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Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
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Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
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Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
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Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
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Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving
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The Collectors

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THE COLLECTORS

Being Cases mostly under the Ninth and Tenth Commandments

by

FRANK JEWETT MATHER, Junr.

1912

Comprising a *Ballade*, wherein the Wrongfulness of Art Collecting is conceded, and as well Certain Stories: *Campbell Corot*, which recounts the career of an able and candid Picture Forger. *The del Puente Giorgione*, which tells of an artful Great Lady and an Artless Expert. *The Lombard Runes*, a mere interlude, but revealing a certain duplicity in Professional Seekers for Truth. *Their Cross*, so called from an inanimate Object of Price which wrought Woe to a well meaning New York Couple. *The Missing St Michael*, a tale of Italian-ate Americans which is full of Vanities and, though alluring to the Sophisticated, quite unfit for the Simple Reader. *The Lusted Pots*, again a mere interlude, but of a grim sort, as it grazes the Sixth Commandment and *The Balaklava Coronal*, which, notwithstanding its exotic title, is mostly of our own People, showing the Triumph of a resourceful Dealer over two Critics and a Captain of Industry. To which seven stories are added some *Reflections upon Art Collecting*, setting forth Excuses and Palliations for a Practice usually regarded as Pernicious.

FOREWORD

Of the seven stories of art collecting that make up this book "Campbell Corot" and the "Missing St. Michael" first appeared under the pseudonym of Francis Cotton, in "Scribner's Magazine," and are now reprinted by its courteous permission. Similar acknowledgment is due the "Nation" for allowing the sketch on art collecting to be republished. Many readers will note the similarity between the story "The del Puente Giorgione" and Paul Bourget's brilliant novellette, "La Dame qui a perdu son Peintre." My story was written in the winter of 1907, and it was not until the summer of 1911 that M. Bourget's delightful tale came under my eye. Clearly the same incident has served us both as raw material, and the noteworthy differences between the two versions should sufficiently advise the reader how little either is to be taken as a literal record of facts or estimate of personalities.

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A BALLADE OF ART COLLECTORS

Oh Lord! We are the covetous.
Our neighbours' goods afflict us sore.
From Frisco to the Bosphorus
All sightly stuff, the less the more,
We want it in our hoard and store.
Nor sacrilege doth us appal –
Egyptian vault – fane at Cawnpore –
Collector folk are sinners all.

Our envoys plot *in partibus*.
They've small regard for chancel door,
Or Buddhist bolts contiguous
To lustrous jade or gold galore
Adorning idol squat or tall –
These be strange gods that we adore –
Collector folk are sinners all.

Of Romulus Augustulus
The signet ring I proudly wore.
Some rummaging *in ossibus*
I most repentantly deplore.
My taste has changed; I now explore
The sepulchres of Senegal
And seek the pots of Singapore –
Collector folk are sinners all.

Lord! Crave my neighbour's wife! What for?
I much prefer his crystal ball
From far Cathay. Then, Lord, ignore
Collector folk who're sinners all.

CAMPBELL COROT

The Academy reception was approaching a perspiring and vociferous close when the Antiquary whispered an invitation to the Painter, the Patron, and the Critic. A Scotch woodcock at "Dick's" weighs heavily, even against the more solid pleasures of the mind, so terminating four conferences on as many tendencies in modern art, and abandoning four hungry souls, four hungry bodies bore down an avenue toward "Dick's" smoky realm, where they found a quiet corner apart from the crowd. It is a place where one may talk freely or even foolishly — one of those rare oases in which an artist, for example, may venture to read a lesson to an avowed patron of art. All the way down the Patron had bored us with his new Corot, which he described at tedious length. Now the Antiquary barely tolerated anything this side of the eighteenth century, the Painter was of Courbet's sturdy following, the Critic had been writing for a season that the only hope in art for the rich was to emancipate themselves from the exclusive idolatry of Barbizon. Accordingly the Patron's rhapsodies fell on impatient ears, and when he continued his importunities over the Scotch woodcock and ale, the Painter was impelled to express the sense of the meeting.

"Speaking of Corot," he began genially, "there are certain misapprehensions about him which I am fortunately able to clear up. People imagine, for instance, that he haunted the woods about Ville d'Avray. Not at all. He frequented the gin-mills in Cedar Street. We are told he wore a peasant's blouse and sabots; on the contrary, he sported a frock-coat and congress gaiters. His long clay pipe has passed into legend, whereas he actually smoked a tilted Pittsburg stogy. We speak of him by the operative name of Camille; he was prosaically called Campbell. You think he worked out of doors at rosy dawn; he painted habitually in an air-tight attic by lamplight."

As the Painter paused for the sensation to sink in, the Antiquary murmured soothingly, "Get it off your mind quickly, Old Man," the

Critic remarked that the Campbells were surely coming, and the Patron asked with nettled dignity how the Painter knew.

