



THE YELLOW GLOBE.

A MIDNIGHT STORY.

RETURNING from the club at an hour long past midnight, I noticed a peculiar-looking person of medium height, somewhat angular, with sallow, dark complexion, dressed like any other well-to-do person, gazing intently at the large yellow globe of colored fluid in a druggist's window. The streets were deserted, and his whole attention seemed riveted on that particular yellow spot.

A few nights later, about one o'clock, I saw the man again at the same window; so, taking refuge in the shadow of a house opposite, I watched him unobserved. He stood looking earnestly at the bright yellow center of the large globe. Now he held his finger out as though he were trying some effect, or placed his hand in silhouette against the bright background. Then he moved forward and backward, with his head bent first on one side and then on the other, as though he were looking for

something beyond and through the fluid. At last he walked away, casting glances backward at the fascinating yellow light, and disappeared in the darkness.

A week passed, and I saw him for the third time again scrutinizing the yellow globe. When he left I followed him, and as we passed a street-lamp I accosted him. At first I thought he resented it, but after a moment I ventured to say, "I have observed you gazing into the druggist's window, and I must say my curiosity has been excited to know what you find of such interest in a druggist's yellow light."

Then we walked on for some blocks in silence, and I thought I had offended him; but after a while he said slowly: "The hope of my life is to a certain extent bound up in that yellow spot, the center of that globe. But pardon me, you are a total stranger, and no one but —"

Just then I interrupted him by remarking,

"What a beautiful effect of light through the street, and how soft and velvety the shadows look!"

There was another long pause, and then he said, "You seem to take pleasure in the effects of light and shade."

"Oh, yes," I answered; "I really enjoy nature very much."

"What would you think of pursuing an effect year after year, as I have done?" he asked.

Now we were fairly launched, and I noticed as we passed the various gas-lights what a peculiar, wistful, far-away look the man had, and what a thoroughly artistic make-up. I also noticed that at every turn of the street he seemed to be looking for something. He would pause now and then, and stand in utter silence, watching some unusual effect in the same intent manner with which he had looked at the druggist's light. In the mean time we were getting into narrower streets, and as the shadows of the tall buildings partly hid us, he would give me bits of conversation, always on nature or kindred subjects.

"Yes," he said; "the mistake that most painters make, especially the realists, is that they paint nature as they think they see it. But what of it? 'If art is not more than nature, it is not art.' Why," said he, "look at the romantic school, both old and modern. Was it not always the embodiment of an idea? Did they not always make Nature do their bidding, with as much or as little of herself as they chose? There is Monticelli — what a wealth of beautiful color! He takes what he wants, and adds his own conception of beauty of color, so that you get his groups of figures rich and glowing and harmonious. So with Delacroix, so with Turner. Look at his 'Slave Ship.' All these men borrowed from nature so far as they chose to embody their own idea of what they wished to express."

By this time we had reached the lower part of the city, and the streets became even narrower and the odors more disagreeable. There was a sense of great coolness, like the wind from the water. On we walked. I became more and more interested, and occasionally made a remark to keep the conversation going, while my companion stopped from time to time to watch some new effect, as though he were afraid something would escape him.

"Yes," he said; "I have spent years in an experiment which I hope soon to complete. I have walked the streets by day and night; I have sailed on rivers; I have looked through old doorways, have studied all kinds of vegetation and tree-forms suited to my idea and to my notion of sky effects,— old ironwork, old houses, old fences and windows,— in fact, all nature has been to me a great storehouse from which to select my material."

By this time we had reached the river-front, and although long past midnight, I was so much interested in finding out what manner of man I had chanced upon that I would gladly have walked until daylight. I feared every moment that he would bid me good night; but if anything, he grew more confidential. My chance remark about effects had evidently won him, for some reason. As we walked on, the spars and vessels at the wharves were almost black against the sky, while the lights twinkled across the river, and the stars shone overhead. Suddenly we turned a sharp corner, and came to a great pile of old buildings with steep slate roofs — evidently in their better days sail-lofts. And now, in the gloom of one of the tallest of these buildings, he stopped, and, I thought, was about to say good night. For a time he stood as though he were thinking what he had better do. Finally he asked: "Will you come to my room? It is up many flights of stairs, but I think you may perhaps be interested in what I have to show you."

As we entered the door, which he unlocked with an old-fashioned iron key, he said: "Give me your hand. This building is unoccupied at night, with the exception of myself and a watchman, who has a small room on the ground floor." So saying, he led me up the creaking stairs, in absolute darkness. A strong smell of oakum and tar pervaded the place. On reaching the top floor, both of us out of breath, he fumbled for another key, with which he unlocked the door of his room.

