

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whittman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
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**The Weavers: a tale of England  
and Egypt of fifty years ago -  
Complete**

Gilbert Parker

# Imprint

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# **THE WEAVERS**

**By Gilbert Parker**



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## INTRODUCTION

When I turn over the hundreds of pages of this book, I have a feeling that I am looking upon something for which I have no particular responsibility, though it has a strange contour of familiarity. It is as though one looks upon a scene in which one had lived and moved, with the friendly yet half-distant feeling that it once was one's own possession but is so no longer. I should think the feeling to be much like that of the old man whose sons, gone to distant places, have created their own plantations of life and have themselves become the masters of possessions. Also I suppose that when I read the story through again from the first page to the last, I shall recreate the feeling in which I lived when I wrote it, and it will become a part of my own identity again. That distance between himself and his work, however, which immediately begins to grow as soon as a book leaves the author's hands for those of the public, is a thing which, I suppose, must come to one who produces a work of the imagination. It is no doubt due to the fact that every piece of art which has individuality and real likeness to the scenes and character it is intended to depict is done in a kind of trance. The author, in effect, self-hypnotises himself, has created an atmosphere which is separate and apart from that of his daily surroundings, and by virtue of his imagination becomes absorbed in that atmosphere. When the book is finished and it goes forth, when the imagination is relaxed and the concentration of mind is withdrawn, the atmosphere disappears, and then. One experiences what I feel when I take up 'The Weavers' and, in a sense, wonder how it was done, such as it is.

The frontispiece of the English edition represents a scene in the House of Commons, and this brings to my mind a warning which was given me similar to that on my entering new fields outside the one in which I first made a reputation in fiction. When, in a certain year, I determined that I would enter the House of Commons I had many friends who, in effect, wailed and gnashed their teeth. They said that it would be the death of my imaginative faculties; that I should never write anything any more; that all the qualities which make literature living and compelling would disappear. I thought this was all wrong then, and I know it is all wrong now. Political life does certainly interfere with the amount of work which an author

may produce. He certainly cannot write a book every year and do political work as well, but if he does not attempt to do the two things on the same days, as it were, but in blocks of time devoted to each separately and respectively, he will only find, as I have found, that public life the conflict of it, the accompanying attrition of mind, the searching for the things which will solve the problems of national life, the multitudinous variations of character with which one comes in contact, the big issues suddenly sprung upon the congregation of responsible politicians, all are stimulating to the imagination, invigorating to the mind, and marvellously freshening to every literary instinct. No danger to the writer lies in doing political work, if it does not sap his strength and destroy his health. Apart from that, he should not suffer. The very spirit of statesmanship is imagination, vision; and the same quality which enables an author to realise humanity for a book is necessary for him to realise humanity in the crowded chamber of a Parliament.

So far as I can remember, whatever was written of *The Weavers*, no critic said that it lacked imagination. Some critics said it was too crowded with incident; that there was enough incident in it for two novels; some said that the sweep was too wide, but no critic of authority declared that the book lacked vision or the vivacity of a living narrative. It is not likely that I shall ever write again a novel of Egypt, but I have made my contribution to Anglo-Egyptian literature, and I do not think I failed completely in showing the greatness of soul which enabled one man to keep the torch of civilisation, of truth, justice, and wholesome love alight in surroundings as offensive to civilisation as was Egypt in the last days of Ismail Pasha—a time which could be well typified by the words put by Bulwer Lytton in the mouth of Cardinal Richelieu:

"I found France rent asunder, Sloth in the mart and schism in the temple; Broils festering to rebellion; and weak laws Rotting away with rust in antique sheaths. I have re-created France; and, from the ashes Of the old feudal and decrepit carcase, Civilisation on her luminous wings Soars, phoenix-like, to Jove!"

