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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
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Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Crane
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**Romany of the Snows,
Continuation of "Pierre and His
People", v1**

Gilbert Parker

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A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS

**BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE PERSONAL HISTORIES
OF "PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE" AND THE LAST EXISTING
RECORDS OF PRETTY PIERRE**

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

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To SIR WILLIAM C. VAN HORNE.

MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

To the public it will seem fitting that these new tales of "Pierre and His People" should be inscribed to one whose notable career is inseparably associated with the life and development of the Far North.

But there is a deeper and more personal significance in this dedication, for some of the stories were begotten in late gossip by your fireside; and furthermore, my little book is given a kind of distinction, in having on its fore-page the name of one well known as a connoisseur of art and a lover of literature.

Believe me,

DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

Sincerely yours,

GILBERT PARKER.

7 PARK PLACE. ST. JAMES'S. LONDON. S. W.

INTRODUCTION

It can hardly be said that there were two series of Pierre stories. There never was but one series, in fact. Pierre moved through all the thirty-nine stories of Pierre and His People and A Romany of the Snows without any thought on my part of putting him out of existence in one series and bringing him to life again in another. The publication of the stories was continuous, and at the time that Pierre and His People appeared several of those which came between the covers of A Romany of the Snows were passing through the pages of magazines in England and America. All of the thirty-nine stories might have appeared in one volume under the title of Pierre and His People, but they were published in two volumes with different titles in England, and in three volumes in America, simply because there was enough material for the two and the three volumes. In America The Adventurer of the North was broken up into two volumes at the urgent request of my then publishers, Messrs. Stone & Kimball, who had the gift of producing beautiful books, but perhaps had not the same gift of business. These two American volumes succeeding Pierre were published under the title of An Adventurer of the North and A Romany of the Snows respectively. Now, the latter title, A Romany of the Snows, was that which I originally chose for the volume published in England as An Adventurer of the North. I was persuaded to reject the title, A Romany of the Snows, by my English publisher, and I have never forgiven myself since for being so weak. If a publisher had the infallible instinct for these things he would not be a publisher — he would be an author; and though an author may make mistakes like everybody else, the average of his hits will be far higher than the average of his misses in such things. The title, An Adventurer of the North, is to my mind cumbrous and rough, and difficult in the mouth. Compare it with some of the stories within the volume itself: for instance, The Going of the White Swan, A Lovely Bully, At Bamber's Boom, At Point o' Bugles, The Pilot of Belle Amour, The Spoil of the Puma, A Romany of the Snows, and The Finding of Fingall. There it was, however; I

made the mistake and it sticks; but the book now will be published in this subscription edition under the title first chosen by me, *A Romany of the Snows*. It really does express what Pierre was.

Perhaps some of the stories in *A Romany of the Snows* have not the sentimental simplicity of some of the earlier stories in *Pierre and His People*, which take hold where a deeper and better work might not seize the general public; but, reading these later stories after twenty years, I feel that I was moving on steadily to a larger, firmer command of my material, and was getting at closer grips with intimate human things. There is some proof of what I say in the fact that one of the stories in *A Romany of the Snows*, called *The Going of the White Swan*, appropriately enough published originally in *Scribner's Magazine*, has had an extraordinary popularity. It has been included in the programmes of reciters from the Murrumbidgee to the Vaal, from John O'Groat's to Land's End, and is now being published as a separate volume in England and America. It has been dramatised several times, and is more alive to-day than it was when it was published nearly twenty years ago. Almost the same may be said of *The Three Commandments in the Vulgar Tongue*.

It has been said that, apart from the colour, form, and setting, the incidents of these Pierre stories might have occurred anywhere. That is true beyond a doubt, and it exactly represents my attitude of mind. Every human passion, every incident springing out of a human passion to-day, had its counterpart in the time of Amenhotep. The only difference is in the setting, is in the language or dialect which is the vehicle of expression, and in race and character, which are the media of human idiosyncrasy. There is nothing new in anything that one may write, except the outer and visible variation of race, character, and country, which reincarnates the everlasting human ego and its scena.

