

# Messenger and Visitor

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## Silk from Spiders

One of the wonders of the Paris Exhibition of 1900, says *The London Daily News*, was a piece of silk eighteen yards long and eighteen inches wide, woven from the web of the giant spiders of Madagascar. Into its manufacture entered 100,000 yards of spun thread of 24 strands of spiders' web 25,000 spiders had to be brought into requisition for the purpose, and these were procured by offering the natives so much a hundred, but not knowing or ignoring the purpose for which the insects were required, and having a "get rich quick" desire, they brought them in by basketfuls, mostly dead, so that it was found necessary for the winding off machines to go to the spiders instead of calling in the spiders to the filatures. However, the piece of cloth was finally completed, and was of a shimmering golden-yellow color. In an interesting report Mr. Hunt, the United States Consul at Tamatave, describes the Madagascar spider as a common object of that unfortunate island. When visiting the interior he has found their wonderful webs spun many feet across walks or shady avenues. The lines are strong enough to bear a light bamboo walking cane. The variety of Arachnida in question is the *Nephila Madagascariensis*. Its bite is not dangerous, although the irritation caused by its legs is annoying. The eggs are laid by the female in a silky cocoon, one inch in diameter, of a yellow color at first but turning white after an exposure of two or three months to the air, at the end of which time several hundred insects the size of a pinhead, burst the shell and come out. Three months later the female is two and a half inches long, while the male remains only one-sixth of that size. The female is generally black, lives in solitude, and tolerates the presence of the male only at certain seasons. If he merely calls to discuss the fiscal question he is incontinently eaten. The spiders are carnivorous, and by preference frequent the forests. In some of the wooded gardens in the suburbs of the capital, especially the old royal parks, they may be seen in millions, and would give the impression of being gregarious, but this is not so. It is the abundance of food which brings them together in seeming peace and amity; as soon as the supply fails they fight and devour each other. The idea of using cobweb as a hemostatic was known to the Greeks and Romans, and before the present antiseptics were brought into use by medical science it was in universal use for stopping the flow of blood from wounds and cuts. From an industrial point of view, the silk of the spinning spider (*Epeira*), has been known for centuries, even by the savages of Paraguay, and in the seventeenth century one, Alcide d'Orbigny, in South America, ordered a pair of trousers made of the material. The first difficulty in securing the thread direct from the Madagascar spider (halabe, big spider, the natives call her) was met with in devising a suitable holder to secure the living spider while winding off the web. This was originally performed by confining the spiders in empty match boxes with their abdomens protruding—thus making so many living reels. The extraction of the web does not apparently inconvenience the insects, although care has to be taken not to injure them. From that stage has been evolved a frame of twenty four small guillotines, in each of which a spider is secured in such a manner that on one side protrudes the abdomen, while on the other head, thorax and legs are free. The precaution of keeping the legs out of the way is necessary because the spider when their secretion is spun off in this fashion, are liable to break off the web with their legs. The spider submits without resistance to the winding off of its thread. After the laying period, or formation of the web, it can be reeled off five or six times a month, after which the spider dies having yielded about 4,000 yards. Native girls do the work. Each one has a straw basket at her side, every morning filled with live spiders, and another basket to receive them after they have been wound off. One dozen are locked in at a time, the ends of their webs are drawn out, collected into one thread, which is passed over a metal hook, and the rest is set in motion by a pedal. As soon as an insect gives out no more web it is replaced without stopping the wheel, and later on carried back to the park, where it requires nine or ten days before being ready for a second operation. The cost of this silk web is high, 55,000 yards of nineteen strands in thickness weighs only 25 grams (386 grains), and calculating the time and the labor of procuring and preparing it, brings the price up to £8 per pound. In the early attempts to rear these interesting creatures (we call them creatures because the spider is not a

true insect), 200 were placed in a wirecloth case, they spun their webs over the walls of their prison until it was so completely covered that no mosquito or other insect could get in. Thus deprived of food, on the principle of the survival of the fittest, the stronger set to work to devour the weaker until only a few were taken out alive, but these had attained an enormous size.

