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Number Three ---- The Murderer's Brain.

It was very early in January, 1881 -- it might have been in 1880 though I dont think so--- that Dr. Osler asked me to go to Rimouski, the railway station for Father Point, and Father Point is the place where the ocean ships coming up the St. Lawrence were first reported by telegraph. I was to go and get the brain of a man who was to be hanged at Rimouski on the 13th of the month. A recent paper from Vienna had stated that confluent convolutions, or at least something to do with the convolutions of the brain, went with a criminal record. This paper fired W. O.'s curiosity, and here was a chance that he wasn't going to miss. So he got some sort of letter from the Dominion Minister of Justice in which the Minister asked those concerned, as a favor to him to help Dr. Osler in everyway they could. W, O., arming me with this document, that I in my carelessness thought mandatory (God knows what W. O. thought of it), a bag of tools, a few dollars, my case Gladstone bag, and many good wishes, started me off. At noon on the 12th the train stopped for dinner, a railway station donner, at Trois Pistole, and never in my life have I had such a dinner, onw never to be forgotten. Good soup was followed by better roast wild goose, with rice and potatoes as vegetable, this in turn was followed by desert, with perfect coffee at the end, and all through one was supplied with delicious breadstuffs and fresh butter. And there was nothing niggardly about it. The helpings were generous, and you were urged to a second helping of everything; and though memory is treacherous, I think the charge for this priceless meal, was 35 cents. I probably had a second helping of everything, for on getting to Rimouski early in the afternoon, I was fairly torpid and only remember the porter stuffing me into my overcoat and bustling me and the bags off the train. Rimouski, however, was all agog; not many in the streets for it was cold, but the village inn was buzzing with talk and filled with men and six or eight large dogs, all there for the hanging, next day. The proprietor

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gave me a room, and took my bags and showed me where the doctor lived. Dr. Belleau was a bully good fellow, a gentleman, and particularly nice to me throughout. He seemed a trifle anxious and worried. After reading my letter from the Dominion Minister of Justice, he said we must see some functionary whose name and address I forget. So we went out and up to a building, but whether gaol or courthouse, or what not, I do not know. There we met the gaoler, the village priest, and a man I took to be the sheriff. The talk was rapid and excited and all in French -- for no one in Rimouski, so far as I heard, could speak a word of English. The doctor stood out for me, but it was no go, for the three others, especially the priest, said that the Dominion Minister had nothing to do with the case, that it was purely an affair of the Province of Quebec. Dr. Belleau admitted that the point was well taken, but was in a sense beside the mark, that a professor of McGill had asked a favor, that a mistake had been made in getting official backing from a Dominion stead of a Provincial Minister, but that the favor, as a matter of courtesy, should be granted, especially as Dr. Osler had taken the trouble to send a student to attend the autopsy and get the brain -- but the argument fell on ears inaccessible to any argument. All four of the conferees were, I thought, in a state of great and undue excitement, wholly swayed by prejudices -- political and religious. The meeting broke up late in the afternoon, with the advice to me to take a night train home, as there was no use of my staying, for next morning I would not even be allowed to enter the gaol. It was dark or darkish when I went back to the hotel and sat for an hour or so in the "lobby" waiting for supper. After supper I decided to call on the doctor again, as he seemed the only friendly person in all Rimouski. A happy thought struck me, viz., to take the bag of autopsy tools with me and show him that I had in all probability real help to offer him at the postmortem,

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a point that scored absolutely nothing in the afternoon conference. I found him kind and friendly, but very serious and anxious. He was reading up in some old work the account of autopsy findings in cases of hanging, and was deep in the subject of congestion of all the viscera especially the lungs due to death being caused by strangulation. He again expressed regret in my not being allowed to attend the hanging. I thought he weakened a little at my display of proper tools, as he contrasted them with a small lot of wholly inadequate surgical instruments that he had laid out. I offered to lend him my instruments, and he thanked me and said he would let me know in the morning if he needed them. I went back to the inn rather depressed and discouraged and after a few minutes went up to bed. The bedroom was unheated, was in fact as cold as all outdoors and there was a thin coating of ice over the water pitcher. Shortly after getting into bed, I felt a prickling all over my body, and wondered what it could be, and if it might be connected with the Northern Lights. This diverted my mind for a short time and I got thinking of Wordsworth's "Indian Woman" left to die in the cold, and comparing her fate with the poor fellow in the gaol. But soon the persistency of the just tangible bombardment recalled me, and I got up and lit the little coal-oil lamp, On looking at the bed I saw that the sheets were dotted over with literally tens of thousands of flees, all of them jumping, as only flees can. [redacted]. Being satisfied that they were flees and harmless, and there being nothing else to do, I got back to bed, put out the light, and slept soundly all that night. In the morning the inn-keeper when I told him that I had found "a flea" in my room, expressed great astonishment, and then recollected, with surprise, that the dogs had occupied that room until the day before, [redacted]. Shortly after breakfast while I was sitting in the inn "lobby" and trying to think up some stone that I had left

