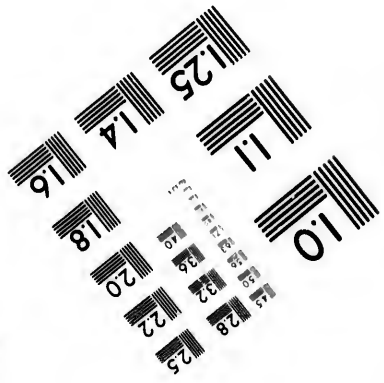
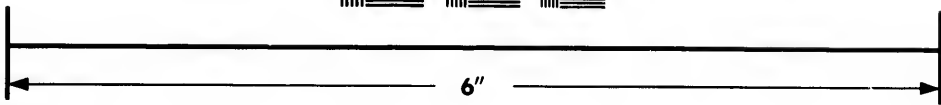
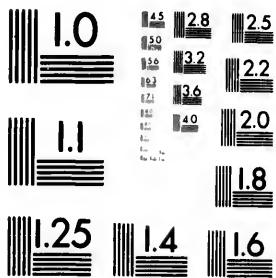


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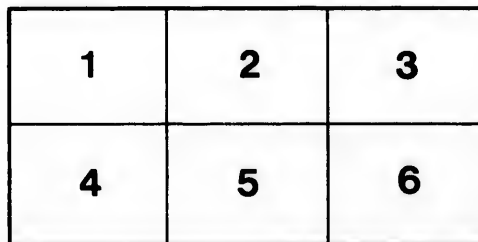
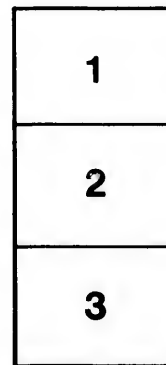
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THE OLD JAPANESE CABINET.

IN the course of the last summer, I followed the example of the rest of the world and made a visit to the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia. When I had enjoyed those features of that splendid show which had for me the most attraction, I found myself at last in front of the Japanese department, to which I had been unable, previously, to give a close inspection on account of the crowd which was continually pressing round that peculiarly interesting part of the Exhibition. Of course, when I was able to obtain a good view of that department, I was as much surprised as any one else at the superiority of the Japanese artists in many articles of vertu and ornament; but there was one specimen of Eastern ingenuity which attracted my attention above everything else, and that was a small cabinet, especially conspicuous for the grotesque mélange of carvings which covered the entire front. Serpents and lizards supported the shelves, while birds of brilliant plumage surmounted the top and appeared making vain exertions to escape from the cruel creatures whose basilisk eyes flashed just below, and seemed to be exercising a mysterious charm over the feathered beauties. The materials of the cabinet were different valuable woods of the Eastern seas, and were put together with a skill which European artists might well envy. The various birds and reptiles which covered the cabinet were so many illustrations of that fidelity to nature and artistic skill which attest the progress of the Japs in certain classes of ornamental art. But it was not simply its excellence as a work of art that caused me to linger so long in front of the cabinet. As I looked at this bizarre specimen of Eastern mechanical skill, I began mentally comparing it with one that I had previously seen in a very different place, and which resembled it in a very remarkable manner. The first cabinet, now so suddenly called to my memory, had made a very vivid impression on my mind at the time, not merely on account of its grotesque workmanship, but

chiefly in consequence of its having been intimately associated with a somewhat startling episode in the life of an old friend.

Having said so much I suppose that I am bound to go further and relate the incidents which led me to pause for some time alongside what was certainly the most curious specimen of Eastern art to be seen at Philadelphia. As I was standing there my thoughts carried me to a scene very different from that around me. It was not in a busy hive of industry and enterprize that I saw myself for a moment in imagination. It was not to the sunny isles of the Japan Sea, where a mysterious people isolated themselves for centuries from European civilization and commerce, but to a younger land in a northern clime, that my mind took a rapid flight. For the scene of the story which I am about to tell is laid within sight of the St. Lawrence, in a little village which twenty-five years ago strikingly illustrated the conservative and quiet habits of the French Canadians, and their indisposition to be carried away by the turmoil and unrest which generally characterize life on this continent. I am not an actor in this story and shall only attempt to relate it as I heard it from the lips of my friend, Ralph Montague, some four years ago, when I made a visit to his fine old country residence, in a distant part of the province of Quebec. When he told me the story he kindly consented to write it out at his leisure; and this promise he fulfilled not long afterwards. Owing to a press of varied engagements, I neglected translating the notes, which are in French, and they lay forgotten in a drawer of my desk until the story was revived in my memory by my visit to the Centennial, and then I decided to give it to the public, as nearly as possible in the words of the author.

I

Nearly a quarter of a century ago—my friend will now speak for himself—I was

living in the old city of Quebec, which was then comparatively little touched by that spirit of modern progress, which now-a-days is levelling its memorials of a famous historic past, and bringing the ancient capital, to the disgust of the antiquarian, more in harmony with modern ideas of convenience and taste. I had been engaged in practising law for several years, and was in the enjoyment of a fair modicum of success. One day in the summer of 1852—I remember it well, a broiling day, without a breath of air from the sea to cool the temperature—I was seated in my office, and wondering whether I could not throw my papers aside and enjoy a few holidays in some distant village on the St. Lawrence, where I could breathe the cool, salty breezes of the ocean. As I was running over in my mind the different places to which I might go, my office boy brought me a letter addressed in the handwriting of an old college friend, which I immediately recognized, though we had not corresponded together for years, and, indeed, had not seen each other since we left college—he, to return to his parents' roof and a fine estate, I to the hard study and plodding of a lawyer's office. I had heard, some months before the receipt of Henry Duchesnay's letter, that he had gone to travel in Europe, by the advice of his physician, who had warned his father that his constitution was too delicate to allow him to enter on the pursuit of any business or profession which would force him to remain constantly confined in-doors. He now simply asked me to come down the river and pay him a visit for a few days, as he wished to consult me on some business matters of much importance to himself and family. He added that if I could not come immediately, I was to write and tell him; but as he confidently expected me he would not fail to come in a carriage to the steamer-landing on the following Saturday.