Critics and readers have endeavoured to identify the main characteristics of *The Weavers* with figures in Anglo-Egyptian and official public life. David Claridge was, however, a creature of the imagination. It has been said that he was drawn from General Gordon. I am not conscious of having taken Gordon for David's prototype, though, as I was saturated with all that had been written about Gordon, there is no doubt that something of that great man may have found its way into the character of David Claridge. The true origin of David Claridge, however, may be found in a short story called 'All the World's Mad', in *Donovan Pasha*, which was originally published by Lady Randolph Churchill in an ambitious but defunct magazine called 'The Anglo-Saxon Review'. The truth is that David Claridge had his origin in a fairly close understanding of, and interest in, Quaker life. I had Quaker relatives through the marriage of a connection of my mother, and the original of Benn Claridge, the uncle of David, is still alive, a very old man, who in my boyhood days wore the broad brim and the straight preacher-like coat of the old-fashioned Quaker. The grandmother of my wife was also a Quaker, and used the "thee" and "thou" until the day of her death.

Here let me say that criticism came to me from several quarters both in England and America on the use of these words thee and thou, and statements were made that the kind of speech which I put into David Claridge's mouth was not Quaker speech. For instance, they would not have it that a Quaker would say, "Thee will go with me"—as though they were ashamed of the sweet inaccuracy of the objective pronoun being used in the nominative; but hundreds of times I have myself heard Quakers use "thee" in just such a way in England and America. The facts are, however, that Quakers differ extensively in their habits, and there grew up in England among the Quakers in certain districts a sense of shame for false grammar which, to say the least, was very childish. To be deliberately and boldly ungrammatical, when you serve both euphony and simplicity, is merely to give archaic charm, not to be guilty of an offence. I have friends in Derbyshire who still say "Thee thinks," etc., and I must confess that the picture of a Quaker rampant over my deliberate use of this well-authenticated form of speech produced to my mind only the effect of an infuriated sheep, when I remembered the

peaceful attribute of Quaker life and character. From another quarter came the assurance that I was wrong when I set up a tombstone with a name upon it in a Quaker graveyard. I received a sarcastic letter from a lady on the borders of Sussex and Surrey upon this point, and I immediately sent her a first-class railway ticket to enable her to visit the Quaker churchyard at Croydon, in Surrey, where dead and gone Quakers have tombstones by the score, and inscriptions on them also. It is a good thing to be accurate; it is desperately essential in a novel. The average reader, in his triumph at discovering some slight error of detail, would consign a masterpiece of imagination, knowledge of life and character to the rubbish-heap.

I believe that 'The Weavers' represents a wider outlook of life, closer understanding of the problems which perplex society, and a clearer view of the verities than any previous book written by me, whatever its popularity may have been. It appealed to the British public rather more than 'The Right of Way', and the great public of America and the Oversea Dominions gave it a welcome which enabled it to take its place beside 'The Right of Way', the success of which was unusual.

## NOTE

This book is not intended to be an historical novel, nor are its characters meant to be identified with well-known persons connected with the history of England or of Egypt; but all that is essential in the tale is based upon, and drawn from, the life of both countries. Though Egypt has greatly changed during the past generation, away from Cairo and the commercial centres the wheels of social progress have turned but slowly, and much remains as it was in the days of which this book is a record in the spirit of the life, at least.

G. P.

"Dost thou spread the sail, throw the spear, swing the axe,  
lay thy hand upon the plough, attend the furnace door,  
shepherd the sheep upon the hills, gather corn from the field,  
or smite the rock in the quarry? Yet, whatever thy task, thou  
art even as one who twists the thread and throws the shuttle,  
weaving the web of Life. Ye are all weavers, and Allah the  
Merciful, does He not watch beside the loom?"



## CHAPTER I. AS THE SPIRIT MOVED

The village lay in a valley which had been the bed of a great river in the far-off days when Ireland, Wales and Brittany were joined together and the Thames flowed into the Seine. The place had never known turmoil or stir. For generations it had lived serenely.

