
SELECTED ESSAYS

VOLUME II

THE LOVECRAFT COLLECTORS LIBRARY

EDITED BY GEORGE WETZEL

second series
S E L E C T E D E S S A Y S

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HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT

VOLUME TWO
THE LOVECRAFT COLLECTORS LIBRARY
EDITED BY GEORGE WETZEL



SSR PUBLICATIONS
North Tonawanda New York

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

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THE STREET

There be those who say that things and places have souls, and there be those who say they have not; I dare not say, myself, but I will tell of The Street.

Men of strength and honour fashioned that Street; good valiant men of our blood who had come from the Blessed Isles across the sea. At first it was but a path trodden by bearers of water from the woodland spring to the cluster of houses by the beach. Then as more men came to the growing cluster of houses and looked about for places to dwell, they built cabins along the north side; cabins of stout oaken logs with masonry on the side toward the forest, for many Indians lurked there with fire-arrows. And in a few years more, men built cabins on the south side of The Street.

Up and down The Street walked grave men in conical hats, who most of the time carried muskets or fowling pieces. And there were also their bonneted wives and sober children. In the evening these men with their wives and children would sit about gigantic hearths and read and speak. Very simple were the things of which they read and spoke, yet things which gave them courage and goodness and helped them by day to subdue the forest and till the fields. And the children would listen, and learn of the laws and deeds of old, and of that dear England which they had never seen, or could not remember.

There was war, and thereafter no more Indians troubled The Street. The men, busy with labor, waxed prosperous and as happy as they knew how to be. And the children grew up comfortable, and more families came from the Mother Land to dwell on The Street. And the children's children, and the newcomer's children, grew up. The town was now a city, and one by one the cabins gave place to houses, simple, beautiful houses of brick and wood, with stone steps and iron railings and fanlights over the doors. No flimsy creations were these houses, for they were made to serve many a generation. Within there were carven mantels and graceful stairs, and sensible, pleasing furniture, china, and silver, brought from the Mother Land.

So the Street drank in the dreams of a young people, and rejoiced as its dwellers became more graceful and happy. Where once had been only strength and honour, taste and learning now abode as well. Books, and paintings and music came to the houses, and the young men went to the university which rose above the plain to the north. In the place

From THE WOLVERINE, December 1920

of conical hats and small-swords, and lace and snowy periwigs, there were cobble-stones over which clattered many a blooded horse and rumbled many a gilded coach; and brick sidewalks with horse blocks and hitching-posts.

There were in that Street many trees; elms and oaks and maples of dignity; so that in the summer, the scene was all soft verdure and twittering bird-song. And behind the houses were walled rose-gardens with hedged paths and sundials, where at evening the moon and stars would shine down bewitchingly while fragrant blossoms glistened with dew.

So The Street dreamed on, past wars, calamities, and changes. Once most of the young men went away, and some never came back. That was when they furlled the Old Flag and put up a new Banner of Stripes and Stars. But though men talked of great changes, The Street felt them not, for its folks were still the same, speaking of the old familiar things in the old familiar accents. And the trees still sheltered singing birds, and at evening the moon and stars looked down upon dewy blossoms in the walled rose-gardens.

In time there were no more swords, three-corner hats, or periwigs in The Street. How strange seemed the denizens with their walking-sticks, tall beavers, and cropped heads! New sounds came from the distance—first strange puffings and shrieks from the river a mile away and many years later strange puffings and shrieks and rumblings from other directions. The air was not quite so pure as before, but the spirit of the place had not changed. The blood and soul of their ancestors who had fashioned The Street. Nor did the spirit change when they tore open the earth to lay down strange pipes, or when they set up tall posts bearing weird wires. There was so much ancient lore in that Street, that the past could not easily be forgotten.

Then came days of evil, when many who had known The Street of old knew it no more and many knew it, who had not known it before. And went away; for their accents were coarse and strident, and their mein and faces unpleasing. Their thoughts, too, fought with the wise just spirit of The Street. So that The Street pined silently as its houses fell into decay, and its trees died one by one, and its rose-gardens grew rank with weeds and waste. But it felt a stir of pride one day when again, marched forth young men, some of whom never came back. These young men were clad in blue.

With the years worse fortune came to The Street. Its trees were all gone now, and its rose-gardens were displaced by the backs of cheap ugly new buildings on parallel streets. Yet the houses remained, despite the ravages of the years and the storms and worms, for they had been made to serve many a generation. New kinds of faces appeared in The Street; swarthy, sinister faces with furtive eyes and odd features, whose owners spoke unfamiliar words and placed signs in known and unknown characters upon most of the musty houses. Push-carts crowded the gutters. A sordid, undefinable stench settled over the place, and the ancient spirit slept.

Great excitement once came to The Street. War and revolution were raging across the seas; a dynasty had collapsed, and its degenerate subjects were flocking with dubious intent to the Western Land. Many of these took lodgings in the battered houses that had once known the

song of birds and the scent of roses. Then the Western Land itself awoke, and joined the Mother Land in her titanic struggle for civilization. Over the cities once more floated the Old Flag, companioned by the new flag and by a plainer yet glorious Tri-colour. But not many flags floated over The Street, for therein brooded only fear and hatred and ignorance. Again young men went forth, but not quite as did the young men of those other days. Something was lacking. And the sons of those young men of other days, who did indeed go forth in olive-drab with the true spirits of their ancestors, went from distant places and knew not The Street and its ancient spirits.

