

MARCH OF THE WHITE GUARD

By SIR GILBERT PARKER

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CHAPTER IV—Continued.

And Jaspur Hume was left alone with the starving Indian, who sat beside the fire eating voraciously, and the sufferer, who now mechanically was taking a little biscuit sopped in brandy.

"Yes," and the hands of the Sub-factor chafed those of the other.

"But you said you were a friend, and come to save me."

"I am come to save you."

There was a shiver of the sufferer's body. This discovery would either make him stronger or kill him altogether.

Jaspur Hume knew this, and said: "Varre Lepage, the past is past and dead to me; let it be so to you."

There was a pause.

"How—did you know—about me?"

"I was at Fort Providence; there came letters from the Hudson Bay Company, and from your wife, saying that you were making this journey, and were six months behind."

"My wife, my wife! Rose?"

"Yes, I have a letter for you from her. She is on her way to Canada. We are to take you to her."

"To take me—to her!" He shook his head sadly, but he pressed the letter that Jaspur Hume had just given him to his lips.

"To take you to her, Varre Lepage."

"No, I shall never—see her—again."

"I tell you, you shall. You can live if you will. You owe that to her—to me—to God!"

"To her—to you—to God. But I have been true—to none. To win her I wronged you doubly—and wronged her too; and wronging—both of you, I wronged That Other One. I have been punished. I shall die here."

"You shall go to Fort Providence. Do that in payment of your debt to me, Varre Lepage. I demand that."

In this sinning man there was a latent spark of honor, a sense of justice that might have been developed to great causes, to noble ends, if some strong nature, seeing his weaknesses, had not condoned them, but had appealed to the natural chivalry of an impressionable, vain, and weak character. He struggled to meet the eyes of Jaspur Hume, and doing so he gained confidence and said, "I will try to live. I will do you justice—yet. But, oh, my wife!"

"Your first duty is to eat and drink. We start for Fort Providence to-morrow morning."

The sick man stretched out his hand: "Food! Food!" he said.

In little bits food and drink were given to him, and his strength sensibly increased. The cave was soon aglow with the fire that was kindled by Late Carscallen and Cloud-in-the-Sky. There was little speaking, for the sick man soon fell asleep. Varre Lepage's Indian told Cloud-in-the-Sky the tale of their march—how the other Indian and the dogs died; how his master became ill as they were starting toward Fort Providence from Ma-lou Mountain in the summer weather; how they turned back and took refuge in this cave; how month by month they had lived on what would hardly keep a rabbit alive; and how at last his master urged him to press on with his papers; but he would not, and stayed until this day, when the last bit of food had been eaten, and they were found!

CHAPTER V.

The next morning Varre Lepage was placed upon a sled and they started back, Jacques barking joyfully as he led off, with Cloud-in-the-Sky beside him. There was light in the faces of all, though the light could not be seen by reason of their being muffled so. All day they traveled, scarcely halting, Varre Lepage's Indian being strong again and marching well. Often the corpse-like bundle on the sled was disturbed and biscuits wet in brandy and bits of preserved venison were given.

That night Jaspur Hume said to Late Carscallen: "I am going to start at the first light of the morning to get to Gaspé Toujours and Jeff Hyde as soon as possible. Follow as fast as you can. He will be safe if you give him food and drink often. I shall get to the place where we left them about noon; you should reach there at night or early the next morning."

"Hadin't you better take Jacques with you?" said Late Carscallen.

The Sub-factor thought a moment, and then said, "No, he is needed most where he is."

At noon the next day Jaspur Hume looks round upon a billowy plain of sun and ice, but he sees no staff, no

signal, no tent, no sign of human life: of Gaspé Toujours or of Jeff Hyde. His strong heart quails. Has he lost his way? He looks at the sun. He is not sure. He consults his compass, but it quivers hesitatingly, and then points downward! For a while wild bewilderment which seizes upon the minds of the strongest, when lost, masters him, in spite of his struggles against it. He moves in a maze of half-blindness, half-delirium. He is lost in it, is swayed by it. He begins to wander about; and there grow upon his senses strange delights and reelings agonies. He hears church bells, he catches at butterflies, he tumbles in new-mown hay, he wanders in a tropic garden. But in the hay a wasp stings him, and the butterfly changes to a curling black snake that strikes at him and glides to a dark flowing river full of floating ice, and up from the river a white hand is thrust, and it beckons him—beckons him! He shuts his eyes and moves toward it, but a voice stops him, and it says, "Come away! come away!" and two arms fold him round, and as he goes back from the shore he stumbles and falls, and

What is this? A yielding mass at his feet! A mass that stirs! He clutches at it, he tears away the snow, he calls aloud—and his voice has a far-away unnatural sound—"Gaspé Toujours! Gaspé Toujours!" Yes, it is Gaspé Toujours! And beside him lies Jeff Hyde, and alive! ay, alive! Thank God!

