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The Ghost Book

BY CLARENCE MEILY.

PART I.

The bright sunlight of an April morning fell through the tall, half-curtained windows directly across Mr. Wombold's breakfast table, placed just in front of the friendly recess of the bay window. Outside a rose garden filled the air with puffs of perfume that drifted lazily through the half-raised sash. The table was set for two, Mr. Wombold having lately formed the practice of breakfasting with his secretary, Miss Armitage. At the master's place lay the morning papers neatly folded by Otu, his manservant.

The room was empty as Mr. Wombold entered. He was a tall man whom accumulated years had bowed, lean with the fleshlessness of age, with scant white hair fringing a high, narrow forehead. Deep-set eyes full of absent brooding, angular features touched upon their bony prominences with a pinkish pallor, a mobile mouth withered by time, all served to fix the impression of a recluse who had not so much renounced the world as wearied of it. He was dressed with care, even daintiness, yet moved with a large, slow gesture as if accustomed and indifferent to the niceties of attire. In his hand he held a volume of Maeterlinck containing studies of some recent experiments in psychic research, which he intended to peruse in the garden after breakfast.

Mr. Wombold seated himself at the table, laid the volume of Maeterlinck to one side, and lifted the newspapers, glancing idly at the headlines. As he laid aside the last one, he noticed beneath it a small square of cardboard. It was of the shape, size and texture of the ordinary business card, and bore in its centre a curious monogram composed of the letter H and F. Nothing else appeared on the card.

Mr. Wombold gazed at it, at first, with the same abstraction and indifference with which he had handled the newspapers; but the card, as if by some subtle and impelling attraction, held his gaze until it gradually focused into alert consciousness. The color left his face, which sank to the sickly yellow of old ivory.

A moment later, a stertorous intake of air, as if he was regaining his breath by a determined muscular effort, sent the blood surging back into his neck and face. He rose tremblingly, and violently pressed the button of an electric call bell set in the wainscoting at his side. Otu answered the summons.

"Who has been in here?" Mr. Wombold demanded, glaring at the Japanese.

"None, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"I am attending the preparing fruit at the kitchen."

"Did you put those newspapers here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did that come from?"

He pointed to the card, but did not touch it. Otu examined it, and shook his head.

"I not see it," he said. "I doan know."

"Where is Miss Armitage?"

"She walk out some lil time. Back ver' soon, I guess."

Mr. Wombold turned from him with a growl that sent the Japanese scurrying out of the room. He took up the card very gingerly in the fingers of one hand and turned it over. The underside was blank. He carried the card to the buffet, where stood a bronze cigar holder and ash-tray.

He laid it on the tray, and, lighting a match, held the burning wood to the cardboard till it was wholly consumed. Then he left the room for the lavatory, where he washed his hands. When he returned, Miss Armitage was in her place at the table.

"Has anyone called here this morning?" Wombold asked, omitting any preliminary greeting.

"No one that I know of."

"I found a—a business card by my plate. Do you know how it got there?"

Miss Armitage drew her pretty brows into a slight frown of perplexity.

"I am sure I couldn't tell you," she said. "I went out to mail the letters you dictated yesterday evening. There has been no one here that I know of."

Mr. Wombold stepped into the recess of the bay window and looked out over the rose garden. The sun was warm; the flowers glistened with ardent life; a linnets in one of the rose trees carolled shrilly. It was a most practical and reassuring scene.

As he came back to the table, Otu began serving breakfast. All the same, a preoccupation so profound settled over Mr. Wombold that he entirely neglected both the food and Miss Armitage's efforts at conversation. Presently he arose, and, leaving the volume of Maeterlinck behind, sauntered out into the garden.

Even the full tide of sunlight in which Mr. Wombold stood submerged failed to warm him, or to irradiate the dark flood of recollections that swept in upon him from a remote past. It had been forty years since he had seen that monogram. Time and success, wealth and long undisturbed security had given to his sense of safety a complete finality. It had taken him some moments even to remember what the thing was.

Now, in miniature imposed by the perspective of years, as if he looked through a reversed telescope, he saw again the quaint, winding streets of the old New England village, with their shading elms, their board sidewalks, their austere, peak-roofed dwellings. He saw the little shop under its wooden awning, where two young men, playfellows and school mates, had bravely started their first business venture as partners. It seemed to him he could still smell, above the odor of the roses, the strange, mingled aromas of that dingy interior—spices from the tropics, salt fish that carried the tang of the ocean, the pungent smell of vinegar, the clean perfume of new linens and calicos.

It had been a store of general merchandise, and he had been one of its proud proprietors. His name had not been Wombold then. The firm's initials had been fashioned into a monogram, which had come to stand as its distinctive emblem—almost, one might say, its trade-mark. It appeared on its stationery, in its advertising, on the sign over the door. It was one of the many things of which the young partners had been so proud—"H" and "F" combined within a circle.

Yes, forty years had passed since he had seen it.

But for all their pride and all their gay young confidence, the firm of Hart & Frazier had not prospered. It was hard to say what had been the matter, except that they were too eager, too confident, too daring. They had done much business, they had handled large sums, but they had also accumulated heavy debts. In the end, when failure became inevitable, they had agreed to turn all their assets into cash and pay their creditors pro rata, as much as possible. Then they would work together, as common laborers if need be, to settle the balance.

Part of this program, the liquidation of the assets, had been carried out. Then, one night, Frazier had disappeared, and with him had gone all of the firm's money. Hart was left to face utter ruin alone.