It was on a Wednesday that I received my friend's invitation, and I decided at once to accept it, especially after his hint that I might be of assistance to him professionally. It was a lovely morning when I stood on the upper deck of the little steamer which then connected with the villages of the lower St. Lawrence. Quebec loomed out of the morning mist, which was slowly fading away before the sun's warm rays, like some mediæval castled city of the Danube or the

Rhine. The shipping lay lifeless on the bosom of the noble river, which bears to the ocean far below the tribute of many a lake and stream of the far distant West. Heave ho! heave ho! were the only sounds that came from the port where some stevedores were just commencing their work. A few vessels had hoisted their sails, which hung motionless from the masts. Passing the Island of Orleans, covered with verdure and dotted with white cottages hidden in the clustering foliage, we soon found ourselves making rapid headway down the river, in company with several tug-boats, which were puffing lustily as they bore along some heavily laden ships bound for countries far beyond.

In four or five hours' time we reached the wharf which had been built for the accommodation of the surrounding district. It was a quiet, secluded spot, the only buildings in sight were a small warehouse and a tiny white cottage, where the guardian of the place lived. The woods covered the sides of the lofty hills, which came sloping to the water's edge. A picturesquely wooded island was moored midway in the river, and I imagined it was still left in a state of natural wildness, until one of the passengers told me that several families were living in huts, and cultivating little patches of ground on the opposite side. Several cluney carts and a couple of calèches, drawn by stout Canadian ponies, were waiting on the wharf for passengers or freight. I did not see anything of my friend when we first reached the wharf, but a few minutes later he drove down the hill and greeted me warmly. It did not take me long to get my valise into the comfortable waggon which my friend was driving, and then we made our way into the country as fast as the ponies could take us. The surrounding country was very hilly, and we were obliged to make more than one considerable ascent on our way to the old home of the Duchesnay's, which was situated in the neighbourhood of a little village on the plateau of the hills. The road showed many a graceful curve and many a beautiful bit of scenery. Here a glen, where maples and birches threw their shadows over a rapid brook whose source was hidden deep among the hills. There a rugged height, where wild blackberries, ripening, peeped out among the

Now and then, as we ascended a prominent point, we caught a glimpse of the lordly river, sparkling in the sunshine and flecked with white wings. We passed a few habitants, dressed in rough homespun, and straw hats, which they touched courteously with a 'Bon jour, M'sieurs.'

But I am forgetting, as I recall the memories of that charming drive, to introduce you to my friend. He was a slender, rather delicate looking man, with piercing black eyes, and dark curly hair clustered carelessly over a prominent brow, which showed him to possess no ordinary intellectual power. I was glad to find that he believed his trip to Europe and the healthy natural life that he led on the Seigniorship had strengthened his constitution, and that he had not had, of late, any recurrence of those attacks of weakness which had been a frequent cause of alarm to his friends in his early youth. I now learned, for the first time, that his father had died nearly twelve months before, and left the estate, which had been in possession of the family for many generations, very heavily involved, on account of some speculations in iron mines which had turned out very unsuccessful.

'I have been hoping,' said Henry Duchesnay, 'that we might save at least a small part of the large sums which my father raised on mortgages at a very heavy rate of interest, but I now find that the stock is literally worthless, and that the shareholders will lose all they have invested. I have only known the truth very recently, and in the hope that you might assist me in some way, I have asked you to come down. I was in Quebec a couple of months ago on the same business, but found you were absent in Montreal. The friends I did consult gave me no comfort whatever.'

I could not disguise the fact that the mining stock of which he was speaking was quite worthless at that time, and that it was out of the question to expect to raise a shilling on it. The chief creditor, I learned, was an old notary, living in the village, who, like his father, had amassed what was a considerable fortune in Lower Canada.

'Jean Brouette,' continued Henry Duchesnay, 'appears to have drawn my father into a perfect network of trickery during my absence in Europe. My father was too easily influenced in business matters, and placed implicit confidence in the old notary,

who had managed our affairs for years. If I were alone in the world I would not, perhaps, mind my ill-luck so much, but the old rascal has had the audacity to suggest a compromise, as he calls it; one that is very repugnant to me. He proposes that I should consent to the marriage of his only son to my sister, Estelle, who, I am sure, dislikes him, although, in her affection for me, I believe she would not hesitate to sacrifice herself rather than allow the estate to pass completely out of our family. If this marriage could be arranged, Brouette would be satisfied with a part of the estate, on which he would build a house for his son and wife. Of course the proposal is liberal in the extreme, and if young Brouette were at all a fellow I could esteem, or my sister had any liking for him, I could not have any objection in the world to this plan of settling our difficulties. But I have decided, if no other means can be taken, to allow the estate to be sold rather than see my dear sister throw herself away on so cold-blooded a creature as this Francis Brouette. The worst of it is I am fit for nothing in practical life. I have no professional education, whilst my health at the best is very precarious. It will end, I suppose, in the Duchesnays becoming only a name in the country, like so many other families of the old régime.

II.

CONVERSING on the difficulties of his position, we at last reached the summit of the hills, and drove for a while through a more level country, presenting cultivated fields and many snug cottages of wood, with here and there one built of the common stone of the neighbourhood. We had now reached the Seigniorship of the Duchesnays.

'Our family,' said Henry Duchesnay, 'has held the land you see for miles around since the first Duchesnay came over as a captain in the Carignan regiment, in the seventeenth century. It is true, the settlement of the Seigniorial Tenure question has deprived us of much of our land, and of our old privileges, but still we have enough to make my patrimony a valuable one for this part of the country, and if my

father had not been led away for years to invest all his money in rash speculations, I could have no reason to be dissatisfied with my lot as the heir to so fine a heritage. At present Brouette, whose house you can now see close to the church—a low, stone building—may be said to be the real owner.'

We passed by the village, a small collection of white-washed, or painted, low-browed, red-roofed houses, all scattered around a large stone church with a lofty steeple, topped by a huge gilded cross, which glittered brightly in the sunshine. We took a road which led us to an avenue of lofty native trees, about a quarter of a mile from the village, and soon found ourselves on a fine lawn, in front of a large stone mansion, unpretending in appearance and covered with wild grape-vines, which clambered over the wide verandah, running along the entire front. The solidity of the stonework, and the massive, clumsy chimneys, showed that the house had been built in old times, though it had been very materially altered of late years, by modernizing the interior and adding a wing and verandah.