## Europe and the Kaiser.

The friendly sentiments with which European powers regard each other are always modified more or less by jealousy and suspicion. Sometimes it is one and sometimes another power, or combination of powers, whose intentions are principally the object of suspicion. Just now it is Germany and her enterprising and somewhat enigmatic Emperor which constitute the prominent object of distrust. There are suspicions that the Kaiser believes it would be for the aggrandizement of his throne at this juncture to disturb the peace of Europe, and it is doubted if, holding these views, the German ruler's love of peace is strong enough to restrain him from the path of ambition. These suspicions very likely do some injustice to the Kaiser. He is indeed an ambitious, self-reliant and resourceful ruler, jealous of his own and his nation's prestige and not likely to overlook his opportunities. He has recently indicated his displeasure at the aggressive action of France, countenanced by Great Britain, in Morocco. While it is hardly likely that the German Emperor is meditating a step involving so serious contingencies as would be connected with a war with France, it is not improbable that he means to indicate in a somewhat threatening way to France and to Britain that he represents a power not to be ignored when the ambitions of European nations are in question. In reference to the present situation in Europe the *London Spectator* says:

"The instant one power becomes notably the strongest a disposition to rule the world is almost certain to manifest itself, and the moment that it is visible the world becomes uneasy with an uneasiness which, if not fatal to peace, destroys most of the advantages which mankind expect peace to secure. Russia is not a much loved power except by absolutists, but her momentary withdrawal from the field of European politics leaves the German Emperor the strongest potentate on the Continent, and we see instantly the result. France shivers, Holland begins to reckon her means of defence and Great Britain betrays a watchful anxiety which the German people not unnaturally mistake for latent hostility. The British people no more wish harm to Germany than to France or America, but they cannot help asking themselves what the able and busy sovereign just opposite, who yields such immense powers and is yearly increasing them, means to do with them now that checks on his free action have been withdrawn. They cannot help studying him closely, and as much of the studying under our modern system is done in public, a situation is created which, as Napoleon III once said, is neither peace with its advantages nor war with its happy chances, and which benefits no one except indeed the diplomatists who find themselves suddenly elevated from the position of superior postmen to that of the most important of all international politicians. The choice of an ambassador just now really matters as much as a premier or a commander-in-chief. There is, we suppose, no remedy, but it is a weak place in that march of civilization, of which at intervals we are all so proud, that which in no way prevents panics that make it infructuous and leave all men as much afraid of war suddenly breaking out as if courts of arbitration had never been heard of."

## East and West.

Referring to the fact that Canada is pictorially represented in the Ottawa *Free Press* as showering blessings on the West, the *Toronto News* asks,—"Is not the West part of Canada? What right have we in the East to assume a sort of Divine or paternal relation toward our fellow citizens in the West? This notion used to be prevalent in Downing Street. It led to the loss of the American colonies, or at least hastened and embittered the separation of the United States from Great Britain. It came near to estranging Canada from the British Empire. The calamity was averted by the recognition of self-government about half a century ago. We do not regard this recognition as a part of a shower of blessings. It was common sense; the best course for Great Britain and the best course for Canada. . . . The quality of Ottawa mercy according to this picture, is not strained, but falleth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. The West has received from Canada 'a free homestead,' a 'bountiful harvest,' and 'vast herds.' Marvelous condescension! How thankful the Western settler should be to the various Conservative and Liberal Governments, and to us in Eastern Canada, for not swallowing up the fertile prairie in wrath, for allowing the sun to shine, the rain to fall, the

cattle to roam and the wheat to grow! We reject without hesitation this view of the relative positions of Eastern and Western Canada. We in the East, for the time being, have the greater population and the greater power. But we are merely trustees, not masters, and even our position as trustees is only temporary. The country west of Lake Superior will eventually hold a larger population than the country east, just as Upper Canada eventually passed Lower Canada. If we insist today upon shackling the West, the West will be perfectly justified in throwing the shackles off as soon as it is strong enough. A patronizing attitude on our part is not only unjust, but ridiculous."

