

## THE GRAY GHOST OF GILSUM.

(Concluded)

"Why am I here?" I asked, and was astonished to find my voice so weak and thread-like. For an instant I had an impression that I, too, had become a ghost, in which case I should probably frighten the young lady who sat by the fire.

"But she looked up and answered quietly: 'Do not talk or you will be ill again. You have been very sick, but you are better now. You must get well.'"

"I will get well," I remarked, idiotically, "if you will go on sitting there by the fire."

"Then I fell asleep, and when I woke again I was strong enough to recount the incidents of the night preceding my illness, and to listen to an explanation of my remarkable experience."

"Ah!" observed madam, drawing a long breath, "then there was an explanation after all. It was an hallucination—simply brain-fever in an incipient state?"

"Not at all," said De Wolf. "My friends followed my footsteps through the snow, found the broken tomb, and, well—yes, captured the ghost."

"Ah, the ghost!"

"Yes. It happened that the man who had died had a twin brother who was a deaf-mute and harmlessly insane. He had wandered away from his home, and but for kindly hands who found and rescued him would no doubt have become a veritable ghost on that eventful night."

"And the young lady in the blue dress?"

De Wolf ran his fingers through his white hair and laughed.

"Madam, are you acquainted with Miss Clara Wright?"

"Clara Wright! My own cousin, and she spent last winter in Gilsum. I see it all now. She wrote me only last week that she had just become engaged. And you are the man?" she added, with a sudden flash of inspiration.

"I believe I am," replied De Wolf, bowing; "and I can assure you, madam, that I am not insensible of the honor."

THE END.

## AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT.

"There's a book about it, Mrs. Calthrop," I said. "It's entitled 'How the Question is Put.' Hardened bachelor as you seem to think me, I was interested enough to be the subject to get the book—from a library, of course."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Calthrop, smiling, "we shall see by-and-by whether you have derived any benefit from the perusal of that volume."

"I don't think I have," I said. "It is only a collection of tender scenes extracted from novels. I had read them all before. But now if I could get some real authentic information as to how men do propose—whether they go down on both knees, or one knee, or whether they don't kneel at all, whether one should make a long speech, or only whisper a few words, whether after all it is not better to write, so that one can have time to collect one's thoughts, and whether, if one writes, poetic quotations are admissible or advisable."

"For all these questions you had better apply for information to Helen," said Calthrop, looking at his wife. "She had so many offers, you know, that she must be quite an authority."

It was one evening I was dining with the Calthrops that this conversation took place. I was the only guest, except Calthrop's sister Mabel. Our talk had been reasonably sensible during the earlier courses; we had discussed Art, the New Journalism, and the latest attempt to demolish Christianity in a three volume novel, but with the dessert it had degenerated.

"You heard what your husband says, Mrs. Calthrop?" I exclaimed. "I am athirst for information."

"If I had any to give, you shouldn't have it," she said laughing. "Don't you see, it wouldn't be of any use; however many offers I have had, only one of them succeeded; apply to him."

"Were they very ridiculous?" I asked. "The men who failed?"

Mrs. Calthrop shook her head.

"A man is never ridiculous, if he is sincere," she said.

I laughed.

"Excuse me," I said, "I was thinking of Gibbon."

"He was the gentleman who sighed as a lover but obeyed as a son?"

"Yes, but it is not that I mean," I rejoined. "You know how he proposed to Middle Curchod and was rejected, and then had to ask the lady to help him up from his knees. Poor man! he couldn't manage to rise by himself."

"I wonder if Middle Curchod smiled—I hope she didn't, but perhaps she could hardly help it."

Mrs. Calthrop recoiled.

When Calthrop and I were left alone, he poured out a glass of claret and said:

"Do you know, Montague, I was once in a worse plight than poor Gibbon."

"You!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I—and I don't mind telling you about it. My wife is not listening."

He paused, emptied his glass, and then began.

"Her name was Amy—that is, her name was not Amy, but it shall be so during my story. She is married now." And Calthrop poured out more wine.

"I needn't trouble you," he went on, "by narrating how I made my Amy's acquaintance, and how I fell in love, and how the course of my love grew till it was an impetuous torrent that couldn't be resisted and came on as quickly. I needn't say that she was beautiful—she was also rich, and I was distinctly poor then. I had some expectations, painfully remote, and what I managed to earn as one of the staff of the *Evening Observer*. That wasn't much. Still, we saw each other often, and the way she received my advances left me entirely in doubt as to whether she would return them or not. She certainly seemed to give some encouragement, some reason to hope, and yet there was nothing which I could be sure indicated more than a modest friendship. I wavered between hope and hopelessness. When your time comes, Montague, you may understand that fearful see-saw."