A young lady, whose dark and expressive eyes at once spoke of her relationship to my friend, came out on the verandah, as we jumped out of the waggon, and I was introduced to Estelle Duchesnay. Close behind her came a charming old lady from whom even old age had not robbed all her grace and beauty. This was Madame Duhamel, the aunt of the young Duchesnays. She was the widow of a brother of Henry's father, who had been an officer in the British navy, and subsequently a roving captain in the merchant marine. Two fairer types of youth and age, of innocence and experience, of maiden grace and matronly dignity, need scarcely be sought for; the resemblance of their features heightened the contrast of age and character. Each had the same elliptical arch of brow, the straight nose and delicate chin, and the graceful carriage of the well shaped head. Though so many years separated the aunt from the niece, each had her special charm to attract the eye; the one the freshness and joyousness of a hopeful youth; the other, the gentle serenity of a kindly old age, neither saddened by vain regrets for the past, nor distrustful of what the future had in store.

Passing through a large, lofty hall, decorated by a few fine moose and deer heads, we entered a spacious room, comfortably furnished with old-fashioned sofas and arm-chairs. The walls were covered with several old paintings, chiefly portraits of members or friends of the family. What attracted my attention particularly at the moment, was the number of curious ornaments which were scattered on the mantelpiece and on tables everywhere, and which I afterwards learned had been sent home at different times by Captain Duhamel, who had been very fond of collecting such curiosities.

After a comfortable wash in a snug bedroom, where the windows looked down immediately on a pretty little flower garden, and gave a wide prospect of woodland and meadow, I returned down stairs to a bountiful supper, that was awaiting my appearance. Then the ladies accompanied us to the verandah, where we enjoyed the cool, fresh breeze that came from the hills far to the northward, and seemed so fragrant and invigorating after the hot dusty atmosphere I had been inhaling in a musty office for weeks past. Our conversation gradually turned to the curious ornaments that had attracted my notice, and Henry Duchesnay then gave some particulars about Captain Duhamel's adventurous career, whilst his aunt was absent for some moments giving directions to the servants.

'My uncle left his home at a very early age, as a midshipman on board an English frigate, and by his twenty-fifth year had obtained a lieutenantcy. But when his ship was put out of commission, and he saw no prospect of employment for some time, he left the navy, married my aunt, and settled near Quebec; but he soon became tired of an inactive life, and took command of a large merchantman bound to the China Sea. It was on this voyage he collected many of those curiosities which you see scattered about the house. He remained in command of different merchant ships for some eighteen years, in the course of which he paid visits home only at distant intervals. My aunt accompanied him on two voyages—one to Brazil, and the other to the Cape of Good Hope; but her health did not permit her to leave her home for a long time afterwards; and had

it not been for his remittances of money and presents of different kinds, my Uncle Ralph would have been considered by us children as a mythical personage. Two years ago, or a little more, he suddenly made his appearance with his ship at Quebec, and there he was taken with a stroke of paralysis, almost immediately after his arrival, and before my aunt had time to reach him. He never spoke afterwards, but lingered for a fortnight in a perfectly helpless state, very pitiable to be seen, and then died without being able to utter a word. Unhappily for my aunt, she was never able to obtain any accurate information as to the disposition of his property. He was supposed to have saved a considerable amount of money; but he was always reticent on such subjects, of late years, though his letters to my aunt intimated that she need have no fears as to their future comfort, when he retired from his active life on the seas. But, strange to say, we could not find any papers to tell us what he had done with his property. His chief officers were as ignorant in the matter as we were, and all admitted that he never gave his confidence to those about him, with respect to his private affairs. There was one person from whom we might have obtained some clue, and that was, a Henry Martin, who had been his chief mate for years, and who, from his superior education and companionable qualities, was always a great favorite with my uncle. But Martin left the ship many months before my uncle's death, and settled somewhere in South America, and though we have written to him time and again, and addressed our letters to every place where he was likely to be found, we have never received any answer. All the property that my aunt could find was a share in the ship he had been sailing for years, besides a couple of valuable rings, set with precious stones, for which he had a perfect mania, and of whose value he had a remarkable knowledge—equal to that of the best lapidary or jeweller anywhere. The most fantastic illustration of his fancy for curiosities is an old Japanese cabinet which, I believe, accompanied him. all his voyages, and which I will show you now, if you like, for it is a wonderful piece of workmanship, in its way.'

With these words, Henry Duchesnay led me through the hall and dining-room,

into a small apartment, wainscoted with oak, now dark with age, and fitted up as a library. It had an air of seclusion, particularly attractive to a lover of books. Several comfortable arm-chairs were scattered about, a well-filled case of books stood between two windows, looking upon a small flower-garden and shrubbery. But the most conspicuous object in the room was a cabinet of decidedly bizarre appearance, made of a variety of costly woods, and standing some six feet high. The faces of the drawers were inlaid with ivory and ebony, making a sort of mosaic pattern, and the handles were exquisitely formed butterflies and humming birds, the colours of which were still remarkably well preserved, despite the rough usage to which it had been subject on many a long sea voyage. Above the shelves of lacquer work and on the top was a large bird of brilliant plumage in the coils of a gorgeously striped serpent, carved out of ebony and ivory, and then painted with exquisite skill.

'Yes,' I exclaimed, 'this is a wonderful piece of workmanship. The eyes of many a connoisseur in London or Paris would covet so rare a piece of carving and coloring.'

'The Jap artists,' replied Henry, 'are evidently very clever fellows in their way. I have no doubt it is a prize, and would be worth a good deal if my Aunt were willing to sell it. Indeed, we could find a purchaser to-morrow if we wished. For the inevitable Brouette, only last week, offered to buy it at our own price, but my Aunt laughs at the idea. What the old notary can want with it, I cannot for the life of me say, unless he has taken a fancy to the idea worked out in the serpent and bird. That about illustrates his mode of dealing with his friends and enemies alike.'

Here Estelle Duchesnay came into the room, and said, with a shudder, 'as she looked at the cabinet,

'Just look at the anguish depicted by the artist in the eyes of the lovely bird that the horrid creature is crushing in his coils. I cannot bear the sight of it, and wish my Aunt would send it away. What a strange taste the artist must have had to mingle the frightful with the beautiful in so fantastic a style.'

