional in appearance, neither is he in speech, which is unaffected, straightforward, and simple to a degree. We have neither mannerisms nor posings to pierce before reaching the real man. Rather, we find a directness and intensity bespeaking dramatic power.

Mr. Parker is at present engaged in dramatising that delightful latest book of his, "When Valmond Came to Pontiac." It will occupy him about three months, he thinks. Quite apart from the interest it will acquire, in view of the present Napoleonic literary revival, we venture to predict its success because of the dramatic force one guesses at after a quiet study of the dark, intent face with its regular features and luminous eyes.

The talk turned naturally upon book-making, and reviewing.

"I rarely reply to unfavorable criticism," said Mr. Parker; "but in this instance,"—

referring to one under discussion,—"I was compelled to do so in self-defence. There is nothing hurts like the malice of ignorance; and the writer had so entirely misconceived my intention in 'When Valmond Came to Pontiac' There is such a difference, also, in the tone of a review. One may say anything, if he but says it in a courteous way."

"We have a good deal to contend with in Canada, in the pressure of publishers," said the little book-reviewer. "Because a book is written by a Canadian, its publishers demand a favourable review, whether the book be worth it or not. If in justice to the public and ourselves we refuse to give it, they become disagreeable, even threatening."



GILBERT PARKER.

"And there is also the pathos of authors," added her friend. "'We are Canadians,' they cry. 'You will surely encourage Canadian literature, and my book means so much to me.'"

"I do not know how you manage as you do," said Mr. Parker. "The straight and narrow way of critical review must be hard to keep in a country whose native literature is yet in a budding stage. But the thing we have to remember, both as authors and critics, is that in literature we are of no country. I am proud of being Canadian; I state it everywhere; but I do not write for Canada, nor for England, nor America, but for the world."

"And the world's heart beats as one," said the little reviewer.

"Yes; there is only one literary standard in the English-speaking world, and that is the standard at the centre," added the author.

In his Hudson Bay stories Mr. Parker writes essentially as a romancer; he idealises the facts, as all true artists do. This is often misunderstood by his Canadian readers, who are disposed to judge from the realistic standpoint.

This is equally true of his Indian types. "Although there is often a strong foundation

of fact," he said. "I know one instance of a young man marrying an Indian girl, and sending her down to his parents in Detroit to be educated. He did not see her for two years, and at the end of that time she had developed into a charming and cultured woman. There is a woman of Indian blood at present moving in good London society,—the daughter of a chief. She has a beautiful young daughter. I met them quite recently."

"Are your series of charming little sketches—"In the Vashti Hills"—allegorical, Mr. Parker?" inquired one of his guests.

The author paused in his self-appointed task of pouring tea. "Did you find them too mystic?" he inquired, smiling.

"I know there is always an under-meaning, but cannot define it. The interpretation is elusive."

"You are right. Certainly, I intended each to contain a great central truth; but it is too indefinable. I shall re-write them some day."

"I never earned a dollar in Canadian journalism," said the author, as our chat came back to personal experience. "Except—I believe I once was given a five years' subscription to *The Week*, in return for some contribution. My only journalistic experience was won in Australia on the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Previous to that I was lecturing in that country, and had a travel through Australian wilds. It was full of interest; but, as you know, there is more of drudgery than romance in such expeditions. That was in 1886."

"No," in answer to a question, "I do not purpose writing any more Hudson Bay stories—not at present. As ideas take hold of one, so he must write."

Mr. Parker spoke as though an idea had already taken possession and was waiting to be clothed upon.

"Irving saw its possibilities," he said; "and several New York attempts have been stopped, since I hold the copyright."

"Then, you are going to write just ordinary books after this?" questioned one of the guests,—too interested to notice the implication.

Whereat the clever young author gave a hearty laugh. "That's good," he said. And just then the author's wife,—a stylish and attractive New York girl, and a bride of three months,—came in from her shopping trip. There was a little gossip of Bernhardt, of Canadian impressions, of the forthcoming dinner; and then *au revoir* until evening.

Possibly Mr. Parker's power was best revealed in his address at the National Club dinner tendered in his honour; which by the courtesy of the club secretary, Mr. Wiels, we were permitted to hear.

It was a speech modestly yet earnestly delivered—splendidly thoughtful; creamy in suggestion; elegantly dramatic in terse, expressive phrase; quotable at a score of points. It was a speech that not only every colonial litterateur, but every citizen, should hear, and rise in dignity in the hearing; for the plea of it was, "Let us be true," and the encouragement of it lay in the acknowledged "strength of the outposts."

For those who heard came away feeling that the term "colonial" was one that implied not reproach, but strength, dignity, and the virility of the primitive—a glorious literary endowment.

The toast, "To the Native Born," that introduced Mr. Gilbert Parker, was never more fittingly termed than for this strong young author, who so well upholds his country at the world's English heart.

FAITH FENTON.