

THE RIGHT OF WAY.*

The further label—The Story of Charley Steele and Another, by Gilbert Parker. "Beauty" Steele has set the fashion for years in the way of clothes, merely a penchant of Charley's, a man of intellect, keen and predominant. The question of what to expect afterwards stands badly answered with him. Spiritual discernment is over-ridden by the cynicism of his nature, commingled with the cold logic of his lawyer's mind; self-abasement is not in his line of march. The Who Knows! of his thoughts ends always with the interrogation, committed to verse at times. He pours oil on the waters; he has answered most questions—this remains to solve.

In its extreme formality and genteel lack of emotion, his marriage to Kathleen is highly pleasing to them both. Kathleen fills his eye; she is ornate; she is to be pedestalled with others of his art collections. That is all he asks of her. The Who-Knows solution rests not with Kathleen.

Charley drinks. It soothes him when he discovers himself in some time to come without a friend. The cold formality of their married life has worked on Kathleen. The marriage game is a sorry affair; she is tired of it all.

The Côte Dorion stands on the river's edge—in Quebec we are. Charley is an habitué of the place, a frequent loller over the bar, where one evening his growing eloquence on the Who-Knows! attracted the attention of his companions, river-drivers and shantymen, with a grievance against him. So much the worse for Charley; he is defiant with liquor; his sentiments begin to run wide of the mark prescribed by their superstition and ignorance. A wrangle commences and Charley is thrown into the river, senseless with a blow on the head.

It is in a hut on the Chaudière valley that life returns to Charley Steele, snatched from Eternity by a riverman and taken far down the river. Charley is a child now—the blow on the head did that for him. A skilled doctor happens along and his surgery on the disordered brain brings him back to his world of trouble; he searches for his inseparable monocle; it is useful to screw in one's eye, a ready vehicle for expression of emotion. Then he reads of Kathleen's re-marrying, this time with love in her heart. They call him dead, it seems. For seven months he has been out of the world. He embezzled trust monies, they say. Billy Wantage, his brother-in-law, did that, twenty thousand dollars of it; he was shielding Billy when the blow on the head came.

Charley doesn't return to Montreal. It were better not to bring more trouble to Kathleen and disgrace to

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Billy; leave well enough alone, and, casting off every coil of his old life, begin afresh in little Chaudière. Seven months of innocence and hardy living have worked wonders. He leaves the slough of evil ways behind.

Charles Mallard, no stranger from the monocle and the suggestion in the moistening of the lips with the tongue, sets up as a tailor at Chaudière. He is about to mix with men—a new sensation for him. It is stimulating to feel the pulse of life in the valley.

Then the Other, Rosalie Evanturel, comes into his life—no *habitante*, but a girl of lofty thought, generous imagination that lifts her humble surroundings to the height of enjoyment. Charley comes to her—the realization of a dream. He commands attention as ever. Her religion is deep, not narrow, else how could Charley find place in her affections? Charley doesn't attend Mass.

Charley is fighting these days—fighting with the problems of life—that's something; fighting with his growing love for Rosalie, calling to him in her heart—that's everything. He has his wife, Kathleen, to think of; honorable he must be—no ruthless oblivion of the

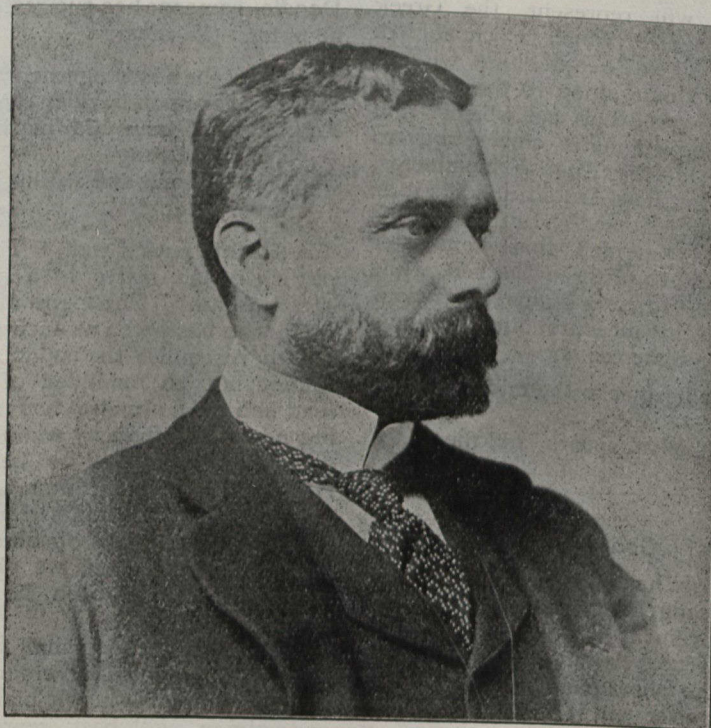
past, and to tell the Other all would work havoc. He is snared. Love grows to expression of love; nevertheless Rosalie's right of way is barred.

There is a Passion play in the valley; Charley has given his wits to its production for some time past. He stands apart from the crowd one day, moved by the whispered "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The Magdalene kneels towards the cross. She turns; it is Rosalie who speaks of this very peace Charley has been groping for. It is shown to him at last, reflected from a pure soul. He sleeps that night, a just man.

Billy Wantage appears in Chaudière, primed for evil. There's church money in the tailor's keeping. Charley is shot, and by Billy, with the recognition is mutual. Billy will be captured, and back will Charley be brought into the old life. Best take no chances of recovery; easy to slip the bandage, and death comes to him with Rosalie's call across the gulf.

This tragedy of hearts is tense and appealing. There is an artistic symmetry in the tempest within and the quiet without. Their mutual love is suggested rather than expressed until the dénouement is neared, and then with much pathos. The catastrophe is anticipated.

Charley has the repartee and cynicism of the author's Pierre—his magnetic personality as well. We treat the man rather as a curiosity until the *outré* in him is thrown off; sympathy for his spiritual struggles, the soul-tragedy of the story, comes unwillingly, we might say. Gilbert Parker has a firm touch; he has no half-dealings with



GILBERT PARKER.