I quite agreed with the fair speaker that the cabinet would be far more harmonious were the serpent left out altogether.

'If it were possible to remove the obnoxious part,' said Henry Duchesnay, 'I would make the attempt myself, but if you look closely you will see that the serpent and its victim are so closely connected with the whole fabric, that to destroy one thing would be to ruin the entire cabinet. And then, after all, it is so admirable an illustration of the ingenuity of the Japanese, that it would be a pity to injure it. We should look at it as we would at that famous specimen of antique sculpture, the Laocoon group.'

III.

WHEN we returned to the verandah Madame Duhamel rejoined us, and suggested that we should take a walk in the flower-garden of which I had just caught a glimpse through the library-windows; but we had hardly stepped on the lawn before we saw two persons coming up the shady avenue.

'It is too bad,' said Henry Duchesnay, in a tone of annoyance; 'here come that precious father and son; we might have at least this evening to ourselves.'

I was speaking to Estelle at that moment, and I could see she was equally annoyed at the intrusion; but she said nothing, though she looked anxiously, as if she were afraid her brother might allow some exhibition of his feeling to escape.

As they joined us I was not prepossessed in their favour. The elder Brouette was a little wizened-faced man of between fifty and sixty years of age, with small, keen eyes and dry, parchment looking cheeks, and a voice which, obsequious as he tried to be, was far too sharp and incisive to be pleasant. The son was certainly more presentable both in looks and dress, but he too had the cunning ferret-like eyes, and his manner was far too fawning to be agreeable. Both shook hands with me, when my friends introduced them, and looked at me with their dangerous little eyes as if they would probe out the object of my presence at the manor.

Whether from fear of the well matched couple, or a desire to keep them in as good a humour as possible, the two ladies allowed themselves to be monopolized by the father and son. Henry Duchesnay could hardly

restrain his annoyance, and I doubt if he would have done so, had it not been for a warning glance now and then from his sister. We walked through the garden, where a few late roses and some old-fashioned flowers perfumed the evening air. Fortunately the Brouettes did not come to spend the evening, but soon took their departure; but before doing so I heard the old notary say to Henry Duchesnay, as he took my friend aside for a moment to the library window to speak about some matter of business,

'Have you then decided not to sell me that old cabinet; I have taken, as you know, a great fancy to it, and you might please me in so small a matter, as I will pay you more than you can ever sell it for elsewhere.'

'Mr. Brouette,' replied Henry Duchesnay, 'the cabinet, you know perfectly well, is not mine to sell or give away, and I trust you will not trouble me again about it.'

'Oh! very well,' answered the notary; 'keep it since you are so fond of it. It is not worth while quarrelling about, I am quite sure. But come, Francis, we must leave before it is too late. There is no moon to-night, and the road is very dark.'

'I cannot endure this life much longer,' said Henry Duchesnay, as soon as their unwelcome visitors had taken their leave, which they did with as much *empressement* as if they were the dearest friends of the family; 'I would rather pick up stones than be exposed to the coarse insults of the old notary and his son.'

'Be patient, my dear brother,' said Estelle, as she took his hand; 'let us hope for the best; I feel that all is not so dark as it really seems. But come, the dew is commencing to fall heavily, and it will be pleasanter in the sitting-room, where my aunt is waiting for us.'

The rest of the evening passed very delightfully, for the two ladies vied with each other in their efforts to dispel the gloom which the visits of the old notary invariably threw over Henry Duchesnay. Both related for my amusement many interesting incidents in the lives of the ladies and gentlemen whose portraits stared down on us from the walls. One face, from its striking resemblance to Estelle Duchesnay, impressed me particularly, and that was a painting of a young girl of some nineteen or twenty years, elaborately dressed in the

costume of Marie Antoinette's times just previous to the revolution. Her eyes and features generally were very like those of the aunt and niece—those of a true Duchesnay—but there was visible on the countenance of the portrait a sadness, a woe-sadness seemingly, which was in decided contrast with the more healthy, natural expression of the living girl. Estelle Duchesnay told me that the lady of the portrait had been married at an early age, soon after coming out of a French Convent in which she was educated, to an officer in the King's guards, who was one of the first to die in vain efforts to save his sovereign and his Queen in those terrible times. After many trials and vicissitudes she succeeded in reaching her friends in this country, with an only child; but the burden of her sorrow became at last so heavy that her reason gave way and she never recovered it.

'For many years,' continued Miss Duchesnay, 'the unhappy lady lingered in the old chateau; her only pleasure was in gathering flowers, for which she would haunt the deepest, most solitary woods, from the time the white lilies and violets first appeared, and out of which she would make *immortelles* to hang on the imaginary grave of her husband, who, she believed, was resting beneath the shadow of our old church in the village. The habitants would often meet her as she wandered through the woods and meadows, and would bow to her reverently and cross themselves fervently, as if they were in the presence of one from the other world; and so she must have seemed to many, with her saint-like, mournful expression, and her white draped figure. One day she never returned home, and after a search of many hours her friends found her lying peacefully by the side of a brook, with a bunch of white violets in her hand. Here, tired with her walk, she must have laid down to rest, and then fell gradually into a sleep from which no mortal could ever awake her. That spot is still respected by the people far and near, who, in their superstition, have often imagined that they have seen her, a white-robed figure, picking flowers in her favourite haunts.'

'The habitants,' said Madame Duhamel, when her niece had brought her sad history to a close, 'inherit much of the superstition of their Breton and Norman ancestry. Some of them persist in believing that Marie

D'Estouville can be seen, every anniversary of her death, picking flowers by the brook where she died. Claire, one of the young servants, declares that she saw a figure, just like that in the portrait, standing on the lawn, beneath the old maple tree, one night in the early part of this summer, when she had got up to open the window wider, on account of the sultriness of the air. In a terrible fright, she called up Margaret, who occupies the same room, but when they summoned enough courage to look out of the window, nothing could be seen. It is in this way, no doubt, most ghost stories originate.'

Music and stories of the peasantry wiled away the rest of the evening, till near midnight, when the ladies retired and left my friend and myself to talk over college days for some moments before we followed their example.

