

THE LIAR

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649632039

The Liar by Gilbert Parker

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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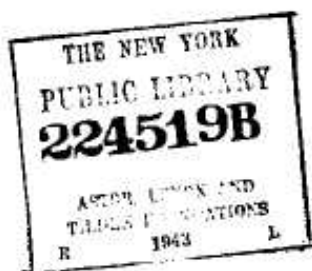
AUTHOR OF "THE BATTLE OF THE STRONG,"
"THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY," ETC.



BOSTON
BROWN AND COMPANY

144 PURCHASE STREET

1899



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Harvard University Press
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

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THE LIAR



CHAPTER I

AN ECHO

“O, de worl’ am roun’ an’ de worl’ am wide, —
O Lord, remember your chillun in de mornin’!
It ’s a mighty long way up de mountain side,
An’ dey ain’t no place whar de sinners kin hide,
When de Lord comes in de mornin’.”

WITH a plaintive quirk of the voice the singer paused, gaily flicked the strings of the banjo, then put her hand flat upon them to stop the vibration, and smiled round on her admirers. The group were applauding heartily: a chorus said: “Another verse, please, Mrs. Detlor.”

“Oh, that ’s all I know, I ’m afraid,” was the reply. “I have n’t sung it for years and years, and I should have to think too hard — no, no, believe me, I can’t remember any more. I wish I could, really.”

The Liar

A murmur of protest rose, but there came through the window faintly yet clearly a man's voice :

“Look up and look aroun’,
Fro you’ burden on de groun’” —

The brown eyes of the woman grew larger, there ran through her smile a kind of frightened surprise, but she did not start, nor act as if the circumstance were singular.

One of the men in the room — Baron, an honest, blundering fellow — started towards the window to see who the prompter was, but the host — of intuitive perception — saw that this might not be agreeable to their entertainer, and said quietly : “Don’t go to the window, Baron. See, Mrs. Detlor is going to sing.”

Baron sat down. There was an instant's pause in which George Hagar, the host, felt a strong thrill of excitement. To him Mrs. Detlor seemed in a dream, though her lips still smiled, and her eyes wandered pleasantly over the heads of the company. She was looking at none of them; but her body was bent slightly towards the window, listening with it, as the deaf and dumb do.

Her fingers picked the strings lightly, then warmly, and her voice rose, clear, quaint, and high :