## Defences for Quebec.

According to statements contained in a Quebec despatch, the Dominion Government is about to enter upon gigantic military works in the city and district of Quebec, which will involve a very large expenditure of money and at the same time add materially to the strength of the military fortifications of the country. It appears that when Colonel Stone, Inspector of Artillery, from England, arrived in Canada three years ago on a tour of inspection, among other things he recommended in a report to the Home Government, was the erection of forts along the south shore of the River St. Lawrence to prevent ships in case of war, from reaching the harbor of Quebec via the St. Lawrence. Ever since then negotiations have been going on between the Imperial and Federal Governments in regard to those matters and within the past few months an understanding has been arrived at. The Canadian Government, besides making extensive repairs to the Citadel fortifications in Quebec, will overhaul the three forts at Levis, which are to be armed with long distance firing guns and garrisoned by a company of artillery in each one of them. The most important work however, to be undertaken by the Dominion Government is the construction of two forts at Beaumont, nine miles East of Quebec, on the South Shore. These forts will be located at a point which gives a sweeping observation of both the north and south channels of the River St. Lawrence and when completed will cost, it is said, in the vicinity of three million dollars. One of the forts will be located on a strong rock foundation overlooking the Beaumont beach and the other and larger one will be erected on the height of land at the same place. The plans for the forts were prepared by the Engineering Department in England, but have been changed to some extent since their arrival in Canada by the engineering branch of the Militia Department at Ottawa. Col. MacDonald, Quartermaster-General of the Canadian Militia, and Lt.-Col. Wetherbee, director of the engineering branch of the same department, were in Quebec seven or eight days ago on a secret mission in connection with this important work and since then, Capt. H. Allison, of the Engineers' branch of the service, arrived in Quebec, from Ottawa, in the same connection.

## A Question of Rights and Dignities.

Quite a little storm was raised in the Dominion Senate by the visit to that Chamber, on Wednesday last, of Sir Elzear Taschereau, Chief Justice of Canada. The excitement, however, was not so much on account of the visit itself as the manner of it. The Chief Justice came in his capacity of Deputy Governor-General to give assent to certain bills which had previously passed both houses of Parliament. Now it is no secret that Sir Elzear Taschereau is a man who sets a high value on his rights and dignities as Deputy Governor-General and is disposed to abate no jot or tittle of them when discharging the functions of that lofty position. Other Chief Justices, in performing the duties of the Governor-General's deputy in the Senate Chamber, had been content to occupy the Speaker's chair, but on this occasion the Speaker was informed through the medium of a page that unless the chair were removed and Sir Elzear were permitted to occupy the vice-regal throne, he would not enter the chamber to give assent to the bills. Accordingly the chair was removed and Sir Elzear was seated on the throne. However, after the august presence of the Deputy had been withdrawn some of the Senators recovered their breath and began to enquire whether some disrespect had not been shown to the highest legislative body in Canada? Had Sir Elzear indeed any right to demand the removal of the Speaker's chair in which Chief Justices quite as able as himself had been content to sit while giving assent to bills? Was it not a discourtesy to the Senate that the Deputy should come there to assent to bills, unannounced in any formal way, and was it not a token of disrespect to that august body that in his communication to the speaker Sir Elzear should send his message by a page instead of making his announcement by the authorized official for duties of that kind—the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod? It seemed to be pretty generally agreed that Sir Elzear's sense of his official importance and his consequent line of procedure were exasperating if not intolerable, and Sir Richard Cartwright declared that he would take steps to bring the matter before the proper authorities. Accordingly it may be hoped that this important question touching Sir Elzear Taschereau's vice-regal rights and dignities is on the way to final settlement.