Over the seas there was a great victory, and in triumph most of the young men returned. Those who had lacked something lacked it no longer, yet did fear and hatred and ignorance still brood over The Street; for many had stayed behind, and many strangers had come from distant places to the ancient houses. And the young men who had returned, dwelt there no longer. Swarthy and sinister were most of the strangers, yet among them one might find a few faces like those who fashioned The Street and moulded its spirit. Like and yet unlike, for there was in the eyes of all a weird, unhealthy glitter as of greed, ambition, vindictiveness, or misguided zeal. Unrest and treason were abroad amongst an evil few who plotted to strike the Western Land its death-blow, that they might mount to power over its ruins; even as assassins had mounted in that unhappy, frozen land from whence most of them had come. And the heart of that plotting was in The Street, whose crumbling houses teemed with alien makers of discord and echoed with the plans and speeches of those who yearned for the appointed day of blood, flame, and crime.

Of the various odd assemblages in The Street, the law said much but could prove little. With great diligence did men of hidden badges, linger and listen about such places as Petrovitch's Bakery, the squalid Rifkin School of Modern Economics, the Circle Social Club, and the Liberty Club. There congregated sinister men in great numbers, yet always was their speech guarded in a foreign tongue. And still the old houses stood, with their forgotten lore of nobler, departed centuries; of sturdy colonial tenants and dewy rose-gardens in the moonlight. Sometimes a love poet or traveler would come to view The Street and would try to picture them in their vanished glory; yet of such travelers and poets there were not many.

The rumor now spread widely that these houses contained the leaders of a vast band of terrorists, who on a designated day were to launch an orgy of slaughter for the extermination of America, and of all the fine old traditions which The Street had loved. Handbills and papers fluttered about filthy gutters; handbills and papers printed in many tongues and in many characters, yet all bearing messages of crime and rebellion. In these writings the people were urged to tear down the laws and virtues that our fathers had exalted; to stamp out the soul of the old America----the soul that was bequeathed through a thousand and a half years of Anglo-Saxon freedom, justice and moderation. It was said that the swart men who dwelt in The Street and congregated in its rotting edifices were the brains of a hideous revolution; that at their word of command many millions of brainless, besotted beasts would stretch forth their noisome talons from the slums of a thousand cities,

burning, slaying, and destroying till the land of our fathers should be no more. All this was said and repeated, and many looked forward in dread to the fourth day of July about which the strange writings hinted much; yet could nothing be found to place the guilt. None could tell just whose arrest might cut off the damnable plotting at its source. Many times bands of blue-coated police came to search the shabby houses, though at last they ceased to come; for they had grown tired of law and order, and had abandoned all the city to its fate. Then men in olive-drab came, bearing muskets; till it seemed as if in its sad sleep to The Street must have come haunting dreams of those other days, when musket-bearing men in conical hats walked along it from the wood-land spring to the cluster of houses by the beach. Yet could no act be performed to check the impending cataclysm, for the swart sinister men were old in cunning.

So The Street slept uneasily on, till one night there gathered in Petrovitch's Bakery and the Rifkin School of Modern Economics, and the Circle Social Club, and in the Liberty Cafe, and in other places, as well, vast hoards of men whose eyes were big with horrible triumph and expectation. Over hidden wires strange messages traveled and much was said of still stranger messages yet to travel; but most of this was not guessed till afterward, when the Western Land was safe from the peril. The men in olive-drab could not tell what was happening or what they ought to do; for the swart sinister men were skilled in subtlety and concealment.

And yet the men in olive-drab will always remember that night, and will speak of The Street as they tell of it to their grandchildren; for many of them were sent there toward morning on a mission unlike that which they had expected. It was known that this nest of anarchy was old, and that the houses were tottering from the ravages of the years and the storms and worms; yet was the happening of that summer a surprise because of its very queer uniformity. It was, indeed, an exceedingly singular happening; though after all a simple one. For without warning in one of the small hours beyond midnight all the ravages of the years and the storms and the worms came to a tremendous climax; and after the crash there was nothing left standing in The Street save two ancient chimneys and part of a stout brick wall. Nor did anything that had been alive, come alive from the ruins. A poet and a traveler, who came with the mighty crowd that sought the scene, tell odd stories. The poet says that all through the hours before dawn he beheld sordid ruins but indistinctly in the glare of the arc lights; that there loomed above the wreckage another picture wherein he described moonlight and fair houses and elms and oaks and maples of dignity. And the traveler declares that instead of the places wonted stench their lingered a delicate fragrance as of roses in full bloom. But are not the dreams of poets and the tales of travelers notoriously false?

There be those who say that things and places have souls, and there be those who say they have not; I dare not say, myself, but I have told you of The Street.

A DESCENT TO AVERNUS

For one whose knowledge of the subterranean world has hitherto been confined wholly to dreams and fiction, there are probably few experiences as thoroughly moving and satisfying as an exploration of the endless caverns in Virginia. Though not among the vastest of earth's hidden chambers, this profound labyrinth of night has a wealth of formations and dramatic vistas which can scarcely be parallel elsewhere; so that it forms a perfect realization of our wildest and most fantastic infernal visions.

The long railway journey from Washington to New Market, the nearest town to the caves, is through a region made richly historic by the Civil War - beginning with Manassas and ending with the scene of Sheridan's Ride - but the terrain does not become wild and vivid until the latter half of the trip, when the mountains are reached. Then one observes bold landscapes much like those of the Connecticut valley - rugged ridges of hills and splendid prospects of valley and distant towns. The agricultural state of the country seems more prosperous than that of New England, though none of the farms can approach the typical Yankee homestead in neatness and beauty. Zigzag rail fences of the Southern type serve generally, instead of stone walls, to divide the fields; though a few of the latter are not absent.

