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OBSERVATIONS.

A Non-Intime.

The serial story most talked about in these parts is Gilbert Parker's "Right of Way," now appearing in Harper's Magazine. Unquestionably it is the most interesting serial that has appeared since Du Maurier's Trilby. Charley Steele, the hero, is a "non-intime." He is one of those persons who do right without the inspiration of a passion for righteousness. The refuge of the helpless, tolerant in spite of scoffing, an aesthete in the word's best sense, the protector of the weak, and a fascinating philosopher, he bears his own misfortunes as equably as though they were his neighbor's troubles. There are non-intimes with philosophical tendencies in Lincoln who bear their neighbor's troubles with admirable calmness. Charley Steele accepted undeserved disgrace, the world's contumely, the humble calling of a tailor and exile from his dwelling-town, with cheerfulness. Nevertheless, in the little town among simple poor folk he is a non-intime as he was among his rich acquaintances in the city he is exiled from. In some mysterious, world-universal way the villagers feel that a man has come to live among them who yet is separated from them by an aristocratic barrier. They think they suspect him because he is a stranger and an unbeliever. They are Canadian-French, a simple, unsophisticated people, good catholics all, with a horror of heresy and its post-mortem consequences. When they discover that Charley Steele does not worship God as they do they suspect him of robbing the church, or burglary of private houses, even of murder. The soul of isolation never explains. Charley was aware that the village distrusted him and why. Although he had begun to feel the ubiquitous presence of Providence, that even he was led and that he had never had his head, he was too proud, or rather too absolutely a non-intime to seek to change their impression of him.

The first chapters of the story are devoted to Charley's very brilliant conduct of a murder case, for he was a lawyer in his first period, known as "Beauty Steele," and for his keen intellect. He is a drunkard and while drinking, is struck on the head by a logger who resents Charley's aloofness though he does not name it aloofness, but pride and heresy. The blow stuns Charley and he is thrown into the river, from which the murderer, whom he has saved from the gallows, rescues him, carries him home to his hut in the woods and nurses him back to health. Charley gets well, all but the memory part of his mind. For six months or a year he is tormented with a thirst that he does not know how to satisfy. He drinks water from a spring near the hut, quantities of water, for he is always thirsty. Then a great physician removes the pressure on his brain by trepaning and Charley recovers his memory of what will momentarily satisfy his thirst, of his heartless wife, and of his profession. The surgeon has left powders in case his patient wishes to conquer a drunkard's temptation, which, he percieves will assail him as soon as memory is released from the numbing pressure of a broken skull. Charley remembers everything when the anaesthetic ceases to affect him, and an old newspaper informs him of the remarriage of his wife to an army officer she had long hopelessly admired. Thereupon he determines (and the author does not say "he determines" but shows it by action) to lead a different life. He finds a tailor in the nearest village who needs help. Charlie learns the business and when the tailor dies, succeeds to the business and makes the trousers, coats and vests for a village full of peasants. Imagine the lawyer with the largest practice in this city giving it up and voluntarily consenting to make clothes for a living. To nurse the sick of nights, to screen the guilty at the cost of his own reputation, to deny love, to take the humblest place in a city where all are lowly, this was what the gifted "Beauty Steele" did. To be spat upon by clowns and still to bless them! Only one Man ever really succeeded in fulfilling his own sermon. But outwardly "Beauty Steele" obeyed the Sermon on the Mount. He crucified love and his appetite. Slapped, he turned his cheek, spat upon he did not revile, and he gave more than his cloak to the needy. Such is the inevitable tragedy of life that so good a draughtsman as Gilbert Parker will not answer the prayers of all the spinsters and sentimental people who read serial love stories to let these lovers marry and live happily ever afterwards. They must suffer and die like Juliet and Romeo. The chorus sings a death song and the girl and the man will die.

