

of a Japanese cabinet a number of gems, and began telling me their histories. This, I confess, I did not find specially entertaining; and I was not sorry when, pausing, he pulled open a drawer, and proceeded to rummage in it for some new subject of conversation.

‘Here,’ he said at last, ‘is another curious specimen.’ And he produced and handed me a small triangular something, heavy, rough in surface, and in colour a dusky green. ‘That,’ he went on, ‘is a fragment of Verd Antique, the famous marble which was so much prized by the ancients, and the quarries of which have for so long been unknown to the modern world.’

I asked him where he found it. ‘I found it,’ he said, ‘in Cyprus, in a remote part of the island; and all about the spot the same priceless stone was to right and left of me in enormous detached masses. More than that, too,’ he added; ‘close beside them are other masses of a beautiful clouded yellow. There they lie! Nobody knows of them; nobody but a peasant comes near them. I myself found them only by accident.’

I asked him if it might not be practicable to work these quarries profitably. He replied, though without much enthusiasm, that it very possibly might be, provided a man with sufficient knowledge and enterprise should be found willing to undertake the experiment. His tone was not encouraging, and the matter accordingly dropped; but there was a mixture of romance and speculation in the train