New Market is reached after a four-hour ride, and a coach conveys the traveler to the mouth of the caverns, some six miles away. These open from a pleasant spot just at the base of a great hill, where the owners have built an office and laid out suitable grounds. Purchasing a ticket, one enters a building covering the actual gate of the abyss and is assigned to a party dominated by two guides, a lecturer-leader and a rear guard to save stragglers from the nameless perils of loss in the gulfs of blackness.

Proceeding down steep stone steps to a region whose uniform temperature contrasts oddly with the shifting thermal values outside, the subterranean novice knows he is at last in a real cavern, and that he is about to sample in objective fact those secrets of earth's ultimate core which he has heretofore traversed only in dreams and in literature. It is a great moment; and as the first of the wide gulfs yawns up before the explorer, he feels that something out of phantasy has come earthward to meet him and give substance to his profoundest imaginings.

There is no exaggeration in all the awed and marvel-filled accounts

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of the caves which have been published. As deep gives place to deep, gallery to gallery, and chamber to chamber, one feels transported to the strangest regions of nocturnal fancy. Grotesque formations leer on every hand, and the ever-sinking level apprises one of the stupendous depth he is attaining. Glimpses of far black vistas beyond the radius of the lights - sheer drops of incalculable depth to unknown chasms, or arcaded beckoning laterally to mysteries yet untasted by human eye - bring one's soul close to the frightful and obscure frontiers of the material world, and conjure up suspicions of vague and unhallowed dimensions whose formless beings lurk over close to the visible world of man's five senses. Buried eras - submerged civilizations, subterranean universes and unsuspected orders of entities and influences that haunt the sightless depths - all these flit through an imagination confronted by the literal presence of soundless and eternal night. One regrets the uniform illumination of the visited parts of the cave, and lags behind the party as much as the rear guide will let one, in order to imbibe the stupendous spectacle without excessive human cluttering.

The crystal formations at several points are of a fantastic beauty so poignant that all sensations of horror are momentarily forgotten. Water, limestone, and quartz have done strange and exquisite things at the behest of the infernal deities, and under the play of carefully arranged lights the stalactitic, stalagmitic, and other effects are grotesque and exotic with cosmic, interplanetary suggestions. Words cannot describe the utter, supernal loveliness of those formations known as the Diamond Lake and Oriental Room - they are not of this earth, but are sheer fragments of the narcotic rhapsodies of hashish-eaters, and the inspired visions of those few rare artists in words and colours who have had glimpses of realms beyond starry space.

And at the bottom of all-far, far down - still trickles the waters that carved the whole chain of gulfs out of the primal soluble limestone. Whence it comes and whither it trickles - to what awesome deeps of Tartarean nighted horror it bears the doom-fraught messages of the hoary hills - no being of human mould can say. Only They which gibber down There can answer.

THE BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN INCONSEQUENTIAL SCRIBBLER

Since the earthly career of a secluded and non-robust individual is seldom replete with exciting events, my readers must not expect the following chronicle to possess much which will hold their attention or awaken their interest. But for the mandate of a relentless editor, they would have been spared this affliction.

I was born in Providence, of unmixed English ancestry, on August 20, 1890. During the first few years of my existence, my mode of expression was more often oral than written; and my tastes much more modern than at present. It is indeed worthy of note that my utterances prior to the summer of 1891 betray a marked kinship to the vers libre of today.

In the year 1892, from which my first genuine recollections proceed, my literary career began in earnest. Having mastered the art of connected speech, and assimilated the alphabet, I was an inveterate reciter of poesy, delivering such pieces as "Sheridan's Ride" and selections from "Mother Goose" with true declamatory finesse. I also dabbled in poetic imagism, with aid from alphabetical blocks.

By the close of 1893, I had added another accomplishment to my catalogue - that of reading. My tastes ran to polysyllables, of whose pronunciation I was not always certain. About this period I began to supplement the fairy taled hitherto related to me, with individual research in the pictureful pages of Grimm, and developed a marked penchant for everything pertaining to myths and legends. The close of 1895 and 1896 were uneventful, and although I was constantly scribbling both crude prose and crude rhymes, no specimen survives. The leading event of this era was my change of interest from Teutonic to Classical mythology, induced by perusal of Hawthorne's "Wonder Book," and "Tanglewood Tales".

In 1897 I composed by earliest surviving attempt at authorship, a "poem" in forty-four lines of internally rhyming iambic heptameter, entitled "The Poem of Ulysses; or The New Odyssey", whose four lines are as follows:

"The night was dark, O Reader, hark!
and see Ulysses fleet;
All homeward bound, with vict'ry
crown'd, he hopes his spouse to greet;

From THE SILVER CLARION; Volume 3, Number 1, April 1919

"Long hath he fought, put Troy to naught,
and levell'd down its walls;
But Neptune's wrath obstructs his path,
and into snares he falls."

In 1898 I commenced a school career, much interrupted by ill health and supplemented by home reading and private instruction. It was my favorite diversion to spend hours in the midst of the family library, browsing chiefly over books over a century old, and insensibly forming a taste for eighteenth-century style and thought which will never leave me.