The atmosphere of a story or novel is what temperament is to a man. Atmosphere cannot be created; it is not a matter of skill; it is a matter of personality, of the power of visualisation, of feeling for the thing which the mind sees. It has been said that my books possess atmosphere. This has often been said when criticism has been more or less acute upon other things; but I think that in all my experience there has never been a critic who has not credited my books with

that quality; and I should say that Pierre and His People and A Romany of the Snows have an atmosphere in which the beings who make the stories live seem natural to their environment. It is this quality which gives vitality to the characters themselves. Had I not been able to create atmosphere which would have given naturalness to Pierre and his friends, some of the characters, and many of the incidents, would have seemed monstrosities – melodramatic episodes merely. The truth is, that while the episode, which is the first essential of a short story, was always in the very forefront of my imagination, the character or characters in the episode meant infinitely more to me. To my mind the episode was always the consequence of character. That almost seems a paradox; but apart from the phenomena of nature, as possible incidents in a book, the episodes which make what are called "human situations" are, in most instances, the sequence of character and are incidental to the law of the character set in motion. As I realise it now, subconsciously, my mind and imagination were controlled by this point of view in the days of the writing of Pierre and His People.

In the life and adventures of Pierre and his people I came, as I think, to a certain command of my material, without losing real sympathy with the simple nature of things. Dexterity has its dangers, and one of its dangers is artificiality. It is very difficult to be skilful and to ring true. If I have not wholly succeeded in A Romany of the Snows, I think I have not wholly failed, as the continued appeal of a few of the stories would seem to show.

ACROSS THE JUMPING SANDHILLS

"Here now, Trader; aisy, aisy! Quicksands I've seen along the sayshore, and up to me half-ways I've been in wan, wid a double-and-twist in the rope to pull me out; but a suckin' sand in the open plain—aw, Trader, aw! the like o' that niver a bit saw I."

So said Macavoy the giant, when the thing was talked of in his presence.

"Well, I tell you it's true, and they're not three miles from Fort O'Glory. The Company's—[Hudson's Bay Company]—men don't talk about it—what's the use! Travellers are few that way, and you can't get the Indians within miles of them. Pretty Pierre knows all about them—better than anyone else almost. He'll stand by me in it—eh, Pierre?"

Pierre, the half-breed gambler and adventurer, took no notice, and was silent for a time, intent on his cigarette; and in the pause Mowley the trapper said: "Pierre's gone back on you, Trader. P'r'aps ye haven't paid him for the last lie. I go one better, you stand by me—my treat—that's the game!"

"Aw, the like o' that," added Macavoy reproachfully. "Aw, yer tongue to the roof o' yer mouth, Mowley. Liars all men may be, but that's wid wimmin or landlords. But, Pierre, aff another man's bat like that—aw, Mowley, fill your mouth wid the bowl o' yer pipe."

Pierre now looked up at the three men, rolling another cigarette as he did so; but he seemed to be thinking of a distant matter. Meeting the three pairs of eyes fixed on him, his own held them for a moment musingly; then he lit his cigarette, and, half reclining on the bench where he sat, he began to speak, talking into the fire as it were.

"I was at Guidon Hill, at the Company's post there. It was the fall of the year, when you feel that there is nothing so good as life, and the air drinks like wine. You think that sounds like a woman or a priest? Mais, no. The seasons are strange. In the spring I am lazy

and sad; in the fall I am gay, I am for the big things to do. This matter was in the fall. I felt that I must move. Yet, what to do? There was the thing. Cards, of course. But that's only for times, not for all seasons. So I was like a wild dog on a chain. I had a good horse—Tophet, black as a coal, all raw bones and joint, and a reach like a moose. His legs worked like piston-rods. But, as I said, I did not know where to go or what to do. So we used to sit at the Post loafing: in the daytime watching the empty plains all panting for travellers, like a young bride waiting her husband for the first time."

Macavoy regarded Pierre with delight. He had an unctuous spirit, and his heart was soft for women—so soft that he never had had one on his conscience, though he had brushed gay smiles off the lips of many. But that was an amiable weakness in a strong man. "Aw, Pierre," he said coaxingly, "kape it down; aisy, aisy. Me heart's goin' like a trip-hammer at thought av it; aw yis, aw yis, Pierre."

"Well, it was like that to me—all sun and a sweet sting in the air. At night to sit and tell tales and such things; and perhaps a little brown brandy, a look at the stars, a half-hour with the cattle—the same old game. Of course, there was the wife of Hilton the factor—fine, always fine to see, but deaf and dumb. We were good friends, Ida and me. I had a hand in her wedding. Holy, I knew her when she was a little girl. We could talk together by signs. She was a good woman; she had never guessed at evil. She was quick, too, like a flash, to read and understand without words. A face was a book to her.