Jaspur Hume's mind is itself again. It has but suffered for a moment what comes to most men when they recognize first that they are being shadowed by the awful ban of "Lost."

Gaspé Toujours and Jeff Hyde had lain down in the tent the night of the great wind and had gone to sleep at once. The staff had been blown down, the tent had fallen over them, the drift had covered them, and for three



He Moves in a Maze of Half-Blindness, Half-Delirium.

days they had slept beneath the snow; never waking.

Jeff Hyde's sight was come again to him. "You've come back for the book," he said; "you couldn't go on without it. You ought to have taken it yesterday;" and he drew it from his bosom.

"No, Jeff, I've not come back for that; and I did not leave you yesterday; it is three days and more since we parted. The book has brought us luck, and the best! We have found him; and they'll be here to-night with him. I came on ahead to see how you fared."

In that frost-bitten world Jeff Hyde uncovered his head for a moment. "Gaspé Toujours is a Papist," he said; "but he read me some of that book the day you left, and one thing we went to sleep on; it was that about 'Lightenin' the darkness, and defendin' us from all the perils and dangers of this night.'" Here Gaspé Toujours made the sign of the cross. Jeff Hyde continued half apologetically for his comrade, "It comes natural to Gaspé Toujours—I guess it always does to Papists. But I never had any trainin' that way, and I had to turn the thing over and over, and I fell asleep on it. And when I wake up three days after, here's my eyes as fresh as daisies, and you back, Captain, and the thing done that we come to do!"

He put the book into the hands of Jaspur Hume, and Gaspé Toujours at that moment said, "See!" And far off, against the eastern horizon, appeared a group of moving figures!

That night the broken segments of the White Guard were reunited, and Varre Lepage slept by the side of Jaspur Hume.

CHAPTER VI.

To conquer is to gain courage and unusual powers of endurance. Napoleon might have marched back from Moscow with undecimated legions safely enough, if the heart of those legions had not been crushed. The White Guard, with their faces turned homeward and the man they had sought for in their care, seemed to

have acquired new strength. Through days of dreadful cold, through nights of appalling fierceness, through storm upon the plains that made for them paralyzing coverlets, they marched. And if Varre Lepage did not grow stronger, life at least was kept in him, and he had once more the desire to live.

There was little speech among them, but once in a while Gaspé Toujours sang snatches of the songs of the voyagers of the great rivers; and the hearts of all were strong. Between Jacques and his master there was occasional demonstration. Jacques seemed to know that a load was being lifted from the heart of Jaspur Hume, and Jaspur Hume, on the twentieth day homeward, said with his hand on the dog's head, "It had to be done, Jacques; even a dog could see that!"

And so it was "all right" for the White Guard. One day when the sun was warmer than usual over Fort Providence, and just sixty-five days since that cheer had gone up from apprehensive hearts for brave men going out into the Barren Grounds, Sergeant Gosse, who every day and of late many times a day, had swept the northeast with a field-glass, rushed into the Chief Factor's office, and with a broken voice cried, "The White Guard! The White Guard!" and pointed toward the northeast. And then he leaned his arm and head against the wall and sobbed. And the old Factor rose from his chair tremblingly, and said, "Thank God," and went hurriedly into the square. But he did not go steadily—the joyous news had shaken him, sturdy old pioneer as he was. As he passes out one can see that a fringe of white has grown about his temples in the last two months. The people of the Fort had said, they had never seen him so irascible, yet so gentle; so uneasy, yet so reserved; so stern about the mouth,

yet so kind about the eyes as he had been since Jaspur Hume had gone with his brave companions on this desperate errand.