In 1899 I became interested in the sciences, and established my first enduring amateur publication, "The Scientific Gazette," which ran continuously until 1904. It was published successively by pencil pen, and hectograph, and afforded me infinite pleasure and pride.

In 1903 astronomy became my chief interest, and I established the hectographed magazine, "The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy", which survived until 1907. All this time I knew nothing of organized amateurdom, and the reams of old-fashioned miscellany I had been evolving remained mercifully unpublished till 1906, when I made my debut in print by commencing a series of monthly astronomical articles in a local paper.

From 1906 to 1914 I was a contributor to sundry publications of no importance, veering about 1811 from pure science back to belles lettres. In March, 1914, I learned through Mr. Edward F. Daas of Amateurdom's existence, and soon joined the United; a connection likely to subsist till my death, since it has furnished me more enjoyment than any other I have experienced.

In the United it has been my privilege to become a frequent contributor to the press, and to hold several offices, including the Presidency and the Chairmanship of the Department of Public Criticism. I have endeavored to support the most purely literary and progressive elements in the association, and to aid in a revival of that conservatism and classicism which modern literature seems dangerously prone to reject. To this purpose is my individual publication, "The Conservative" devoted.

These various activities have doubtless gained for me the reputation of being an insufferable old pedant; yet I cannot wholly complain of my fate, since Editor Samples deems it fit to waste good white paper upon these over-long annals of Boetian mediocrity.

ANGLO-SAXONDOM

When the historian of the future shall look back upon the stupendous events of this age, it is likely that he will find, aside from the general defense of civilization, no event of greater magnitude and significance than the new understanding which is daily being cemented between the two political divisions of Anglo-Saxondom.

The war has stripped many shams and delusions from the social and political life of the world; and paramount amongst these is the pernicious fallacy, fostered by and for the unthinking immigrant rabble, that America's path must lie apart from that of the Mother Empire.

The strongest tie in the domain of mankind, and the only potent source of social unity, is that mystic essence compounded of race, language and culture; a heritage descended from the remote past. This tie no human force can break, whatever political revolution may by such an agency be effected. It may be temporarily submerged by the base prejudices of passion and the detestable contamination caused by alien blood, but rise it must when overwhelming threat calls out man's deeper emotions, and sweeps aside the superficialities of arbitrary modes of thought.

Today we know that, as in the beginning, England and America are spiritually one; one undivided rampart of liberty and enlightenment ordained by the Fates to defend for humanity the priceless legacy of classical civilization.

REVOLUTIONARY MYTHOLOGY

Events in our little sphere of amateurdom sometimes coincide remarkably with those of the world outside. The announcement in United circles of Mr. Harry Clapham McGayack's forthcoming essay on "Preliminaries of the American Revolution", wherein some hoary Yankee myths will be dissected, comes almost simultaneously with the storm of resentment awakened among professional American patriots by the lamentable faux pas of Prof. Wilson's pacifistical Secretary of War; who asserted in a campaign speech on October 16, that the Mexican banditti of today are comparable to the American revolutionists of General Washington's army.

Secretary Baker has undoubtedly perpetrated another characteristic-Wilsonian blunder in drawing a parallel between the pure-blooded Anglo-Saxon rebels of 1775, and the herd of half-breed swine, bent only on plunder, who are grunting, shooting, cavorting, and misbehaving generally below our southern border; but the loud denunciation comes rather from the truth he has let slip, than from the erroneous inferences he has drawn.

The American Revolution has created a more marvellous fund of genuine legendary lore than any other event in modern history. Not only to the proletariat, but to the bulk of our intelligent countrymen, the colonists who caused the withdrawal of America from the British Empire stand forth as heroes unsullied; as veritable as Galahads, Bayards, and Sidneys. It is soberly believed by grown men, that the defiers of George III were a host of terrestrial Seraphim, the like of whom have never been known before or since. Willingly enough do we confess weaknesses on both sides of other intestine struggles through which our race has passed. In reflecting upon the Civil Wars which culminated in Cromwell's usurpation, we all acknowledge on the one hand that King Charles I was weak, that his promises were not inviolable, and that many of his adherents were luxurious and dissipated men; and on the other hand that the rebels were hasty, cruel, coarse, hypocritical, and animated by many false notions. Neither Charles nor Cromwell is to the descendants of his followers as supernal being "sans peur et sans reproche". But in mentioning the Continental army of 1775-1783, the average American assumes an unconscious accent of prayer, and damns any possible blasphemer with the true fervour of the fanatic. That the band of American Colonists who seceded from the authority of Great

From THE CONSERVATIVE; Volume 2, Number 3,

Britain in 1775 contained at least several human beings, is well proven by careful students. That these beings possessed their full share of what we call "human nature", is likewise not unknown. Which compels "The Conservative" to smile a trifle at the legends of Revolutionary Gods and Herbes preserved by each Yankee fireside, and transmitted both orally and verbally to each succeeding generation.

The American Revolution arose from a fatal misunderstanding between the Englishmen at home and those upon this continent. Neither side can claim the exclusive sanction of Heaven, nor must either be blackened with the imputation of infamy. Saxon fought Saxon as men always fight men. The record of each army is as clean, or as soiled, as that of any other body of embattled human creatures who contend under the best traditions of civilized warfare. That a certain amount of looting, burning, and other irregularities existed in both sides, is no cause for surprise or indignation in the mind of the student or historian, for these things are inseparable from armed conflict of any sort, though training may modify them. Even the sainted crusaders of old were less Christian toward the Saracens than we would like to imagine.

