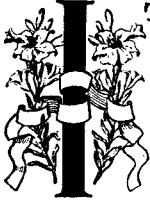


THE NEST OF IMPOSTURE.

BY DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT.



It was just four o'clock on a certain afternoon late in June. Young Oliver Prest had ascended the steps leading from his office to the pavement of St. James Street, when he was accosted by a man in whose air and aspect there was something singular, something far removed from the conventional life which crowded him in the busy metropolitan street. He had the appearance of one who had a friendship for ships and who had seen the world from them. Although there was nothing absolutely strange in the cut of his garments, they seemed outlandish, and when he moved there was the roll of the sea in his gate, and the air of strange harbors and alien coasts seemed to play about his shoulders. He spoke to Oliver Prest in English that smacked of other accents.

"If you are the young man who can find out hidden things I would like to speak to you."

Oliver turned and they went down into his office. "I have found out things that were hidden, but I have not been infallible, and there are yet many concealed."

"I have come to you with one of them. My name you will want to know; call me, St. Pierre Miquelon. I will tell you nothing about myself: all that is unimportant; one does not talk as much about himself who has seen the world as I have."

Oliver began to be fascinated by the deep eyes which regarded him.

"Is there a place called Lacolle near here?" he asked abruptly.

"There is; it is a village about forty miles from here, not far from the Richelieu River."

"On the shore of that river there is a house called the Manor. I've never seen it, but I have had it described to me often,

and I think I could rebuild it anywhere, I seem to know it so well." Oliver began to wonder whether it was the haunted house of the neighborhood which he knew when he was a boy, and the next words answered his questioning.

"Many years ago the owner of that house disappeared suddenly, mysteriously, and he has never been seen since. That occurrence made a great difference in my life, and after all these years I have come to look upon the house. I want you to be my guide. When shall we start?"

"As soon as you wish, to-morrow morning. I am fully at your disposal; the train leaves the Bonaventure Depot about nine."

"Well, I will meet you there." And so it was arranged.

That evening Oliver had leisure to recall impressions of his home on the banks of the Richelieu, and the old house in the neighborhood which filled him with such awe and terror. It stood on the bank of the river; the road, a strip of turf bordered by large trees, and a few feet of beach covered with flat stones, separated it from the water. It was built of grey stone, and the main door was covered by a porch or portico supported by pillars; this was the only attempt at outward adornment. Many years after the main house was finished two wings had been projected by the owners; only one of these had been completed. The other was roofed, but was without windows or doors and lent a most melancholy aspect of ruin to the whole structure.

Years before, Oliver could remember the master of the house had disappeared. He had set out for Montreal with a drove of fat cattle and had sold them for a good round price; but after he stepped from the ferry at Longueuil no one had ever set eyes upon him again. The surmise that he had been murdered for his money grew into a certainty, and so when