"Eh bien. One afternoon we were all standing outside the Post, when we saw someone ride over the Long Divide. It was good for the eyes. I cannot tell quite how, but horse and rider were so sharp and clear-cut against the sky, that they looked very large and peculiar—there was something in the air to magnify. They stopped for a minute on the top of the Divide, and it seemed like a messenger out of the strange country at the farthest north—the place of legends. But, of course, it was only a traveller like ourselves, for in a half-hour she was with us.

"Yes, it was a girl dressed as a man. She did not try to hide it; she dressed so for ease. She would make a man's heart leap in his mouth—if he was like Macavoy, or the pious Mowley there."

Pierre's last three words had a touch of irony, for he knew that the Trapper had a precious tongue for Scripture when a missionary passed that way, and a bad name with women to give it point. Mowley smiled sourly; but Macavoy laughed outright, and smacked his lips on his pipe-stem luxuriously.

"Aw now, Pierre—all me little failin's—aw!" he protested.

Pierre swung round on the bench, leaning upon the other elbow, and, cherishing his cigarette, presently continued:

"She had come far and was tired to death, so stiff that she could hardly get from her horse; and the horse too was ready to drop. Handsome enough she looked, for all that, in man's clothes and a peaked cap, with a pistol in her belt. She wasn't big built—just a feathery kind of sapling—but she was set fair on her legs like a man, and a hand that was as good as I have seen, so strong, and like silk and iron with a horse. Well, what was the trouble?—for I saw there was trouble. Her eyes had a hunted look, and her nose breathed like a deer's in the chase. All at once, when she saw Hilton's wife, a cry came from her and she reached out her hands. What would women of that sort do? They were both of a kind. They got into each other's arms. After that there was nothing for us men but to wait. All women are the same, and Hilton's wife was like the rest. She must get the secret first; then the men should know. We had to wait an hour. Then Hilton's wife beckoned to us. We went inside. The girl was asleep. There was something in the touch of Hilton's wife like sleep itself—like music. It was her voice—that touch. She could not speak with her tongue, but her hands and face were words and music. Bien, there was the girl asleep, all clear of dust and stain; and that fine hand it lay loose on her breast, so quiet, so quiet. Enfin, the real story—for how she slept there does not matter—but it was good to see when we knew the story."

The Trapper was laughing silently to himself to hear Pierre in this romantic mood. A woman's hand—it was the game for a boy, not an adventurer; for the Trapper's only creed was that women, like deer, were spoils for the hunter. Pierre's keen eye noted this, but he was above petty anger. He merely said: "If a man have an eye to see behind the face, he understands the foolish laugh of a man, or the hand of a good woman, and that is much. Hilton's wife told us all.

She had rode two hundred miles from the south-west, and was making for Fort Micah, sixty miles farther north. For what? She had loved a man against the will of her people. There had been a feud, and Garrison—that was the lover's name—was the last on his own side. There was trouble at a Company's post, and Garrison shot a half-breed. Men say he was right to shoot him, for a woman's name must be safe up here. Besides, the half-breed drew first. Well, Garrison was tried, and must go to jail for a year. At the end of that time he would be free. The girl Janie knew the day. Word had come to her. She made everything ready. She knew her brothers were watching—her three brothers and two other men who had tried to get her love. She knew also that they five would carry on the feud against the one man. So one night she took the best horse on the ranch and started away towards Fort Micah. Alors, you know how she got to Guidon Hill after two days' hard riding—enough to kill a man, and over fifty yet to do. She was sure her brothers were on her track. But if she could get to Fort Micah, and be married to Garrison before they came; she wanted no more.

"There were only two horses of use at Hilton's Post then; all the rest were away, or not fit for hard travel. There was my Tophet, and a lean chestnut, with a long propelling gait, and not an ounce of loose skin on him. There was but one way: the girl must get there. Allons, what is the good? What is life without these things? The girl loves the man: she must have him in spite of all. There was only Hilton and his wife and me at the Post, and Hilton was lame from a fall, and one arm in a sling. If the brothers followed, well, Hilton could not interfere— he was a Company's man; but for myself, as I said, I was hungry for adventure, I had an ache in my blood for something. I was tingling to the toes, my heart was thumping in my throat. All the cords of my legs were straightening as if I was in the saddle.