If the time has come when Revolutionary Mythology may be placed in honoured banishment beside the similar lore of infant Rome; if men may at last be suffered openly to speak the truth about those brave Britons and Colonists of yesterday, it is to be hoped that justice may be done that most maligned class in all America - the loyalists, or Tories. In the year 1775 this country was a legitimate part of the British Domain, under the rightful authority of the King and his Parliament. The rebellious decision of a majority of the people can certainly form no ground for complaint against those Americans who felt that their duty lay with the existing government, and who upheld their Sovereign's rule with valour and distinction. That selfish interest dwelt beneath the acts of the "Tories" is often asserted, and may in some instances be true; but it is only the most crass ignorance or most malicious prejudice which can thus defame the multitude of patriotic American Royalists, who willingly suffered or died in the service of the third George.

THE TRIP OF THEOBALD

First, August 19, Worcester by bus, where W. Paul Cook met me with his car. There to Athol. On Aug. 20 took a side trip to Deerfield; which is a marvelous old colonial town. On Sunday the 21st, we went on a trip to Vermont and New Hampshire - stopping at West Brattleboro to see Goodenough, who lives in a quaint old farm house on a hill side amidst some of the most beautiful unspoiled country in New England. Goodenough is a modest hospitable altogether admirable and dutiful man - an old time Yankee Puritan, untouched by the centuries. From Brattleboro we went to Lake Sunapee, and thence back to Athol. On Monday I climbed a high hill west of Athol and had an admirable view.

Wednesday I left for Boston. Stayed over night in the Y.M.C.A. and took the Portland bus in the morning. Got to Portland Thursday afternoon, and explored the town, taking a side trip to the Old Colonial village of Stroudwater. Also went up in the observation tower, built in 1807, for signalling ships. Just the same today - splendid view of town and harbor.

Portland is too modern and large to be really quaint, but it is a beautiful hill city with magnificent views and promenades. Friday took a side trip to ancient Yarmouth, 13 miles from Portland, and another to Portland Head Lighthouse, built in 1791. Went through both Longfellow houses - birthplace and principal residence. Saturday, took a cheap excursion to the White Mountains - saw real mountains for the first time in my life, and had some superb views at Crawford Notch. Ascended Mt. Washington by cog-wheel railway, and had some splendid views on the way up, though it rained just as I reached the summit.

Sunday moved on to Portsmouth, where I revisited all the ancient scenes I had four years previously. Also hiked out to the Old Bouring Wentworth House at Little Hampton, where I had never been before, the scene of Longfellow's poem, "Lady Wentworth". The house was a disappointment, for it was a rambling farm house now made over into a summer estate, Doubt if Longfellow had ever seen it when he wrote his poem. Monday moved on to Newburyport which is fully as colonial as Portsmouth. These two towns are probably the most ancient looking places of large size in America. Both of them have a whole network of narrow unpaved streets without sidewalks in the poorer sections - just as they were before the Revolution, same houses and all. In Newburyport the whole business section, outside of buildings erected about 1812

From "TRYOUT", by "Theobald"

just after the great fire of 1811. Stopped at the Y.M.C.A. in all these places except Portsmouth, where it was closed on Sunday. So stopped at the Kearsage House there.

Tuesday, explored Newburyport further, and took a side trip to Parker River, climbing a great hill getting one of the finest views in New England.

In the evening went to Amesbury and Haverhill, putting up at the Y.M.C.A. and making a trip to Tryout office where I am now. Hope to get to Ipswich and Gloucester tomorrow, if I can get good transportation. Then Salem, Marblehead, Boston and home.

After leaving Haverhill Wednesday morning, I returned to Newburyport via West Newbury, giving this ancient town of "Lord" Timothy Dexter a final survey. I then took the train for Ipswich, where I thoroughly explored the ancient Whipple House, built in 1640, and housing one line of my ancestry. Obtaining transportation to Essex, I took there a bus for Gloucester, which I reached in the afternoon. Registering at the Y.M.C.A., I purchased a guidebook and proceeded to explore the town much more thoroughly than on my former visit five years ago. This time I left nothing unseen, including the fine 1896 church, the stately old mansion on Middle Street, the hidden graveyard on Church Street, a fine panorama view from Governor's Hill.

The perennial color and atmosphere of the water front, where the last of New England's maritime still survives. The next day I devoted to interiors, notably the fine Sargent-Murray-Gilman House (1786) and the ancient Ellery House, (1704) and a side trip to quaint Rockport, where old Main St. stretches beside the sea. On the final day I visited the Riggs House, oldest on Cape Ann - at Annisquam, and explored the cliffs of Magnolia, overlooking Normans Woe, and contain the celebrated Rape's Chasm. At noon I proceeded southwest through picturesque Manchester and bustling Beverly to Salem, where I steeped myself in the usual quota of historical sights. Then crossing by trolley to Marblehead, I devoted the glorious sunset hours to that of finest of colonial survivals, imbuing the spirit of Georgian antiquity to its fullest extent.

In the evening I returned to Providence by way of Lynn and Boston, reaching home at midnight, after exactly two weeks of scenic and anti-quarian travelling. The trip, as a whole, exceeded all others I have taken in general pleasure and picturesqueness; and will surely be difficult to improve upon in future years.