I was up at an early hour in the morning, and strolled out to the lawn, and thence into the little flower-garden, where the flowers that had resisted the heat of the summer were still heavy with dew. Here I found Estelle Duchesnay cutting a few flowers for the breakfast table.

'My brother has never been an early riser,' she replied, when I made enquiries after Henry Duchesnay; 'his delicate health for many years required that he should take a great deal of rest, and what was so long a necessity has now become a regular habit. As for myself, I always enjoy these earlier hours of the morning; everything is so fresh and fragrant; the sun has not had time to burn up the new life which the night's rest and dews have given to the flowers and leaves.'

It was indeed an exquisite morning. The heat of the sun was still modified by a slight mist, which was slowly rising and working its way in almost imperceptible clouds up the hills which rose to the northward, until it was lost in the azure of the heavens. The air was fragrant with the perfume of late blooming roses and honeysuckles which clambered up the side of the veranda or hung carelessly over the low fences. The only noises which disturbed the stillness of the morning were the bells of the cattle in the pastures or the notes of some canaries which trilled their songs on the veranda as cheerily as if they were flying in the woodlands of their natural home.

We strolled up and down the gravelled walks, conversing on different topics which naturally suggested themselves, until Madame Duhamel summoned us to the breakfast table.

Then, Henry Duchesnay, as soon as we had finished breakfast, took me off to the library, that we might freely talk over business matters. When I had looked carefully over the papers, I had to confess that the prospect was by no means bright. The property, though covering an extensive tract, only brought in enough income to support the family in a respectable, and certainly not extravagant style. The mortgage held by the notary very probably represented as much as the property would realize if suddenly forced into the market. Our only hope was in raising the money elsewhere to pay off Brouette; but that was not to be easily done in times when great financial distress was prevalent in all the large commercial centres.

'On one thing I am decided,' said Henry Duchesnay; 'my sister must not listen to the proposals of young Brouette. She, at least, must not be sacrificed.'

To this decision of my friend I gave an emphatic response in my own mind. It would indeed be a sacrifice, I said to myself, to see the charming Estelle Duchesnay the wife of a mere miser, as I felt the younger Brouette would become sooner or later, for he had imprinted on his face all the signs of innate greed and selfishness. Later on, as I was thrown more frequently into the company of Estelle Duchesnay, my repugnance to hearing her name even mentioned in connection with that of the young notary became still greater. From the moment of that interview among the roses and honeysuckles, the expressive eyes of the lovely girl were seldom absent from my mind.

Having sent off several letters in connection with my friend's affairs, I accompanied him round the village. The primitive tastes of the habitants were illustrated on every side. Everything was old-fashioned—remember I am writing of some twenty years ago, when improvements made only slow way in French Canadian villages. Large, clumsy sweeps hung over the wells, and oxen were busy in the fields, hauling, in heavy wooden carts, the grain which was just ripe for the sickle. Some women, for the most part stout and bronze-faced, and

dressed in homespun petticoats, white jackets, and broad-brimmed straw hats, were helping the men in the fields. Hollyhocks and sunflowers flaunted their showy blossoms in front of every cottage. The houses we entered were extremely neat, and had the inevitable double stove between two rooms. Every one, old and young, had a pleasant word for my friend, and several made more than one remark, as we stood conversing on the weather and the crops, which showed how little esteem was felt for the old notary and his son. At the same time it was easily seen that he had a strong hold over more than my friend in that part of the country. Every one evidently feared, and all despised, his character, but none were ready to quarrel openly with the only moneyed man in the settlement.

We stopped at the Post Office, which was kept in a shop with a sign over the door—

PIERRE GAUDET,

Marchandises Sèches & Epiceries.

This was one of the general shops, to be seen throughout the country, where everything is sold, from a needle to a ready-made coat or Digby herring. Here the postmaster, a careworn man of some fifty years of age, handed us a parcel of letters and papers out of one of the little pigeon-holes which took up a corner near the window. I noticed that he looked at my friend as if he were afraid to meet his eye, and after delivering the package he made an excuse to hurry to the back part of the shop.

'That poor fellow, Gaudet,' said Henry Duchesnay, as we drove off, 'is one of Brouette's victims, and I am not astonished he should look so wretched. He has been borrowing money for years from the notary at an enormous rate of interest, and is now known to be entirely at my old friend's mercy. I daresay you must by this time think us a particularly happy community, since an old money-lender has us all by the throats. But, unhappily for the habitants, there are too many of Brouette's class in the rural districts. No wonder the people are poor.'

IV.

A WEEK passed away very quickly—certainly the happiest week of my

life. I enjoyed the society of Estelle Duchesnay for many hours in strolling through the pleasant walks in the forest, and on one occasion we all made an excursion to a lake situate a few miles distant in the bosom of encircling hills. Here nature luxuriated in all its primitive wildness. The white clematis hung in masses over the trees, which bent their boughs into the very water, and great pines, which had resisted the tempests of a century or more, towered like grim sentinels on the mountain slopes. From more than a lofty hill we saw a noble panorama of mountains behind and of level meadows below, while far away stretched the dark blue waters of the great river. Is it strange that amid such scenes, my feeling of admiration for the sister of my college friend should have gradually ripened into a deeper sentiment.

My friends had not seen or heard anything of the Brouettes for some days—in fact, my presence at the manor-house seemed to keep them at a distance—but I felt that the time was fast coming when my friend must decide on his course for the future.

One afternoon, I happened to be walking in the outskirts of the grounds. For a wonder I was alone—Henry Duchesnay was tired and had laid down to sleep, while the ladies were busily engaged in some domestic occupation. I wandered carelessly through the shaded avenues, and at last found myself close to the main road. Here was a thick grove of spruce, which looked so cool and inviting on that hot August afternoon, that I threw myself down under their fragrant boughs, and took out a little volume, a copy of Montaigne's Essays, which I had found on the shelves in the library. I did not read much, but lay reflecting on the present and future, when I was aroused from my meditative frame of mind by the noise of some footsteps coming slowly over the road, which passed only a few feet from my resting-place. I could not see the faces through the thick growth of fir, but as the footsteps drew nearer, I recognised the voices as those of the old notary and his son. I did not wish to play the part of an eavesdropper; but neither was I inclined to meet them, and I consequently remained quiet in the hope that they would soon pass on; but, as it happened, they stopped near the gate, as if

they were hesitating about paying a visit to the house. They were now just far enough off to enable me to catch snatches of their conversation.