"Know?" he resumed, having had the necessary fillip. "Because I knew him, smelled his stogy, and drank with him in Cedar Street. It was some time in the early '70s, when a passion for Corot's opalescences (with the Critic's permission) was the latest and most knowing fad. As a realist I half mistrusted the fascination, but I felt it with the rest, and whenever any of the besotted dealers of that rude age got in an 'Early Morning' or a 'Dance of Nymphs,' I was there among the first. For another reason, my friend Rosenheim, then in his modest beginnings as a marchand-amateur, was likely to appear at such private views. With his infallible tact for future salability, he was already unloading the Institute, and laying in Barbizon. Find what he's buying now, and I'll tell you the next fad."

The Critic nodded sagaciously, knowing that Rosenheim, who now poses as collecting only for his pleasure, has already begun to affect the drastic productions of certain clever young Spanish realists.

"Rosenheim," the Painter pursued, "really loved his Corot quite apart from prospective values. I fancy the pink silkiness of the manner always appeals to Jews, recalling their most authentic taste, the eighteenth-century Frenchman. Anyhow, Rosenheim took his new love seriously, followed up the smallest examples religiously, learned to know the forgeries that were already afloat—in short, was the best informed Corotist in the city. It was appropriate, then, that my first relations with the poet-painter should have the sanction of Rosenheim's presence."

Lingering upon the reminiscence, the Painter sopped up the last bit of anchovy paste, drained his toby, and pushed it away. The rest of us settled back comfortably for a long session, as he persisted. "Rosenheim wrote me one day that he had got wind of a Corot in a Cedar Street auction room. It might be, so his news went, the pendant to the one he had recently bought at the Bolton sale. He suggested we should go down together and see. So we joggled down Broadway in the 'bus, on what looked rather like a wild-goose chase. But it paid to keep the run of Cedar Street in those days; one might find anything. The gilded black walnut was pushing the old

mahogany out of good houses; Wyant and Homer Martin were occasionally raising the wind by ventures in omnibus sales; then there were old masters which one cannot mention because nobody would believe. But that particular morning the Corot had no real competitor; its radiance fairly filled the entire junk-room. Rosenheim was in raptures. As luck would have it, it was indeed the companion-piece to his, and his it should be at all costs. In Cedar Street, he reasonably felt, one might even hope to get it cheap. Then began our *duo* on the theme of atmosphere, vibrancy, etc.—brand new phrases, mind you, in those innocent days. As Rosenheim for a moment carried the burden alone, I stepped up to the canvas and saw, with a shock, that the paint was about two days old. Under what conditions I wondered—for did I not know the ways of paint—could a real Corot have come over so fresh? I more than scented trickery. A sketch overpainted—or it seemed above the quality of a sheer forgery—or was the case worse than that? Meanwhile not a shade of doubt was in Rosenheim's mind. As I canvassed the possibilities his *sotto-voce* ecstasies continued, to the vast amusement, as I perceived, of a sardonic stranger who hovered unsteadily in the background. This ill-omened person was clad in a statesmanlike black frock-coat with trousers of similar funereal shade. A white lawn tie, much soiled, and congress gaiters, much frayed, were appropriate details of a costume inevitably topped off with an army slouch hat that had long lacked the brush. He was immensely long and sallow, wore a drooping moustache vaguely blonde, between the unkempt curtains of which a thin cheroot pointed heavenward. As he walked nervously up and down, with a suspiciously stilted gait, he observed Rosenheim with evident scorn and the picture with a strange pride. He was not merely odd, but also offensive, for as Rosenheim whispered '*Comme c'est beau!*' there was an unmistakable snort; when he continued, '*Mais c'est exquis!*' the snort broadened into a mighty chuckle; while as he concluded '*Most luminous!*' the chuckle became articulate, in an '*Oh, shucks!*' that could not be ignored.

"'You seem to be interested, sir,' Rosenheim remarked. 'You bet!' was the terse response. 'May I inquire the cause of your concern?' Rosenheim continued placidly. With a most exasperating air of willingness to please, the stranger rejoined: 'Why, I jest took a sim-

ple pleasure, sir, in seeing an amachoor like you talking French about a little thing I painted here in Cedar Street.' For a moment Rosenheim was too indignant to speak, then he burst out with: 'It's an infernal lie; you could no more paint that picture than you could fly.' 'I did paint it, jest the same,' pursued the stranger imperturbably, as Rosenheim, to make an end of the insufferable wag, snapped out sarcastically, 'Perhaps you painted its mate, then, the Bolton Corot.' 'The one that sold for three thousand dollars last week? Of course I painted it; it's the best nymph scene I ever done. Don't get mad, mister; I paint most of the Corots. I'm glad you like 'em.'