Already the handful of people at the Fort had gathered. Indians left the store and joined the rest; the Factor and Sergeant Gosse set out to meet the little army of relief. God knows what was in the hearts of the Chief Factor and Jaspur Hume when they shook hands. To the Factor's "In the name of the Hudson Bay Company, Mr. Hume," there came "By the help of God, sir," and he pointed to the sled whereon Varre Lepage lay. A feeble band was clasped in the burly hand of the Factor, and then they fell into line again, Cloud-in-the-Sky running ahead of the dogs. Snow had fallen on them, and as they entered the stockade, man and dogs were white from head to foot.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Lombard Would Put Him Up.

Harding Lombard, of Wales, Me., was a quaint character. He had a ready wit, but was slow to express it, on account of an impediment in his speech.

One stormy night in winter a big tramp called, and Mr. Lombard, going to the door in his stockings, the tramp asked if he would put him up.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," replied Mr. L. "You wait till I get my boo-boo-boots on, and I will pu-put you up so high you never'll get down again."

Everything Her Own Way.

He (after a spat)—I sometimes think you women court domestic quarrels.

She—We do not. If we had our way there'd be none.

He—Oh, exactly—if you had your way.

Standing for a Good Deal.

"What, my frinsas," dramatically demanded Thomas Bott, "does the old party stand for?"

"Well, you, for one thing," replied a pessimistic voice from the back of the hall.—Puck.



ALONE AT CHRISTMASTIME

By S. BARING-GOULD

Is there—can there be—a man more lonely than one returned from a far country, who has been out of his home land for 20 years, and comes back when his parents are dead, his old friends dispersed, and the old nest has passed to other occupants? And can his loneliness be more emphasized than when his return synchronizes with Christmas?

That was my condition when I revisited the mother country. With a beating heart and straining eyes I had looked for the first sight of dear old America after having left it as a lad, hardly a man, some 20 years ago.

I was back—not to home—I had no home now. My heart began to fail me, my spirits decline, when I reached the little country town near which I had been born, and where I had fled the golden hours of childhood. No one knew me. In the churchyard I laid a wreath on the graves where lay dear old father and mother. I looked at our house. It had been rebuilt and was occupied by strangers.



"You Are Very Good."

I went through the village. The little shops had fresh names over them. The old rector who had baptized me was dead. The old school was gone. The ancient church had been renovated. The village inn was in new hands. The old Christmas was no more. No frost, no snow, no icicles; only sludge and a drizzling rain.

I returned from my visit to the village in deep depression. I would haste to the rooms I had taken in a house in the town, and spend my Christmas Eve with my pipe and glass—alone, with not even an old dog to lie at my feet and look up with speaking eyes into my face and sympathize with me in my solitude. I would pass the evening before the fire, looking into the red coals, not building castles among them, but watching the tumbling down of old cottages, old farms, old reminiscences, into ash.

I had done well in the other land, and had returned, not a rich man, but with a competence.

It had been my wish, my ambition, to settle in the village about which

clung all my sweetest and holiest thoughts; to buy there a little land, to tread the old paths, ramble in the same woods, look upon the same scenes, dwell among the same people, re-make a home in the same place. But now?—Could it be?

As I walked back to my lodgings, through the street and by the market place, folk were hurrying in all directions, some with bunches of holly in their hands, a girl or two with a sprig of mistletoe slyly hid in her muff, a man wheeling a Christmas tree on a barrow, butchers' boys carrying joints for the morrow's dinner. Plum puddings and mince pies were displayed in the confectioners' shops. The chemist, the hairdresser, the seedsman, the draper had stuffed their windows with toys, toys, toys. He who had come to earth as a little child had filled every heart with thought of the little ones, and desire to make Christmas a day of joy to them. I had no tiny ones of my own, no little nieces and nephews, no small cousins for whom to provide anything. I was alone—utterly, desolately alone.

As I pursued my way I saw a tall, slim girl walking before me with a basket on her arm, and I noticed that the bottom had come out, and that the contents fell on the pavement. Of this she was unaware. I stooped and picked up a little woolly lamb, then—a something wrapped in paper—then a silver match box breaking out of its covering.

Gathering them together, I ran after the girl and stopped her.

"Excuse me," said I, "are you a female Hop o' my Thumb, dropping tokens whereby your track may be known?"

I showed her what I had collected. She colored and thanked me. Then I recognized her as the daughter of my landlady.

"You must allow me," said I, "to tie my handkerchief round the basket, and to carry it for you. I believe that we go the same way."