'Remember now, Francis,' said the old notary, 'I must have no more of this faint-heartedness. I have set my heart on your having the lady as well as the estate—it has been the object of my life for years to see you married into the oldest family in the country. The doctor has told me Henry Duchesnay is dying of consumption; that his life cannot be spared many years, though he himself believes he is stronger. Then you must be the owner of everything, if you marry Estelle.'

'Father,' replied the young man, 'I am willing enough to marry Estelle Duchesnay'—how I should like to have shaken the rascal for so freely using her name—'but she will not listen to me when I try to speak to her; she too clearly dislikes me, and I cannot go to be insulted by that upstart brother of hers.'

'I will see Henry Duchesnay at once,' said the father, emphatically, 'and let him know my terms for the last time. I don't like to see that Quebec lawyer hanging about; he may thwart our plans. But remember there is that other affair to be attended to at once.'

Here I lost the thread of their conversation, as they dropped their voices on hearing a cart coming up the road. After the cart had disappeared, and all was quiet again, I only caught one sentence, and that was not very intelligible to me.

'I am sure'—it was the father who was speaking—'that I have got the clue I've been looking for. It was only a week ago that Gaudet gave me a letter which, I think, solves the mystery which has so long been perplexing the Duchesnays, and as I see no other means just now of finding out the secret, I've resolved on the plan I've told you. It must be done at once; there is no risk whatever; better try that plan than let some lucky chance discover the whole affair to the family; and then what becomes of my long cherished schemes for your advancement.'

Here I lost the rest of the conversation, for the speakers entered the gate and proceeded towards the house, while I took a walk in another direction to reflect on what I had heard. It was quite evident to me

that the old notary was hatching some new scheme which foreboded no good to my friends, but what I had overheard did not give me much inkling into the subject. I decided to say nothing to young Duchesnay, for the present—it would only worry one of so excitable a disposition, and perhaps lead him to commit some hasty act which would complicate matters still more. On reaching the house I learned that the Brouettes had only remained half an hour, and then left, with the threat that they were not prepared to wait much longer. The old notary, I also found, had made a formal proposal for the hand of my friend's sister.

'I gave him an answer,' said Henry Duchesnay, who was much excited, 'which will prevent the old intriguer ever daring to approach me again on that subject. I suppose,' he added, with a sigh, 'that we must soon make up our minds to leave the old homestead.'

I was not able to afford any direct encouragement to my friend, but I decided, as I had not yet received any answers to my letters, to leave on the following day for the capital, and see for myself what might be done. We passed a very quiet evening, talking over probabilities for the future. I had, I confess, felt much relieved that Estelle Duchesnay was not to be allowed to sacrifice herself by a marriage with so unworthy a man as the younger Brouette. Though no words of mine had ever revealed my affection for her, yet I was sure, at times, that she was not unconscious of my attachment, and that her own feelings were not unfavourable to me. I believed that were I to succeed in assisting her brother out of his great difficulty, I should have an additional claim upon her regard, and might hope eventually to win her love. That evening particularly, I thought her manner, whenever she spoke to me, was even kinder to me than usual, and that I felt a sympathetic pressure of her hand as she bade me good night. Be that as it may, it served to feed the hope that the day would soon come when I could ask her to become my wife. Never more did I regret that I was not a capitalist. What an unspeakable gratification it would have been, to have relieved my friends of the heavy sorrow that was now apparently in store for them.

The night was fine, but remarkably dark, and the trees that stood in every direction, so close to the old house, naturally added to the prevailing gloom. Even the whip-poor-will that generally came every night and sang his curious refrain on the trellis-work below my window, seemed to have deserted his favorite haunts, or else to have sought his secluded nest unusually early. I had put out the lamp that I might more perfectly enjoy the calm that rested everywhere, and burying myself in an arm-chair, gave myself up to reflections on what might or might not be in the future. The most practical and prosaic amongst us will build, at one time or other in his life, his *châteaux en Espagne*. The only difference is the style of architecture these castles will assume in each imagination.

And then having built my *château*, of which, it is needless to say, Estelle Duchesnay was the fair *châtelaine*, my thoughts carried me to a less pleasant subject for reflection, and that was the conversation I had heard the previous afternoon in the spruce copse, and which I had forgotten for the moment, in the society of my friends. What could be the secret which the old covetous Paul Pry had managed to ferret out? I was sure, from the few words I had caught, that his scheme, if successful, meant some new misfortune to my friends. While reflecting over the affair, I gradually fell into a half dreamy state, in which I must have remained for a long time, till I suddenly started up with one of those presentiments that will frequently impress themselves forcibly on our minds—a presentiment that a crisis was approaching in the fortunes of my friend. I tried to throw off the idea that was burning itself into my very brain, and to force my thoughts to take another direction. Restless and excited though I was, I decided at last to try and compose my oppressive thoughts in sleep, and as I rose from my chair, and was about relighting the little lamp, I was sure I saw a gleam of light flicker near the garden gate, as I happened to look out of the window for a moment while holding the match in my hand. I thought for the instant that the light might come through the closed blinds of one of the other windows, but I knew that everyone in the house must have long since retired, and if I had any doubt on the

matter, that was soon removed by the fact that it was moving slowly through the garden, and I could hear the cautious movement of some person or animal, as a branch or pebble was touched. I sat down again in my chair, where I could better observe the light without the danger of being seen, and reflected what was best to be done. I soon found that the light proceeded from a small lantern; but who was carrying it? It could not be anybody belonging to the manor, and certainly burglars were never heard of in that secluded part of the country, where doors and windows were hardly ever fastened securely. Then, like a flash of lightning, there came again to my mind the conversation that I had overheard that afternoon. The light stopped immediately below my window, and I was able at last to detect the outlines of two figures, and could hear a faint whispering. Then I heard the lower window opened gently, and there was a pause for some moments as if the persons were listening. It was quite clear that the robbers, who I was now convinced were the Brouettes, were about to enter the library, which was separate from the main body of the house where the inmates slept. In that room was evidently hidden the secret of which Brouette had dropped a hint in my hearing. I determined to act with the greatest caution, and to catch the rascals in the middle of their scheme, whatever it might be.