Then he excused himself, and left me standing in darkness while he proceeded to strike a light. What a curious room it was! An enormous loft, with a peaked roof, and horizontal beams joining the sides of the building, and several windows of medium size — evidently an old sail-loft, but now filled with a most extraordinary collection of queer objects. At one end of the room were large panes of glass set in upright, movable frames, some of them smeared over with a peculiar mixture. At the other end of the room was a long, plain wooden table, and at its extreme end stood one of the panes of glass. Back of this I noticed a globe of yellow fluid, something like those used in the druggist's window, but not so large. Back of the globe again was a small lamp. In another corner of the room was a gigantic thistle, now dead, planted in a large flower-pot. Near it I saw a stuffed blue heron. But, most interesting of all, at the extreme end of another deal table was a model in clay of what seemed to be an old English manor-house, noble in proportion, exquisite in line, and with little glass windows. Back of this model was one of the large upright frames, holding a pane of yellow glass. Here and there were small models of fences, miniature bits of iron-

work, gateways, etc. On the walls were nailed the most eccentric sketches. There were gigantic studies of weeds, foreground plants done with strong effects in charcoal, and at one end of the room a water-color drawing on brown paper of a great rose-tree, like an enlarged rose-bush. From the ceiling hung globes filled with different-colored fluids, and old ship-lanterns, evidently for some use, not objects of bric-à-brac. In other words, I had been admitted into an immense workshop, where everything had its purpose for the work in hand only. I noticed that a small portion of the room was screened off, probably as a bedroom. Near the stove, on one side, was a cheap round table, on which were a book or two and some newspapers, as well as several new clay pipes.

I have given only an idea of my first hasty survey of the room. I was constantly discovering new objects of interest. Several large, flat, white porcelain dishes, with lips at the end, seemed to have held colored liquids of various kinds, which had dried, leaving a sediment in the bottom. Many sheets of drawing-paper on stretchers were standing about the room. This was not the den of an elegant dilettante, but the workshop of a man in earnest about something.

And now, as we settled down in the large leather-covered arm-chairs, and the long clay pipes were lighted, my strange companion became more confidential, although it was plain to be seen that by nature he was a recluse, and perhaps a brooding, melancholy man. After looking me over intently, as though he were studying my first impression of the place, he began:

"You are evidently much surprised and bewildered by the mass of objects with which I am surrounded, but they all mean a great deal to me. They all have their place in a new creation I am evolving. They have been collected, at great expense of time and trouble, to help me carry out the idea I am striving to express. Let me explain. First, I wished to render a haunted house which should be not only uncanny and weird, but beautiful as well; in fact, so beautiful that at first you would miss the horrible and mysterious, and notice the beautiful only. How many effects I have studied for this alone! The silver-gray, cold effect was the one I had first thought of, as conveying an impression of weirdness; but I finally settled on a scheme in which the whole picture should be flooded in golden light, but a

Light that never was, on sea or land —

something of the effect that you might possibly see on an Indian-summer day, when you feel an awful stillness in nature; when the little birds forget to sing, and sit in the sunshine as though they were paralyzed; when even the trees and flowers and all growing things seem to be under some magic spell; when, as you

start to walk, you suddenly stand still as if fascinated by the sunlight; when the motion of everything in nature seems suspended. You can hardly understand," he added, "what this haunted house means to me. Windows have grown to have human looks, at times almost terrible. Old fences and ironwork have as keen expressions as individuals. In fact, this whole house wears its personality until I am often deeply depressed by it. Ah, I have had my life's sorrow and trouble, and horrible—" He stopped suddenly. Did I observe a faint gleam of something like a pained, agonized look in the sudden expression of his eyes and face? If so, it was gone in a moment, and the soft, beautiful look returned, although he seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"Yes," he continued; "I have worked many years at this haunted house. All there is in me shows itself here to one who can read it, in its various moods and parts: sorrow, love, hope, forgiveness—all are expressed here; and if I can leave behind me this one great picture, I shall be satisfied, even if I never do another. How long I have worked, and how earnestly I have studied for this result! Do you see those globes filled with fluid, and those upright panes of glass set in frames? They are all parts of my experiment; all yellow sunsets and peculiar effects of yellow light: yellow lights shining through mists and fogs. Why, look here!" and he handed me a large sketch-book filled with hundreds of studies. In one the trees appeared in silhouette against a sunset sky; in another there would be only a gigantic thistle, or a great rank weed, with the sky for a background. "The house," he said, "was not so difficult a matter, for I had in memory a beautiful old manor-house with its quaint gables and angles and picturesque windows."