Under another name, with the stolen money as his capital, and with the

experience gained from the failure, in the generous and fruitful West, fortune had come to him. By sheer force of will, later by habit, and at last in very truth, he had forgotten.

And now, like a strange blast of air blown out of some cavernous depth of time, had come this monogram. Well, reflected the old man, they would have a merry time trying to bulldoze him! He clung to this theory of blackmail. There was something human, material, normal, and understandable about it. Flesh and blood men did such things, and could be dealt with in the flesh. He was not too old to do battle with opponents who could be seen and felt and pointed out. They merely roused his courage and stimulated his energies.

The other alternative he refused to consider, though it was that, he knew, which made the heat of the sun so oddly ineffectual. He had dabbled too much in the preternatural, and had cultivated too far a mystical attitude of mind, to be oblivious to the occult implications of the incident. Such ideas, he realized, grew on one imperceptibly.

He was sorry now that Miss Armitage had pointed his attention in the direction of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, though when the suggestion was made, in the period of ennui following his retirement from business, he had welcomed it rather gladly.

It was several days later that Mr. Wombold, returning from an afternoon motor ride, found Miss Armitage at her desk in the library fingering a significant slip of cardboard.

"A man called to see you while you were out," said the secretary.

Mr. Wombold glanced at the card she held out, but made no move to take it. He received the announcement without any visible sign of emotion, merely seating himself heavily and for a moment staring in silence at the wall.

(To be continued.)

Gates Have History.

A pair of wooden gates which stood in front of the Palace of Beauty at the British Empire Exhibition are copies of the sacred gates of the Teheran mosque and have a most romantic and tragic history. They were made by a poor Persian wood carver who defied the decrees that they were not to be copied. Each day he made a pilgrimage to the mosque, committed some detail to memory, and then went home and wrought it in the wood. But his visits caused suspicion to fall upon him, he was watched, his secret discovered, and, on the completion of his task, he was found murdered, and his work disappeared. Presently the gates came into the hands of Persian dealers, who sold them at a sacrifice rather than keep them, and at length they were recognized in a small London curio shop, and became one of Wembley's multitude of attractions.

Poor Fellow.

A teacher, trying to impress on her pupils the rightness of kindness to all animals, took them for a walk to bring the lesson home to them.

Hearing a scream from little Johnny she asked: "What's the matter, Johnny?"

"I've been sitting on a hornet," was the tearful response, "and I'm afraid I've hurt the poor thing."

Fewer Ostriches in South Africa.

The number of ostriches in South Africa had dropped from 900,000 to 120,000. There is in consequence fear of an ostrich feather shortage.

Too many people remember to multiply their troubles, but forget to add up their blessings.

For Sore Feet—Minard's Liniment.



Photograph shows the operation of medical science's most remarkable and recent curative power, artificial sunlight for sickly and tubercular children. The ray is produced by a quartz mercury lamp.

A Locust Story.

The district mounted patrol of the Krugersdorp (Transvaal) in Africa while destroying locusts in the boundary of the West Rand noticed one locust with a white body. He captured it and found tied around its body a piece of paper bearing the message: "Farmers do your best—26-5-24. Christiana." The distance between Christiana and the place where the locust was captured is more than 200 miles, and the locust despatch flier must have covered the distance with a swarm about a mile long in 24 hours which included a rest over night.

Plans for Root and Storage Cellars.

Plans for the construction of cellars for the storage of roots and of perishable products generally, are contained in the pamphlet "Root and Storage Cellars," issued by the Dept. of Agriculture at Ottawa. Three types of cellar are presented (1) The cellar under the barn driveway; (2) The cellar under a building, and (3) The isolated cellar. Diagrams and specifications are given for each.

HINTS WORTH TAKING.

In making salad dressing add a little grated horseradish to give it the proper "tang."

Keep a needle, threaded, handy in the kitchen to take that "stitch in time" when a garment is snagged, a holder loses its hanger, a dish towel is torn or a dozen and one daily slips that require that aforesaid stitch.

Smith the fire with fine chips, closing all drafts, when a fire in the range is not wanted for some time. Open up all drafts, lay on the wood or coal and shake down when the fire is wanted. This saves fuel, also the extra work of kindling a fresh fire.

Rusty steel should be soaked for several hours in linseed oil and then polished with unslaked lime or emery powder. This powder is easy to use if applied with a cork which has been dipped in the linseed oil.

Minard's Liniment Heals Cuts.

Watch Your Peas and Ques. The farmer, if the man is yv Will open keep his honest it. The country's full these latter days Of swindlers on the hunt for jj. They'll take his xx and his vv With seemingly the greatest ee. His bb and pp and uu and such Get care that simply beats the Dutch, While right beneath his very nose He pays a bill he never oo.

—A. M. Hendee.

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NURSES

The Toronto Hospital for Incurables, in affiliation with Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, New York City, offers a three years' Course of Training to young women, having the required education, and desirous of becoming nurses. This Hospital has adopted the eight-hour system. The pupils receive uniforms of the School, a monthly allowance and travelling expenses to and from New York. For further information apply to the Superintendent.

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A spring balance in which the "spring" consists of a solid metal bar over an inch in diameter is used by the U.S. Bureau of Standards as an aid in calibrating testing machines.

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- Wintering Bees in Canada.
- Root and Storage Cellars.
- The Safe Handling of Commercial Live Stock.
- The Bacon Hog and Hog Grading.
- Finishing Lambs.
- Selection of Lamb Cuts.
- Preservation of Fruits and Vegetables for Home Use.
- Insects Affecting Live Stock.
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