In the meantime, whilst these thoughts were flying through my mind, I looked cautiously out, and noticed that one of the two forms had climbed through the window with the light, and left the other to watch outside. I hesitated for a moment before proceeding noiselessly to Henry Duchesnay's room, when my eyes were enchained by a strange spectacle which affected me with an unaccountable awe. Coming up the path which led from the maple grove directly to the library window, was a figure draped in white. My eyes could perfectly trace the shadowy outlines of the mysterious visitant, as I peered into the gloom. Then I caught, or imagined I caught, a glimpse of the face in the portrait of the unfortunate Marie D'Estouville. My imagination was now naturally excited to the most intense degree, and prepared to accept even the most incredible incident as a reality. All the surroundings of the scene

were calculated to impress even the most obtuse and practical mind with a sense of the marvellous. All the stories that I may have heard of unaccountable incidents, flashed across my memory, and seemed not improbable in the gloom that rested that summer night around the old mansion.

But instantaneously another thought took the place of the superstitious fancies which, for a moment, carried me away into the realms of the marvellous. Fearful of the consequences, if what I now imagined turned out a fact, I awoke my friend hurriedly, and informing him in a few words of my suspicions, proceeded as fast as I could to the garden. I was not a moment too soon. My hasty movements down the stairs evidently disturbed the housebreakers, for as I reached the garden gate, I could see one of them stepping out of the window. As he reached the ground, he put out the light and prepared to make his escape. Neither of the two had yet seen the white figure which was standing in the midst of the flowers, like a guardian angel in a robe of celestial innocence. As they turned to fly from the garden at the sound of my approaching steps, they caught a full view of the white draped figure, and as they did so, the one darted precipitately into the woods with a cry of intense terror, while the other—whose faint voice I recognised as the old notary's—fell panic-struck, on his knees, with appeals to the 'Blessed Virgin' to protect him.

But I had no thought at that instant for the abject wretch, for my whole attention was directed to the mysterious visitor, now trembling with fear. I was not mistaken in the conjecture I had formed when I caught a second glimpse of the figure from the window. It was Estelle Duchesnay, who had been walking in her sleep, and, now suddenly aroused from her lethargy, was asking in trembling accents the meaning of this strange scene.

By this time Madame Duhamel and Henry Duchesnay made their appearance with lights, and for an instant or two all was confusion, until my hurried explanations gave some insight into the cause of the excitement. Whilst Madame Duhamel assisted her niece, almost fainting with nervous excitement, to the house, Henry Duchesnay and myself turned to look for the old notary, who had been for the mo-

ment forgotten, but we found that he had disappeared during the confusion of the explanations.

V.

WE wasted no time in following the old notary, for we knew he could be found later on without difficulty, but hurried to the library, where we saw abundant evidence of his hasty flight. A screw driver and file were lying on the table, and a sheet of paper was on the floor. My first glance, as I entered the room, was in the direction of the cabinet, but so far as I could see that had not been disturbed. Henry Duchesnay picked up the paper, which happened to be a letter dated from a small village in the interior of Brazil. With an exclamation of wonder, Henry Duchesnay glanced at the name of the writer, and then read it aloud :

'DEAR SIR,—I daresay you have been much surprised at my not having answered the letters which, I judge from the only one I have received, you have addressed to me on several occasions. You must know that for nearly two years I was acting as agent to a large estate in the Argentine Republic, and owing to the unsettled state of the country for months, was unable to communicate with my friends. It is only within the past eight months that I have left that wretched country and bought a plantation in Brazil. I am sorry I cannot give you much information as to your uncle's property. You are certainly correct in supposing that Captain Duchesnay gave me a good deal of his confidence, but he was the last man in the world to let even his dearest friend into the secret of his wealth. I am sure he had saved considerable property, but in what shape I cannot say. He had a mania, as you doubtless know, for collecting curiosities, and among other things he once showed me some valuable diamonds which he had purchased in Brazil, and on which he expected to realize a large sum. On one occasion, when he was more communicative than usual, he pointed out to me an ingenious contrivance which the artificer had devised as a hiding place for valuables in a curious cabinet he had bought in Japan. My memory is not very clear, but I think there was a serpent entwined about a bird, and that the secret was discovered by untwisting the coils. You must measure some eight or ten inches—I forget which—from the serpent's fangs and then, if you press firmly on an ebony stripe, you will find a spring give way, and allow the key-piece, as it were, to slip out. You must next unscrew each joint separately, and then you will free the bird, under whose wings are two cleverly contrived places for concealing valuables. I suppose you have seen this cabinet or at least know where it is to be found. It would be curious if you should find

in the secret receptacle some clue which will help you in discovering the whereabouts of your uncle's property. Hoping that you may yet be successful in your search, and again regretting that I can be of so little assistance to you, I remain,
Very sincerely and obediently yours,

HENRY MARTIN.

Then we turned simultaneously to the cabinet, which looked even more fantastic than ever in the dull light of a flickering lamp. Henry Duchesnay paused, as if undecided what to do next, and then said to me,

'Would you believe it, Ralph; this excitement has made me so nervous that my hand is actually shaking. All this seems like a dream. You must discover the secret, if there is any, in the old cabinet.'

I read once more that part of the letter which referred to the cabinet, lest I might not have perfectly understood it, and then measured ten inches, and when that length did not appear to answer, eight inches. Nothing yielded to my first pressure, but as there were several ebony stripes I tried each one separately until at last I felt one give way, and in the next instant a little coil lay in my hand. It was then an easy task to untwist the rest, and when that was done the exquisitely carved bird was liberated. I touched the wings, but nothing moved, and for the moment I thought I was to fail. At last, by pressing gently on each part, I accidentally touched a hidden spring, and then the bird seemed ready to fly off on extended pinions. In the body of the bird, which was lined with some curious perfumed leather, we found a miniature ebony casket, and a small package encased in oiled silk. We opened the casket first, which was fastened by a spring, and then our eyes were dazzled by a wondrous sight. Here, on a soft couch of wool, lay some exquisite gems, diamonds and opals, which sent forth countless tints and gleams to light up the dull room with all the colours of a glorious rainbow.