"You are very good," she replied. "We are about to have a Christmas tree for the children this evening, and I have been making some trifling purchases as presents for my brothers and sisters, and for papa and mamma, who must not be forgotten."

"There go the candles!" I exclaimed, as a cataract of red, yellow and green tapers shot out of the basket.

"And there's an orange!" said she, as one of these fruit bounced forth and fell, and rolled away into the gutter.

We were forced to stoop and collect the scattered wax lights, and then to tie my large handkerchief about the basket.

"What a fortunate thing," said I, "that I have got a good sized kerchief in place of one of the miserable little rags that do service nowadays. That is, because I cling to old customs, and when I was a boy my mother always gave me something like a dish-cloth in my pocket."

Then we proceeded on our way, and when we went into the house, she received the basket from me, and again thanked me. "You must not remove the kerchief till all is unpacked," I said, "or there will be another discharge of the contents, and then the children will see what you have provided for them."

THE TRUE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT



"Shall you be dining out to-morrow?" asked the girl.

"I—oh, no! I have none to dine with. I know no one here."

"And this evening. Shall you be going anywhere?"

"I—oh, no! I have nowhere whither to go."

So we parted, and I ascended to my room. I made up the fire, and sat down and reread the newspaper. There was much in it about the approaching feast. I had the illustrated papers. They had issued Christmas supplements, with pictures of happy family gatherings, of Old Father Christmas, of waits and carol singers. I might perhaps hear the waits and singers. I should certainly hear the Christmas bells. That would be all.

I had done with my papers. I sat before the fire in a brown study, and my spirits sank lower and ever lower. I recalled the old Christmases I had spent at home with my parents. I remembered how I had looked into my stockings on the morning to see if Old Father Christmas had visited me in the night and had left there some presents for the Good Boy.

Alas! No Father Christmas would visit me now. All that was of the past—the utterly and irrevocably past.

I did not light my candles. I could read no more. I needed no light for my thoughts, they were too dark to be illumined thus.

As I stood thus musing, I heard a tap at my door, and shouted: "Come in!" There ensued delay, and I called again: "Come in!"

Then the door opened and I saw some little heads outside, with golden curls and flushed cheeks, and a child's voice said: "Please, Mr. What's-your-name, will you come to our tree downstairs?"

"I—!"

"Please—Annie told us to ask you." And then I saw the tall girl whom I had assisted draw back into the dark behind them.

"Most certainly I will, as you are so kind as to invite me."

So I descended, and there were my landlord and landlady, radiant with happiness, and the five children danced before me and said: "He is come; is it not nice?" Behind, presently, entered Annie, somewhat shyly, and pretending she had come from the kitchen.

I was witness of the delight of the little ones over their presents—the



I Saw the Tall Girl.

woolly lamb, a small cart, a cannon, a doll—the father over a pair of warm stockings of Annie's knitting, the mother over a shawl, also of her work; and I stood smiling and happy, when up sprang one of the children and plucked from the tree the silver match box.

"This," said the child, "is for Mr. What's-his-name. Sister Annie said it was for him."

I was moved more than I can say. So—some had been thinking of me, though I was only a lodger.

"Look here, sir!" said the father, "you're a stranger in the country, and at such a time as this there must be no strangers. You must really sup with us, and dine also with us to-morrow. I can promise you a good dinner, for it is of Annie's making."

All was changed. I was a stranger and they took me in; I was lonely and they made me a friend.

Christmas day, 10:30 p. m.

I returned to my room upstairs, made up the fire, and seated myself before it. I had spent a very pleasant day, and a pleasant evening before that. I did not now feel so discouraged, so hopeless. That was a nice family, very friendly and considerate. And I began to build in the fire. I no longer saw only ruins. I saw, as it were, a pleasant home rise out of the coals, and a pleasing face looked up at me out of them—very much like that of Annie. Ah! if the old home was gone, might I not build one that would be new. I need no longer live in the past, but look to the future, and next Christmas, please God—I would not be alone, that is if Annie—but I cannot say—will consent to put an end to my loneliness and help in building up a future.

Of Interest to Stockholders.

Jaspur—I hear that Santa Claus has given up his yearly rounds.

Jumpuppe—You don't tell me!

Jaspur—Yes. He has accepted a regular position on the "Salaries Committees" of various big corporations.

—Town Topics.