Three buildings in the village stood out insistently, more by the authority of their appearance and position than by their size. One was a square, red-brick mansion in the centre of the village, surrounded by a high, redbrick wall enclosing a garden. Another was a big, low, graceful building with wings. It had once been a monastery. It was covered with ivy, which grew thick and hungry upon it, and it was called the Cloistered House. The last of the three was of wood, and of no great size—a severely plain but dignified structure, looking like some council-hall of a past era. Its heavy oak doors and windows with diamond panes, and its air of order, cleanliness and serenity, gave it a commanding influence in the picture. It was the key to the history of the village—a Quaker Meeting-house.

Involuntarily the village had built itself in such a way that it made a wide avenue from the common at one end to the Meeting-house on the gorse-grown upland at the other. With a demure resistance to the will of its makers the village had made itself decorative. The people were unconscious of any attractiveness in themselves or in their village. There were, however, a few who felt the beauty stirring around them. These few, for their knowledge and for the pleasure which it brought, paid the accustomed price. The records of their lives were the only notable history of the place since the days when their forefathers suffered for the faith.

One of these was a girl—for she was still but a child when she died; and she had lived in the Red Mansion with the tall porch, the wide garden behind, and the wall of apricots and peaches and clustering grapes. Her story was not to cease when she was laid away in the stiff graveyard behind the Meeting-house. It was to go on in the life of her son, whom to bring into the world she had suffered undeserved, and loved with a passion more in keeping with the beauty of the vale in which she lived than with the piety found on the high-backed seats in the Quaker Meeting-house. The name given her on

the register of death was Mercy Claridge, and a line beneath said that she was the daughter of Luke Claridge, that her age at passing was nineteen years, and that "her soul was with the Lord."

Another whose life had given pages to the village history was one of noble birth, the Earl of Eglington. He had died twenty years after the time when Luke Claridge, against the then custom of the Quakers, set up a tombstone to Mercy Claridge's memory behind the Meeting-house. Only thrice in those twenty years had he slept in a room of the Cloistered House. One of those occasions was the day on which Luke Claridge put up the grey stone in the graveyard, three years after his daughter's death. On the night of that day these two men met face to face in the garden of the Cloistered House. It was said by a passer-by, who had involuntarily overheard, that Luke Claridge had used harsh and profane words to Lord Eglington, though he had no inkling of the subject of the bitter talk. He supposed, however, that Luke had gone to reprove the other for a wasteful and wandering existence; for desertion of that Quaker religion to which his grandfather, the third Earl of Eglington, had turned in the second half of his life, never visiting his estates in Ireland, and residing here among his new friends to his last day. This listener—John Fairley was his name—kept his own counsel. On two other occasions had Lord Eglington visited the Cloistered House in the years that passed, and remained many months. Once he brought his wife and child. The former was a cold, blue-eyed Saxon of an old family, who smiled distantly upon the Quaker village; the latter, a round-headed, warm-faced youth, with a bold, menacing eye, who probed into this and that, rushed here and there as did his father; now built a miniature mill; now experimented at some peril in the laboratory which had been arranged in the Cloistered House for scientific experiments; now shot partridges in the fields where partridges had not been shot for years; and was as little in the picture as his adventurous father, though he wore a broad-brimmed hat, smiling the while at the pain it gave to the simple folk around him.

And yet once more the owner of the Cloistered House returned alone. The blue-eyed lady was gone to her grave; the youth was abroad. This time he came to die. He was found lying on the floor of his laboratory with a broken retort in fragments beside him. With

his servant, Luke Claridge was the first to look upon him lying in the wreck of his last experiment, a spirit-lamp still burning above him, in the grey light of a winter's morning. Luke Claridge closed the eyes, straightened the body, and crossed the hands over the breast which had been the laboratory of many conflicting passions of life.

The dead man had left instructions that his body should be buried in the Quaker graveyard, but Luke Claridge and the Elders prevented that—he had no right to the privileges of a Friend; and, as the only son was afar, and no near relatives pressed the late Earl's wishes, the ancient family tomb in Ireland received all that was left of the owner of the Cloistered House, which, with the estates in Ireland and the title, passed to the wandering son.