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unturned, I got a message from Dr. Belleau to meet him at the gaol and to bring my bag of tools. In less than five minutes after getting the message I was at the gaol where I was told that permission had been given me to attend the hanging and the inquest, but not to remove the brain. I replied that I didn't wish to go to the hanging that I only wished to attend the inquest. This they said was impossible and that I must do the whole thing or go back to the hotel at once, as the gaol doors were to be locked in a few minutes. Despite my aversion to being a spectator at a hanging, I felt that this time I must go. We were promptly ushered into the gaol yard, a small enclosure, and besides the jury there were about ten people I should think who were ranged up in the snow at the further side of the yard. It was a bright sunny day and I was surprised to see that every upper window, every roof in the neighborhood was crowded with people. It made me think of the old days when people paid handsomely for seats to see the hangings at Tyburn. My first impulse was to turn my back to the scaffold and look the other way, but this seemed a cowardly procedure and as I was legitimately let in for the hanging, I thought it better and right to see it all through. In a very few minutes there came from the gaol door a little procession, consisting of the priest, rapidly uttering prayers; the condemned man with his hands tied behind his back. and from his dull uninterested expression I doubt if he knew what was going to happen; and one or two others. They mounted up a flight of steps to the platform of the scaffold, the priest still praying. A hood was tied over the man's head, the noose adjusted, the hangman came down, there was some sort of click, Moreau (the victim) dropped, a great gush of blood, followed by a rather rapid moving of all the groups in the gaol yard toward the gallows. In a few moments the body was carried into a shed, followed by the six jurors, and two or three others. The doctor called me to hurry, which I did and then the key was turned and the inquest began. The jurors were sworn in, and while I do not know, I imagine that

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the records would show that the lungs were congested and that Moreau met his death by strangulation from hanging. As a matter of fact a whole caroted artery had been torn across, and when Dr. Belleau was holding a lung in his hand and cutting it, he kept repeating the words, "congestion, congestion", I kicked him under the table and whispered that the man had not died of strangulation, that he had bled to death, which accounted for the exsanguinated condition of the viscera. He thanked me and went on with his work. The jury and coroner were soon satisfied, and as there was no fire in the room, the inquest was a short one. The coroner asked me to leave then and I said I would, but as it was cold probably I could help Dr. Belleau put things straight and in decent order for the burial. The doctor volubly seconded this and he and I were left alone to finish the autopsy, and to get the brain. At the time I thought that I was rather smart in pointing out to the doctor that the lungs were just the reverse of congested, but as a matter of fact, I feel quite sure that he knew it and also knew that all the officials and the village priest would be quite upset if the official records of the coroner's jury showed anything other than the regulation death from hanging. We then proceeded to get the brain, and no one who has not tried it has any idea of the difficulty of removing the brain in a cold room, your hands so numb you could scarcely hold a knife, and ~~with~~ from a head that ~~was~~ is virtually severed from the body. At least four times the coroner came to the door and asked if we were not finished. Dr. Belleau never was, and never can be, adequately thanked for his part in this whole affair. I put the brain in the bag with the tools, and helping the doctor put the body in the coffin, then left the gaol. It was about dinner time and the train for Montreal came through shortly afterwards. On getting on the train I had another unforeseen and agonizing moment. I wanted the brain, to be kept in a cool place and the tool bag that it was in had no lock on it, so hastily turning everything out of my Gladstone bag, I put the brain in that, locked it and stuffed my clothes into the dirty autopsy bag. Giving

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the Gladstone bag and a dollar, which nearly broke my heart, to the colored porter, I told him that the bag contained ptarmigan and that they must be kept in a cool place, but not frozen. This he did, and I got the brain to Montreal in reasonably good condition. W. O. expressed the greatest delight, but he did not give me a new Gladstone bag.