"For a moment I feared that little Rosenheim would smite the lank annoyer dead in his tracks. 'For heaven's sake be careful!' I cried. 'The man is drunk or crazy or he may even be right; the paint on this picture isn't two days old.' 'Correct,' declared the stranger. 'I finished it day before yesterday for this sale.' Then a marked change came over Rosenheim's manner. He grew positively deferential. It delighted him to meet an artist of talent; they must know each other better. Cards were exchanged, and Rosenheim read with amazement the grimy inscription '*Campbell Corot, Landscape Artist.*' 'Yes, that's my painting name,' Campbell Corot said modestly; 'and my pictures are almost equally as good as his'n, but not quite. They do for ordinary household purposes. I really hate to see one get into a big sale like the Bolton; it don't seem honest, but I can't help it; nobody'd believe me if I told.' Rosenheim's demeanour was courtly to a fault as he pleaded an engagement and bade us farewell. Already apparently he divined a certain importance in so remarkable a gift of mimicry. I stayed behind, resolved on making the nearer acquaintance of Campbell Corot."

* * * * *

"Rosenheim clearly understands the art of business," interrupted the Antiquary. "And the business of art," added the Critic. "Could your seedy friend have painted my Corot?" said the Patron in real distress. "Why not?" continued the Painter remorselessly. "Only hear me out, and you may judge for yourself. Anyhow, let's drop your Corot; we were speaking of mine."

"To make Campbell Corot's acquaintance proved more difficult than I had expected. He confided to me immediately that he had

been a durn fool to give himself away to my friend, but talk was cheap, and people never believed him, anyway. Then gloom descended, and my professions of confidence received only the most surly responses. He unbent again for a moment with, 'Painter feller, you knowed the pesky ways of paint, didn't yer?' but when I followed up this promising lead and claimed him as an associate, he repulsed me with, 'Stuck up, ain't yer? Parley French like your friend? S'pose you've showed in the Saloon at Paris.' Giving it up, I replied simply: 'I have; I'm a landscape painter, too, but I'd like to say before I go that I should be glad to be able to paint a picture like that.' Looking me in the eye and seeing I meant it, 'Shake!' he replied cordially. As we shook, his breath met me fair: it was such a breath as was not uncommon in old-time Cedar Street. Gentlemen who affect this aroma are, I have noticed, seldom indifferent to one sort of invitation, so I ventured hardily: 'You know Nickerson's Glengyle, sir; perhaps you will do me the favour to drink a glass with me while we chat.' Here I could tell you a lot about Nickerson's. "Don't," begged the Critic, who is abstemious. "I will only say, then, that Nickerson's, once an all-night refuge, closes now at three—desecration has made it the yellow marble office of a teetotaler in the banking line—and the Glengyle, that blessed essence of the barley, heather, peat, and mist of Old Scotland, has been taken over by an exporting company, limited. Sometimes I think I detect a little of it in the poisons that the grocers of Glasgow and Edinburgh send over here, or perhaps I only dream of the old taste. Then it was itself, and by the second glass Campbell Corot was quite ready to soliloquise. You shall have his story about as he told it, but abridged a little in view of your tender ages and the hour.

* * * * *

"John Campbell had grown up contentedly on the old farm under Mount Everett until one summer when a landscape painter took board with the family. At first the lad despised the gentle art as unmanly, but as he watched the mysterious processes he longed to try his hand. The good-natured Düsseldorfian willingly lent brushes and bits of millboard upon which John proceeded to make the most lurid confections. The forms of things were, of course, an obstacle to him, as they are to everybody. 'I never could drore,' he told me, 'and I never wanted to drore like that painter chap. Why he'd fill a big

canvas with little trees and rocks and ponds till it all seemed no bigger than a Noah's ark show. I used to ask him, "Why don't you wait till evening when you can't see so much to dre?" To such criticism the painter naturally paid no attention, while John devoted himself to sunsets and the tube of crimson lake. From babyhood he had loved the purple hour, and his results, while without form and void, were apparently not wholly unpleasing, for his master paid him the compliment of using one or two such sketches as backgrounds, adding merely the requisite hills, houses, fences, and cows. These collaborations were mentioned not unworthily beside the sunsets of Kensett and Cropsey next winter at the Academy. From that summer John was for better or worse a painter.