"Perhaps I understand it now," I said.

"At last the day came when I determined to know my fate,

"To put it to the touch  
And win or lose it all."

as Montrose says. There was a reason for my decision. Amy was going abroad to travel with some friends. I resolved that she shouldn't leave England without hearing what I had to say. Resolutions are fine things, and do one good if they are good ones, but carrying them out is quite another matter. One must have opportunity. 'Man proposes'—you know the proverb. In this case man didn't propose because man didn't have a chance. Something always occurred to prevent a *tele-a-tele*. Amy was to leave England with the New Year, and on the last day of the old I called at her father's a little before the hour which is sacred to tea. I meant boldly to ask her to favor me with a few minutes' interview. Alas! the fates were adverse even to this bold step. I found a friend there, full of talk, a first-rate specimen of the female variety of the genus bore. She knew all the places that Amy was going to, and had a lot to say about each. I sat still, consumed with helpless rage, and saw the minutes which marked out my time of speaking go past. A little before six I felt obliged to go away, and could do nothing but conjecture as to what might be wrapped up in her good-bye."

"I pity you, Calthrop," I said, "with all my heart. How much is lost by people being where they are not wanted!"

"And not being where they are wanted," replied he. "I am thinking of Amy. As soon as I got home I set about composing a letter of declaration. I was some days over it; it was so hard to find words for what I had to say, and harder still to leave so much unsaid. The letter got to be very long. I copied it out on foolscap. You know my handwriting?"

"I do," I said; "it is without exception the vilest I have ever seen."

"It is very bad, I know," said Calthrop. "The printers on the *Evening Observer* could make it out pretty well, but no one else could. And in the midst of all the seriousness of my love I couldn't help smiling to think of the dreadful trouble I was taking to write plainly and how badly I was succeeding. Amy wouldn't be able to read more than half of my letter, I was afraid, and there were some words so very much like other words. I had a wild idea of having it set up in type, but at last I tore up the letter altogether, and decided on another plan. The Macallisters—the family Amy was travelling with—were going to make a few days' stay in Paris, and I knew the hotel. So I got leave of absence from our chief of the *Evening Observer* and crossed the Channel, and found myself in Paris. The Macallisters were gone. They had left the day before for Florence, the *concierge* of the hotel told me—he luckily knew the name of the hotel. Now I had fortunately, as I then thought, brought a good deal of money with me—all I had, in fact, till the next instalment of my salary should fall due. I counted out my money—ten pound and five pound notes—and decided that I could afford first-class fare to Florence and a *coupe-lit*. I soon found out the Hotel di Nuova York on the Lung' Arno, and enquired for Mr. Macallister with as much indifference as I could assume.

"They are not here yet," the porter told me, after enquiring. "They have engaged rooms, but we don't know when they will come."

"So I stayed in Florence, and made my first acquaintance with the beautiful city. I have seen it since under more favourable circumstances, and I don't know that I admire even Venice more. But then I was too impatient, too full of expectation, to be able to enjoy the lovely view from the Via dei Colli or from Bello Sguardo. Of course I went round to the galleries, but I looked at the pictures carelessly as things that didn't concern me much. If I could see them with her, then I might grasp their full significance. Only Titian's 'Flora' in the Uffizi struck me; the face reminded me so of Amy's."

"That's very curious," I said. "I know that picture well, and I think the face is very much like Mrs. Calthrop's."

"Ah," he continued, "different persons are differently impressed, and the same person differently at different times. Recalling the picture I can see the likeness you suggest. I went round every morning to the Hotel di Nuova York, and was met each day with the same reply—they had not come yet. I puzzled myself to know at what point on the road they could be stopping. Had they made a little detour to see Geneva? Had they stopped at Turin? At Genoa? Perhaps they were at Pisa, quite close by."

"On my sixth visit to the hotel I got a startling piece of news."

"They are not coming till April," said the porter. "They have written to give up their rooms."

"This dreadful intelligence was almost too much for me."

"Do you know where they are now?" I asked the porter, when I had partially recovered.