THE ALCHEMIST

High up, crowning the grassy summit of a swelling mount whose sides are wooded near the base with the gnarled trees of the primeval forest stands the old chateau of my ancestors. For centuries its lofty battlements have frowned down upon the wild and rugged countryside about serving as a home and stronghold for the proud house whose honored line is older even than the moss-grown castle walls. These ancient turrets stained by the storms of generations and crumbling under the slow yet mighty pressure of time, formed in the ages of feudalism, one of the most dreaded and formidable fortresses in all France. From its machicolated parapets and mounted battlements, Barons, Counts, and even Kings had been defiled, yet never had its spacious halls resounded to the footsteps of the invader.

But since those glorious years all is changed. A poverty but little the level of dire want, together with a pride of name that forbids its alleviation by the pursuits of commercial life, have prevented the scions of our line from maintaining their estates in pristine splendor; and the falling stones of the walls, the overgrown vegetation in the parks, the dry and dusty moat, the ill-paved courtyards, and toppling towers without, as well as the sagging floors, the worm-eaten wainscots, and the faded tapestries within, all tell a gloomy tale of fallen grandeur. As the ages passed, first one, then another of the four great turrets were left to ruin, until at last but a single tower housed the sadly reduced descendants of the once mighty lords of the estate.

It was in one of the vast and gloomy chambers of this remaining tower that I, Antoine, last of the unhappy and accursed Comtes de C_____, first saw the light of day, ninety long years ago. Within these walls and amongst the dark and shadowy forests, the wild ravines and grottoes of the hillside below, were spent the first years of my troubled life. My parents I never knew. My father had been killed at the age of thirty-two, a month before I was born, by the fall of a stone somehow dislodged from one of the deserted parapets of the castle. And my mother having died at my birth, my care, and education devolved solely upon one remaining servitor, an old and trusted man of considerable intelligence, whose name I remember as Pierre. I was an only child and the lack of companionship which this fact entailed upon me well augmented by the strange care exercised by my aged guardian. In excluding

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me from the society of the peasant children whose abodes were scattered here and there upon the plains that surround the base of the hill. At the time, Pierre said that this restriction was imposed upon me because my noble birth placed me above association with such plebeian company. Now I know that its real object was to keep from my ears the idle tales of the dread curse upon our line, that were nightly told and magnified by the simple tenantry as they conversed in hushed accents in the glow of their cottage hearths.

Thus isolated, and thrown upon my own resources, I spent the hours of my childhood in poring over the ancient tomes that filled the shadow-haunted library of the chateau, and in roaming without aim or purpose through the perpetual dust of the spectral wood that clothes the side of the hill near its foot. It was perhaps an effect of such surroundings that my mind early acquired a shade of melancholy. Those studies and pursuits which partake of the dark and occult in nature most strongly claimed my attention.

Of my own race I was permitted to learn singularly little, yet what small knowledge of it I was able to gain, seemed to depress me much. Perhaps it was at first only the manifest reluctance of my old preceptor to discuss with me my paternal ancestry that gave rise to the terror which I ever felt at the mention of my great house, yet as I grew out of childhood, I was able to piece together disconnected fragments of discourse, let slip from the unwilling tongue which had begun to falter in approaching senility, that had a sort of relation to a certain circumstance which I had always deemed strange, but which now became dimly terrible. The circumstance to which I allude is the early age at which all the Comtes of my line had met their end. Whilst I had hitherto considered this but a natural attribute of a family of short-lived men, I afterward pondered long upon these premature deaths, and began to connect them with the wanderings of the old man, who often spoke of a curse which for centuries had prevented the lives of the holders of my title from much exceeding the span of thirty-two years. Upon my twenty-first birthday, the aged Pierre gave to me family document which he said had for many generations had been handed down from father to son, and continued by each possessor. Its contents were of the most startling nature, and its perusal confirmed the gravest of my apprehensions. At this time, my belief in the supernatural was firm, and deep seated, else I should have dismissed with scorn the incredible narrative unfolded before my eyes.

The paper carried me back to the days of the thirteenth century, when the old castle in which I sat had been a feared and impregnable fortress. It told of a certain ancient man who had once dwelled on our estates, a person of no small accomplishments, though little above the rank of peasant; by name, Michel, usually designated by the surname of Mauvais, the Evil, on account of his sinister reputation. He had studied beyond the custom of his kind, seeking such things as the Philosopher's Stone, or the Elixir of Eternal Life, and was reputed wise in the terrible secrets of Black Magic and Alchemy. Michel Mauvais had one son, named Charles, a youth as proficient as himself in the hidden arts, and who had therefore been called Le Sorcier, or the Wizard. This pair, shunned by all honest folk, were suspected of the most hideous practices. Old Michel was said to have burnt his wife alive

as a sacrifice to the Devil, and the unaccountable disappearances of many small peasant children were laid at the dreaded door of these two. Yet through the dark natures of the father and son ran one redeeming ray of humanity; the evil old man loved his offspring with fierce intensity, whilst the youth had for his parent a more than filial affection.

One night the castle on the hill was thrown into the wildest confusion by the vanishment of young Godfrey son to Henri the Comte. A searching party, headed by the frantic father invaded the cottage of the sorcerers and there came upon old Michel Mauvais, busy over a huge and violently boiling cauldron. Without certain cause, in the ungoverned madness of fury and despair, the Comte laid hands on the aged wizard, and ere he released his murderous hold his victim was no more. Meanwhile joyful servants were proclaiming aloud the finding of young Godfrey in a distant and unused chamber of the great edifice, telling too late that poor Michel had been killed in vain. As the Comte and his associates turned away from the lowly abode of the alchemist, the form of Charles Le Sorcier appeared through the trees. The excited chatter of the menials standing about told him what had occurred, yet he seemed at first unmoved at his father's fate. Then, slowly advancing to meet the Comte he pronounced in dull yet terrible accents the curse that ever afterward haunted the house of C_____.

