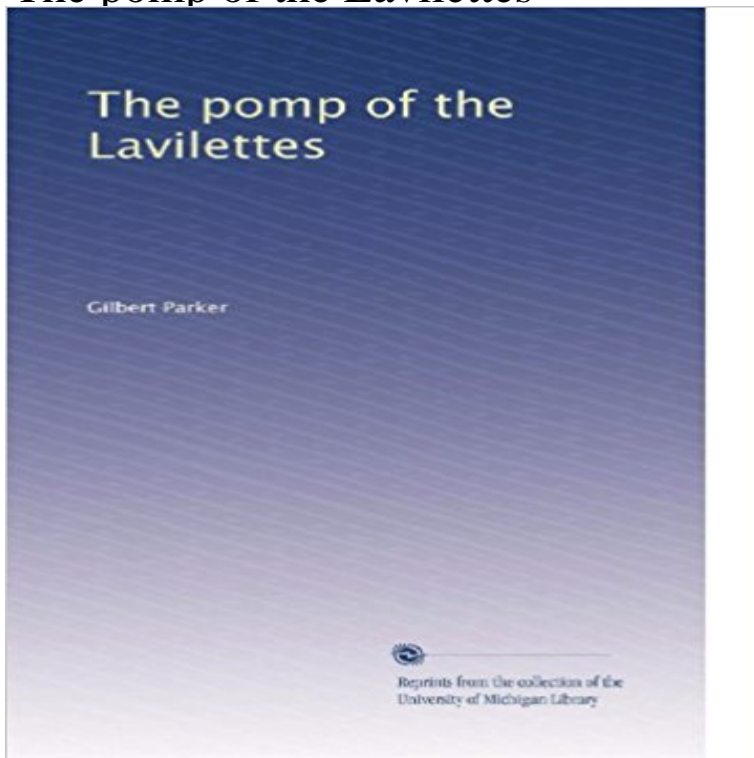


The pomp of the Lavillettes



From the preface: I believe that *The Pomp of the Lavillettes* has elements which justify consideration. Its original appearance was, however, not made under wholly favourable conditions. It is the only book of mine which I ever sold outright. This was in 1896. Mr. Lamson, of Messrs. Lamson & Wolffe, energetic and enterprising young publishers of Boston, came to see me at Atlantic City (I was on a visit to the United States at the time), and made a gallant offer for the English, American and colonial book and serial rights. I felt that some day I could get the book back under my control if I so desired, while the chances of the book making an immediate phenomenal sale were not great. There is something in the nature of a story which determines its popularity. I knew that *The Seats of the Mighty* and *The Right of Way* would have a great sale, and after they were written I said as much to my publishers. There was the element of general appeal in the narratives and the characters. Without detracting from the character-drawing, the characters, or the story in *The Pomp of the Lavillettes*, I was convinced that the book would not make the universal appeal. Yet I should have written the story, even if it had been destined only to have a hundred readers. It had to be written. I wanted to write what was in me, and that invasion of a little secluded French-Canadian society by a neer-do-well of the over-sea aristocracy had a psychological interest, which I could not resist. I thought it ought to be worked out and recorded, and particularly as the time chosen--1837--marked a large collision between the British and the French interests in French Canada, or rather of French political interests and the narrow administrative prejudices and nepotism of the British executive in Quebec. It is a satisfaction to include this book in a definitive edition of my works, for I think that, so far as it goes, it is

truthfully characteristic of French life in Canada, that its pictures are faithful, and that the character-drawing represents a closer observation than any of the previous works, slight as the volume is. It holds the same relation to The Right of Way that The Trail of the Sword holds to The Seats of the Mighty, that A Ladder of Swords holds to The Battle of the Strong, that Donovan Pasha holds to The Weavers. Instinctively, and, as I believe, naturally, I gave to each ambitious, and--so far as conception goes--to each important novel of mine, an avant-coureur. The Trail of the Sword, A Ladder of Swords, Donovan Pasha and The Pomp of the Lavillettes, are all very short novels, not exceeding in any case sixty thousand words, while the novels dealing in a larger way with the same material--the same people and environment, with the same mise-en-scene, were each of them at least one hundred and forty thousand words in length, or over two and a half times as long. I do not say that this is a system which I devised; but it was, from the first, the method I pursued instinctively; on the basis that dealing with a smaller subject--with what one might call a genre picture first, I should get well into my field, and acquire greater familiarity with my material than I should have if I attempted the larger work at once.

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