"His first local success was, curiously enough, an historical composition, in which the village hose company, almost swallowed up by the smoke, held in check a conflagration of Vesuvian magnitude. The few visible figures and Smith's turning-mill, which had heroically been saved in part from the flames, were jotted in from photographs. Happily this work, for which the Alert Hose Company subscribed no less than twenty-five dollars, providing also a fifty-dollar frame, fell under the appreciative eye of the insurance adjuster who visited the very ruins depicted. Recognising immediately an uncommonly available form of artistic talent, this gentleman procured John a commission as painter in ordinary to the Vulcan, with orders to come at once to town at excellent wages. By his twentieth year, then, John was established in an attic chamber near the North River with a public that, barring change in the advertising policy of the Vulcan, must inevitably become national. For the lithographers he designed all manner of holocausts; at times he made tours through the counties and fixed the incandescent mouth of Vulcan's forge, the figures within being merely indicated, on the face of a hundred ledges. That was a shame, he freely admitted to me; the rocks looked better without. In fact, John Campbell's first manner soon came to be a humiliation and an intolerable bondage. He felt the insincerity of it deeply. 'You see, it's this way,' he explained to me, 'you don't see the shapes by firelight or at sunset, but you have seen them all day and you know they're there. Nobody that don't have those shapes in his brush can make you feel them in a picture. Everybody puts too little droring into sunsets. Nobody paints good

ones, not even Inness [we must remember it was in the early '70s], except a Frenchman called Roosoo. He takes 'em very late, which is best, and he can drome some too."

"A very decent critic, your alcoholic friend," the Critic remarked. "He was full of good ideas, as you shall see," the story-teller replied. "I quite agree with you, if the bad whisky could have been kept away from him he might have shone in your profession. Anyhow, he had the makings of an honest man in him, and when the Vulcan enlarged its cliff-painting programme, he cut loose bravely. Then followed ten lean years of odd jobs, with landscape painting as a recreation, and the occasional sale of a canvas on a street corner as a great event. When his need was greatest he consented to earn good wages composing symbolical door designs for the Meteor Coach Company, but that again he could not endure for long. Later in the intervals of colouring photographs, illuminating window-shades, or whatever came to hand, he worked out the theory which finally led him to the feet of Corot. It was, in short, that the proper subject for an artist deficient in linear design is sunrise.

"He explained the matter to me with zest. 'By morning you've half forgotten the look of things. All night you've seen only dreams that don't have any true form, and when the first light comes, nothing shows solid for what it is. The mist uncovers a little here and there, and you wonder what's beneath. It's all guesswork and nothing sure. Take any morning early when I look out of my attic window to the North River. There's nothing but a heap of fog, grey or pink, as there's more or less sun behind. It gets a little thick over toward Jersey, and that may be the shore, or again it mayn't. Then a solid bit of vi'let shows high up, and I guess it's Castle Stevens, but perhaps it ain't. Then a pale-yellow streak shoots across the river farther up and I take it to be the Palisades, but again it may be jest a ray of sunshine. You see there really ain't no earth; it's all air and light. That's what a man that can't drome ought to paint; that's what my namesake, Cameel Corot, did paint better than any one that ever lived.'

"At this point of his confession John Campbell glared savagely at me for assent, and set down a sadly frayed and noxious stogy on Nickerson's black walnut. I hastened to agree, though much of the

doctrine was heresy to a realist, only objecting: 'But one really has to draw a scene such as you describe just like any other. In fact, the drawing of atmosphere is the most difficult branch of our art. Many very good painters, like my master, Courbet, have given it up.' 'Corbet!' he replied contemptuously; 'he didn't give it up; he never even seen it. But don't I know it's hard, sir? For years I tried to paint it, and I never got nothing but the fog; when I put in more I lost that. They're pretty, those sketches—like watered silk or the scum in the docks with the sun on it; but, Lord, there ain't nothing into 'em, and that's the truth. At last, after fumbling around for years, I happened to walk into Vogler's gallery one day and saw my first Corot. Ther' it was—all I had been trying for. It was the kind of droring I knew ought to be, where a man sets down more what he feels than what he knows. I knew I was beginning too late, but I loved that way of working. I saw all the Corots I could, and began to paint as much as I could his way. I got almost to have his eye, but of course I never got his hand. Nobody could, I guess, not even an educated artist like you, or they'd all a don' it.'

* * * * *

"After this awakening John Campbell began the artist's life afresh with high hopes. His first picture in the sweet new style was honestly called 'Sunrise in Berkshire,' though he had interwoven with his own reminiscences of the farm several motives from various compositions of his great exemplar. He signed the canvas Campbell Corot, in the familiar capital letters, because he didn't want to take all the credit; because he desired to mark emphatically the change in his manner, and because it struck him as a good painting name justified by the resemblance between his surname and the master's Christian name. It was a heartfelt homage in intention. If the disciple had been familiar with Renaissance usages, he would undoubtedly have signed himself John of Camille.

"'Sunrise in Berkshire' fetched sixty dollars in a downtown auction room, the highest price John had ever received; but this was only the beginning of a bewildering rise in values. When John next saw the picture, Campbell had been deftly removed, and the landscape, being favourably noticed in the press, brought seven hundred dollars in an uptown salesroom. John happened on it again in