"May ne'er a noble of thy murd'rous line

Survive to reach a greater age than thine"!

Spake he, when suddenly leaping backwards into the black wood, he drew from his tunic a phial of colourless liquid which he threw in the face of his father's slayer as he disappeared behind the inky curtain of the night. The Comte died without utterance, and was buried the next day, but little more than two and thirty years from the hour of his birth. No trace of the assassin could be found, though relentless bands of peasants scoured the neighboring woods and the meadow-land around the hill.

Thus time and the want of a reminder dulled the memory of the curse in the minds of the late Comte's family, so that when Godfrey, innocent cause of the whole tragedy and now bearing the title, was killed by an attow whilst hunting at the age of thirty-two, there were no thoughts save those of grief at his demise. But when, years afterward, the next young Comte, Robert by name, was found dead in a nearby field from no apparent cause, the peasants told in whispers that their seigneur had but lately passed his thirty-second birthday when surprised by early death. Louis, son to Robert, was found drowned in the moat at the same fateful age, and thus down through the centuries ran the ominous chronicle; Honris, Roberts, Antoinnes, and Armands snatched from happy and virtuous lives when little below the age their unfortunate ancestor, at his murder.

That I had left at most but eleven years of further existence was made certain to me by the words which I had read. My life, previously held at small value, now became dearer to me each day, as I delved deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the hidden world of black magic. Isolated as I was, modern science had produced no impression upon me, and I laboured as in the Middle Ages, as wrapt as had been old Michel and young Charles themselves in the acquisition of demonological and alchemical learning. Yet read as I might, in no manner could

I account for the strange curse upon my line. In unusually rational moments, I would even go so far as to seek a natural explanation, attributing the early deaths of my ancestors to the sinister Charles Le Corcier and his heirs; yet having found upon careful inquiry that there were no known descendants of the alchemist, I would fall back to occult studies, and once more endeavor to find a spell that would release my house from its terrible burden. Upon one thing I was absolutely resolved. I should never wed for since no other branch of my family were in existence, I might thus end the curse with myself.

As I drew near the age of thirty, old Pierre was called to the Land beyond. Alone I buried him beneath the stone of the courtyard about which he had loved to wander in life. Thus was I left to ponder on myself as the only human creature within the great fortress, and in my utter solitude my mind began to cease its vain protest against the impending doom, to become almost reconciled to the fate which so many of my ancestors had met. Much of my time was now occupied in the exploration of the ruined and abandoned halls and towers of the old chateau, which in youth fear had caused me to shun, and some of which old Pierre had once told me, had not been trodden by human foot for over four centuries. Strange and awesome were many of the objects I encountered. Furniture, covered by the dust of ages and crumbling with the rot of long dampness met my eyes. Cobwebs in a profusion never before seen by me were spun everywhere, and huge bats flapped their bony and uncanny wings on all sides of the otherwise untenanted gloom.

Of my exact age, even down to days and hours, I kept a most careful record, for each movement of the pendulum of the massive clock in the library told off so much of my doomed existence. At length I approached that time which I had so long viewed with apprehension. Since most of my ancestors had been seized some little while, before they reached the exact age of the Comte Henri at his end, I was every moment on the watch for the coming of the unknown death. In what strange form the curse should overtake me, I knew not; but I was resolved at least, that it should not find me a cowardly or a passive victim. With new vigour I applied my self to my examination of the old chateau and its contents.

It was upon one of the longest of all my excursions of discovery in the deserted portion of the castle, less than a week before that fatal hour which I felt must mark the utmost limit of my stay on earth; beyond which I could have not even the slightest hope of continuing to draw breath, that I came upon the illuminating event of my whole life. I had spent the better part of the morning in climbing up and down half ruined staircases in one of the most delapidated of the ancient turrets. As the afternoon progressed, I sought the lower levels, descending into what appeared to be either a mediæval place of confinement, or a more recently excavated storehouse for gunpowder. As I slowly traversed the nitre-encrusted passageway at the foot of the last staircase, the paving became very damp, and soon I saw by the light of my flickering torch that a blank, water-stained wall impeded my journey. Turning to retrace my steps, my eye fell upon a small trap-door with a ring, which lay directly beneath my feet. Pausing, I succeeded with difficulty in raising it, whereupon there was revealed a black aperture, exhaling noxious fumes which caused my torch to sputter, and dis-