"She slept for three hours. I got the two horses saddled. Who could tell but she might need help? I had nothing to do; I knew the shortest way to Fort Micah, every foot—and then it is good to be ready for all things. I told Hilton's wife what I had done. She was glad. She made a gesture at me as to a brother, and then began to put things in a bag for us to carry. She had settled all how it was to

be. She had told the girl. You see, a man may be—what is it they call me?—a plunderer, and yet a woman will trust him, *comme ca!*"

"Aw yis, aw yis, Pierre; but she knew yer hand and yer tongue niver wint agin a woman, Pierre. Naw, niver a wan. Aw swate, swate, she was, wid a heart—a heart, Hilton's wife, aw yis!"

Pierre waved Macavoy into silence. "The girl waked after three hours with a start. Her hand caught at her heart. 'Oh,' she said, still staring at us, 'I thought that they had come!' A little after she and Hilton's wife went to another room. All at once there was a sound of horses outside, and then a knock at the door, and four men come in. They were the girl's hunters.

"It was hard to tell what to do all in a minute; but I saw at once the best thing was to act for all, and to get all the men inside the house. So I whispered to Hilton, and then pretended that I was a great man in the Company. I ordered Hilton to have the horses cared for, and, not giving the men time to speak, I fetched out the old brown brandy, wondering all the time what could be done. There was no sound from the other room, though I thought I heard a door open once. Hilton played the game well, and showed nothing when I ordered him about, and agreed word for word with me when I said no girl had come, laughing when they told why they were after her. More than one of them did not believe at first; but, pshaw, what have I been doing all my life to let such fellows doubt me? So the end of it was that I got them all inside the house. There was one bad thing—their horses were all fresh, as Hilton whispered to me. They had only rode them a few miles—they had stole or bought them at the first ranch to the west of the Post. I could not make up my mind what to do. But it was clear I must keep them quiet till something shaped.

"They were all drinking brandy when Hilton's wife come into the room. Her face was, *mon Dieu!* so innocent, so childlike. She stared at the men; and then I told them she was deaf and dumb, and I told her why they had come. *Voila*, it was beautiful—like nothing you ever saw. She shook her head so innocent, and then told them like a child that they were wicked to chase a girl. I could have kissed her feet. Thunder, how she fooled them! She said, would they not search the house? She said all through me, on her fingers and by

signs. And I told them at once. But she told me something else—that the girl had slipped out as the last man came in, had mounted the chestnut, and would wait for me by the iron spring, a quarter of a mile away. There was the danger that some one of the men knew the finger-talk, so she told me this in signs mixed up with other sentences.

"Good! There was now but one thing—for me to get away. So I said, laughing, to one of the men. 'Come, and we will look after the horses, and the others can search the place with Hilton.' So we went out to where the horses were tied to the railing, and led them away to the corral.

"Of course you will understand how I did it. I clapped a hand on his mouth, put a pistol at his head, and gagged and tied him. Then I got my Tophet, and away I went to the spring. The girl was waiting. There were few words. I gripped her hand, gave her another pistol, and then we got away on a fine moonlit trail. We had not gone a mile when I heard a faint yell far behind. My game had been found out. There was nothing to do but to ride for it now, and maybe to fight. But fighting was not good; for I might be killed, and then the girl would be caught just the same. We rode on—such a ride, the horses neck and neck, their hoofs pounding the prairie like drills, rawbone to rawbone, a hell-to-split gait. I knew they were after us, though I saw them but once on the crest of a Divide about three miles behind. Hour after hour like that, with ten minutes' rest now and then at a spring or to stretch our legs. We hardly spoke to each other; but, *nom de Dieu!* my heart was warm to this girl who had rode a hundred and fifty miles in twenty-four hours. Just before dawn, when I was beginning to think that we should easy win the race if the girl could but hold out, if it did not kill her, the chestnut struck a leg into the crack of the prairie, and horse and girl spilt on the ground together. She could hardly move, she was so weak, and her face was like death. I put a pistol to the chestnut's head, and ended it. The girl stooped and kissed the poor beast's neck, but spoke nothing. As I helped her on my Tophet I put my lips to the sleeve of her dress. Mother of Heaven! what could a man do—she was so dam' brave.