Charlie's struggle with his appetite is manful. It is like the gladiatorial fight in the Roman arena where an unarmed man fought a hungry lion. The man was always conquered, but the old Romans said it was a fine sight to see the straining muscles of a Christian athlete throw the lion and almost strangle him. The Romans loved athletics. And still we love a struggle where the issue is death.

The New Assessment Plan.

The men sent out by Mr. Aitkin to make county assessments are instructed to appraise a stock of goods or any taxable property at the full valuation. This is all very well, but the men are instructed not to take the owner's appraisal, but to inspect the property and appraise it themselves. The new assessor evidently believes that the taxpayers of Lincoln are thieves and cannot be trusted to return a true list of their holdings. The imposition of such a belief on the citizens, good and bad of Lincoln is contrary to the spirit of the common law, which even holds a man arrested for murder, innocent, until his guilt has been proven without a reasonable doubt, to twelve of his peers. How can Mr. Aitkin's emissaries who are not expert financiers, but ordinary toilers of the land, appraise goods of whose value they have no knowledge? One of the least of these assessors recently arrived at The Courier office, and enquired about the value of the type, etc. He was invited to inspect the type treasures belonging to this paper. He replied that he knew nothing about the printer's business. Not being allowed to take the owner's word for the value of the type and knowing nothing about it himself, it is difficult to surmise the basis of his appraisement. This incident would not be adverted to here were the complaints of arbitrary and ignorant assessments, under the new dispensation, not numerous.

Technique.

There is a comparatively large number of people who have, what is called, a "natural ear" for music. They can play any simple tune they hear without being able to read notes. They are seldom musicians of fastidious taste or of much knowledge. Occasionally a natural-eared musician conquers his predisposition to take music easily, and strenuously exerts himself to learn to play by note, but he has to overcome his original talent first. Other professions contain examples of natural talent which interferes with the acquirement of a good technique. A large number of people possessing ideas and the imagination of a romancist begin to write books and short stories without acquiring any knowledge whatever of the language they must use to convey their concealed thoughts to an audience. The use of could, would and should is an infallible indication of culture or illiteracy. Sentences like "If he would have done so" a constant employment of would, should and could, where the past or present indicative is indicated, are characteristic of the talent which has depended upon its own leading and has ignored the patient study of the masters of English and of the analysis of their medium of expression. No musician who neglects the scientific study of music is listened to with respect by musicians. It is quite as preposterous to expect that a reviewer who has any technical knowledge of the language, who has studied faithfully what the author has chosen to ignore, will lay aside his standards of measurement thus acquired. A book review, if it have any value whatever, must be the sincere judgment of a person with a certain amount of discrimination and with technical knowledge of the art he discusses. Not that criticism is of much value anyway, but people are fond of reading criticisms of plays they have seen, books they have read, and music they have heard. Criticism should advert to merit and excellences more than to faults. But sometimes the technical faults are so glaring that the critic's predisposition to approve the work, it may be of a friend, is obliterated at the beginning. The faults of composition obscure the real sweep of the imagination and of original thought. The carping critic is a nuisance but the smug, insincere, cowardly critic is unsanitary, and of no use to the community he attempts to serve. My friend Mr. Mason, of Beatrice, avers that the book reviewer of The Courier often underestimates what he says is "hot stuff" for the reason that it contains a few unimportant grammatical errors. But the reviewer in question thinks that a man who expects to speak to a large audience owes it to the precious time of his audience to prepare himself to speak intelligibly. Life is short and if a man speak to a thousand for only an hour it means a thousand hours or about a month and a half of one person's time. It is therefore selfishly conceited not to learn the most concise methods of expression. And the "natural ear" thumper whose repertoire is composed of street-band tunes and of the latest soubrette fancies might as reasonably expect to charm good musicians who chance to be in his neighborhood, as for the author who has neglected to learn the movement, the mechanism of his medium of expression, to expect to receive the approval of honest critics.

Considering the amount of creative talent in this city it is a pity that the school children are not taught to