

# NEW DOMINION MONTHLY.

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## A FRAGMENT OF VERCHÈRES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE COLONISTS."

### CHAPTER I.

The October sun was tranquilly shining on the banks of the St. Lawrence. The ground in the early morning had been white with a slight frost that had now disappeared before the warm rays which brightened the departing glories of the woods. The morning had been delightful; but, as the sunbeams commenced to slant, they became gradually pale and white, and a chill was perceptible in the atmosphere; while the withered leaves at times descended in showers, rattling over the stiffened stalks of the aster and the golden rod, the *branche d'or*, and resting lightly on the crisped grass of the long meadows which extended from the woods to the river.

On the bank dividing these fields a boy was seated with his feet raised on a pile of stones. He was busily engaged with a large collection of rushes, counting and cutting these into equal lengths and tying them in small bundles. While thus engaged he more than once turned his head and looked uneasily around; but, apparently, he saw nothing to alarm him, and he each time resumed his occupation.

At some distance, on the other side of the meadow, two men were walking. They wore the dress of soldiers and sauntered carelessly along, as if without any particular object in view. Suddenly one of them stopped.

"What is this?" he said. "A bear drawn on the sand! well done, too; the Praying Indians have been along our path."

"This is not the work of Praying Indians," replied his companion. "The bear is not their badge. No; the Iroquois are on the trail. I will not sleep in the Fort to-night."

"You would not leave those children defenceless and their father and mother absent?"

"Why did the parents go away?" answered the other man. "Pichette," he continued, "I was once prisoner to the savages. I know what mortal man can be made to bear. I have no wish to undergo so much. I shall go to the cedar swamp without delay."

The boy meantime progressed with his work. He was presently interrupted by the rustle of advancing footsteps lightly crushing the maple leaves and the fern. This time he did not raise his head till a girl of about fifteen, springing with agility over a fence, and almost breathless with running, laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Oh! Octave, my brother, I have found you at last! I have been searching all the morning for the little black heifer. Where is Auguste? What are you doing? Are you going to send a message down the river?" and, without waiting for an answer, out of breath as she was, the young lady gathered up and examined the bundles.

The boy only replied to the last of her questions. "I am not going to send a message down the river," he said. "Do not you remember, Marguerite, what Pichette told us of the savages when the Governor marched from Cataraqui? The