So dazed were we for some moments by the sparkle of these wonderful illustrations of Nature's most cunning workmanship, that we could do nothing but look and admire. When we recollected the smaller package, we ripped off the silk and found that it contained the captain's will, devi-

sing all his property to his wife, and, on her death, to his nephew and niece in equal proportions, as well as a statement of the value of the jewels, which represented nearly all his wealth. As the jewels had been bought under peculiarly favorable circumstances, it was probable that they would realize far more than the sum at which they had been purchased, some thirty thousand dollars; and this turned out the case afterwards.

Madame Duhamel, who was all this while in attendance on her niece, who was utterly prostrated from the shock of the excitement, was overjoyed when she was informed of the wonderful discovery, and clapped her hands in the happiness of the thought that she would now be able to ensure the future of her nephew and save the estate.

But we soon woke to the necessity of attending to more prosaic matters. We could not forget the Brouettes, whose scheme had turned out so signally to their own discomfiture. It was now evident enough that the old notary, believing from the tenor of Martin's letter that the old cabinet concealed a valuable secret, had used his best efforts to purchase it, and when those failed, had determined to make a desperate venture to solve the mystery for himself. To marry his son to Estelle Duchesnay, and to see him eventually the proprietor of the estate, of which his father and grandfather had been the *censitaires*,—the mere dependants—had been notoriously the dream of his life, and rather than see his darling scheme thwarted by any discovery which might place the Duchesnays beyond his reach, he had resorted to the daring stratagem in which he had been caught himself.

But the first query I put, as we talked over the best plan to pursue, was as to the way the letter had fallen into the elder Brouette's possession.

'You remember my telling you,' replied Henry Duchasnay, 'that we never received a reply to the letters we addressed to Martin. A few weeks after my father's death I determined to make another effort to reach Martin, and wrote the letter to which this is evidently the reply. I now recollect that the old notary came in when I had finished, and as he had then my entire confidence, I read it aloud and gave it to him

to mail. The old scoundrel has managed to intercept the reply, which indeed I have never expected; in fact I had forgotten all about it.

I took upon myself the management of the whole affair with Brouette. But before we visited his office, we proceeded to the post-office. I had a private interview with the postmaster, who confessed—as I expected he would—after we had threatened to expose him and had shown him that Brouette was at our mercy, that he had for a long time back been in the habit of allowing the notary to look over all letters addressed to the Duchesnays, and had retained any which bore a foreign postmark. The unhappy man, it appeared, was entirely in Brouette's power, and too weak to resist his importunities. He now remembered that he had received a letter some ten days before, with a Brazilian postmark, and this Brouette had put into his pocket with the remark that he would deliver it himself, as he was interested in its contents.

Our interview with the old notary, whom we found alone, his son having left the village at an early hour in a schooner bound for the Gulf, did not last long. He assumed a very indignant and even defiant air when we first made our purpose known, but he soon found he was at our mercy, when we told him that he had been recognized the night before, and that we had learned from Gaudet the means he had used to obtain possession of the letter which he had accidentally dropped in his haste to fly, and which, he confessed, he had foolishly taken with him to consult in his quest after the secret of the old Cabinet. My friends were so reluctant to have their family affairs exposed to public notoriety that I was compelled to forego the pleasure of taking measures to have him prosecuted criminally; but we gave him two alternatives to choose from: either to be brought to trial for his attempt to rob, and for his letter-stealing; or to leave that part of the country as soon as he could settle his affairs. I daresay we could have made our own terms with him, when his courage had thoroughly broken down, but Henry Duchesnay would not free himself from his just obligations in the smallest degree, and came to an arrangement by which the notary was to be paid the sum due him, within a time which would enable us to realize the value of the

jewels. A careful investigation of the accounts, which ran over many years, revealed the fact that Brouette had taken advantage of my friend's father in numerous ways, and when we came to a final settlement, the amount justly due was considerably below that which he had claimed at the first. Both father and son disappeared immediately afterwards to find a new home somewhere in the West, but we never heard of them again. As to the unfortunate postmaster, he emigrated to New Hampshire, where, I understand, he is now doing well.

This story, which I have told you in my imperfect way, said my friend in conclusion, has been written in that same library, and close by that old Cabinet which has played so important a part in the fortunes of a Canadian family. But as I recall the past, I miss two of those familiar and kind faces, present in this room some twenty years ago. Madame Duhamel lived for ten years after

the discovery of her fortune, while Henry Duchesnay, who never married, left us about six years ago on a trip to Egypt, but he never returned, and his body now rests in the little European cemetery near Cairo. In reply to the other query, which I know will be asked by those who may hear or read this story, I have to say very simply that, if you could look out into the little garden, now in the freshness of its summer beauty, you would see at this very moment two ladies who resemble each other remarkably. The elder is still a youthful matron; the younger is a slim, graceful girl of seventeen years. They are trimming the roses and gaily laughing at the antics of a little spaniel who finds the birds far too wary as he eagerly springs after them among the shrubs and flowers. Estelle is the name of both these ladies. One is my wife; the other, my eldest daughter.

J. G. BOURINOT.

NOX ERAT.

HE stood alone and saw the great world rushing
On with its throbbing mass of human life;
He stood and saw the moil and toil of millions,
While in his own heart clashed their din and strife.

'O, world so strange in which our lives are shapen;
O, land so vague to which our pathways tend;
O, Thou in whose vast palm our destinies are hidden,
When wilt Thou bring our sorrows to an end?

'Must man walk on alone throughout the ages,
Evil in silence gnawing at his heart?
Shalt never lyre sweet for him be tunéd?
Or flower for his poor pleasure bloom apart?

'Here must he always suffer pain and anguish,
And see, yet never gain the wished-for goal;
And sing, but never waken with his rapture
The only heart for which he breathes his soul?

'Oh, lonely, dark, and drear this life of toiling,
Black as the night that broods o'er Lethe's wave!
Shall never rest be found from endless labour,
Until man lays him in the silent grave?

'Oh, tell me, trembling heart, that beats so faintly,
Shall I not find this side the grave, the goal,—
That rest the heaven-born being craveth,
The just reward and recompense of toil?'

While Henry
died, left us
Egypt, but
now rests
near Cairo.
Which I know
I never hear or
know simply
of the little
of its summer
of my moment
of her remark-
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of the roses
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so wary as
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of the name of
of his wife ; the

OURINOT.