closing in the unsteady glare the top of a flight of stone steps. As soon as the torch which I lowered into the repellent depths burned freely and steadily, I commenced my descent. The steps were many, and led to a narrow stone-flagged passage which I knew must be far underground. This passage proved of great length, and terminated in a massive oaken door, dripping with the moisture of the place, and stoutly resisting all my attempts to open it. Ceasing after a time my efforts in this direction, I had proceeded back some distance toward the steps when there suddenly fell to my experience one of the most profound and maddening shocks capable of reception by the human mind. Without warning, I heard the heavy door behind me creak slowly open upon its rusted hinges. My immediate sensations are incapable of analysis. To be confronted in a place as thoroughly deserted as I had deemed the old castle with evidence of the presence of man or spirit, produced in my brain a horror of the most acute description. When at last I turned and faced the seat of the sound, my eyes must have started from their orbits at the sight that they beheld. There in the ancient Gothic doorway stood a human figure. It was that of a man clad in a skull-cap and long mediæval tunic of dark colour. His long hair and flowing beard were of a terrible and intense black hue, and of incredible profusion. His forehead, high beyond the usual dimensions; his cheeks, deep sunken and heavily lined with wrinkles; and his hands, long, claw-like and gnarled, were of such a deadly marble-like whiteness as I have never elsewhere seen in man. His figure, leaned to the proportions of a skeleton, was strangely bent and almost lost within the voluminous folds of his peculiar garment. But strangest of all were his eyes, twin caves of abysmal blackness; profound in expression of understanding, yet inhuman in degree of wickedness. These were now fixed upon me, piercing my soul with their hatred, and rooting me to the spot whereon I stood. At last the figure spoke in a rumbling voice that chilled me through with its dull hollowness and latent malevolence. The language in which the discourse was clothed was that debased form of Latin in use amongst the more learned men of the Middle ages, and made familiar to me by my prolonged researches into the works of the old alchemists and demonologists. The apparition spoke of the curse which had hovered over my house, told me of my coming end, dwelt on the wrong perpetrated by my ancestor against old Michel Mauvais, and gloated over the revenge of Charles Le Sorcier. He told how young Charles had escaped into the night, returning in after years to kill Godfrey the heir with an arrow just as he approached the age which had been his father's at his assassination; how he had secretly returned, to the estate and established himself, unknown, in the even then deserted subterranean chamber whose doorway now framed the hideous narrator; how he had seized Robert, son of Godfrey in a field, forced poison down his throat and left him to die at the age of thirty-two, thus maintaining the foul provisions of his vengeful curse. At this point I was left to imagine the solution of the greatest mystery of all, how the curse had been fulfilled since that time when Charles Le Sorcier must in the course of nature have died, for the man digressed into an account of the deep alchemical studies of the two wizards, father and son, speaking most particularly of the researches of Charles Le Sorcier concerning the elixir which should grant to him who partook of it eternal life and youth.

His enthusiasm had seemed for the moment to remove from his terrible eyes that had first so haunted, but suddenly the fiendish glare returned, and with a shocking sound like the hissing of a serpent, the stranger raised a glass phial with the evident intent of ending my life as had Charles Le Sorcier, six hundred years before, ended that of my ancestor. Prompted by some perserving instinct of self-defense, I broke through the spell that had hitherto held me immovable, and flung my now dying torch at the creature who menaced my existence. I heard the phial brake harmlessly against the stones of the passage as the tunic of the strange man caught fire and lit the horrid scene with a ghastly radiance. The shriek of fright and impotent malice omitted by the would-be assassin proved too much for my already shaken nerves, and I fell prone upon the slimy floor in a total faint.

When at last my senses returned, all was frightfully dark, and my mind remembering what had occurred, shrank from the idea of beholding any more; yet curiosity overmastered all. Who, I asked myself, was this man of evil, and how came he within the castle walls? Why should he seek to avenge the death of poor Michel Mauvais, and how had the curse been carried on through all the long centuries since the time of Charles Le Sorcier? The dread of years was lifted off my shoulders, for I knew that he whom I had felled was the source of all my danger from the curse; and now that I was free, I burned with the desire to learn more of the sinister thing which had haunted my line for centuries, and made of my own youth one long-continued nightmare. Determined upon further exploration, I felt in my pockets for flint and steel, and lit the unused torch which I had with me. First of all, new light revealed the distorted and blackened form of the mysterious stranger. The hideous eyes were now closed. Disliking the sight, I turned away and entered the chamber beyond the Gothic door. Here I found what seemed much like an alchemist's laboratory. In one corner was an immense pile of a shining yellow metal that sparkled gorgeously in the light of the torch. It may have been gold, but I did not pause to examine it for I was strangely affected by that which I had undergone. At the farther end of the apartment was an opening leading out into one of the many wild ravines, of the dark hillside forest. Filled with wonder, yet now realizing how the man had obtained access to the chateau, I proceeded to return. I had intended to pass by the remains of the stranger with averted face but as I approached the body I seemed to hear emanating from it a faint sound, as though life were not yet wholly extinct. Aghast, I turned to examine the charred and shrivelled figure on the floor.

Then all at once the horrible eyes, blacker even than the scared face in which they were set, opened wide with an expression which I was unable to interpret. The cracked lips tried to frame words which I could not well understand. Once I caught the name of Charles Le Sorcier and again I fancied that the words "years" and "curse" issued from the twisted mouth. Still I was at a loss to gather the purport of his disconnected speech. At my evident ignorance of his meaning, the pitchy eyes once more flashed malevolently at me, until, helpless as I say my opponent to be, I trembled as I watched him.

Suddenly the wretch, animated with his last burst of strength, raised his piteous head from the damp and sunken pavement. Then, as I re-

nained, paralyzed with fear, he found his voice and in his dying breath screamed forth those words which have ever afterward haunted my days and my nights. "Fool," he shrieked, "can you not guess my secret? Have you no brain whereby you may recognize the will which has through six long centuries fulfilled the dreadful curse upon your house? Have I not told you of the great elixir of eternal life? Know you not how the secret of Alchemy was solved? I tell you, it is I! I! I! that have lived for six hundred years to maintain my revenge, for I am Charles Le Sorcier!"