Was it a look of horror on the man's face as he spoke of the windows? After an awkward silence he resumed: "Yes; I have thought, and planned, and worked over this picture for years." Then, as we smoked in silence, I had a good opportunity to observe him more minutely. It was evident that gentle blood ran in his veins. His head was massive and strong; there was an indescribable softness about his dark eyes, although they showed latent fire. He had a great mass of luxuriant black hair; his beard and mustache were rather long, and very becoming. But now he seemed to feel my glances, and his manner became nervous and agitated. When he again raised his eyes to mine they had grown cold and hard.

"To return to my favorite subject," he said, "I am going to have my vegetation on a grand scale. I will have thistles as large as trees if they suit my purpose. Rose-bushes shall be rose-trees."

"But the air of mystery and weirdness—how are you going to manage that?" I asked.

He did not answer me at once, but after a while said slowly: "The mysterious will be there, whatever else is lacking; and I intend to get such an effect that if innocent children come near the picture they will walk tiptoe with their fingers on their lips. Strange to say, I have decided to do it in water-color, and not in oil. Although one unquestionably does not get such solidity in water-color, it is better suited to my purpose. Look at those square porcelain dishes with lips, and those great sheets of paper near them—all parts of the experiments I have tried. I can flow washes so transparent that they are like air itself; and as for variety of texture, differences of gradation, look at that!" So saying, he handed me a sheet of paper that glowed like sunlight, while the gray house in the middle distance looked as though it were seen through golden mists, or as though its gray were powdered with gold dust.

"That," he said, "is only one of hundreds of experiments I made before I reached with certainty what I wished to express in yellow light. I see you are looking at the sketch of the rose-tree."

"Yes," I replied; "I am very much interested."

"Oh, well," he said, "they are all part and lot of my final picture, which is now almost completed. Perhaps you would like to see how I proceed from time to time with my experiments."

He then turned the light almost out. How uncanny it all seemed to me, as I stood, long past midnight, in the dim, shadowy loft! But I was so thoroughly interested that I did not indulge long in reflections. In a few moments he lighted a small lamp behind the great pane of yellow glass, which I now saw was smeared over with a weird kind of sky, while the model of the house was almost in silhouette against it. In another moment he had lighted a little lamp under the table, which shone through a small pool or pond, also made of yellow glass, which in turn threw a soft light over the front of the house. Then he illuminated the interior of his house, and through the little windows gleamed a melancholy light, subdued here and there by bits of paint carefully and most artistically added to the windows. Now he placed a small bronze heron on the shore of the miniature pond; then some bits of weeds and grasses. On one side he adjusted a group of thistles, and finally the great rose-tree in miniature at one end of the house. To these he kept adding other objects, among them a small sun-dial. Then he led me to the other end of the room, and by some hidden mechanism

threw a soft, delicious, but uncanny yellow glow over the whole. The great loft was now in midnight darkness and gloom, and only this beautiful but almost specter-like, haunted little spot glowing with such strange and fascinating light. How real it appeared! I was riveted to the spot; the singular beauty of this miniature house and its surroundings grew on me. We both stood in absolute silence. What strange, hidden something was there about it that affected me so curiously? I felt cold chills begin to creep over me; the stillness became awful. I looked at my companion; he seemed lost in reverie. But it was not merely seeming, it was with real horror that he stood gazing at those little glass windows. I do not know how long we stood thus; but at last he turned up the light, and I noticed how pale he had become and how absorbed was his manner.

"Now," he said, "I will show you the picture." He went to the further end of the room and pulled a large curtain aside, exposing the painting to my view. "You see, all the appliances of my model are but mere hints to me. I use them as I use nature, and as a figure-artist uses a lay figure, taking only so much as I care for."

If I had been impressed before with all I had seen, how much more was I impressed with the picture! How beautiful! Was the sky painted, or was it real? Now I could well understand all that he had worked so hard to accomplish. Again I began to feel a mysterious awe, cold shivers creeping over me, and again the painter's manner changed. He looked pale and haggard, and an expression of pain and anguish seemed to show itself in his whole being. Another awkward pause, while the beautiful yellow sky glowed like light through amber. A queer, far-away, hold-your-breath sort of feeling came over me. I looked at the front of the house; the paths were choked with great weeds; the sun-dial was moss-covered, and on it was a lizard so quiet that it seemed petrified. On the shore of the pond the heron stood motionless. The little birds were sitting hushed in the branches of the rose-tree. Great thistles, almost black, were in the left foreground, and the gigantic rose-tree was blooming with beauty. But the something which made me shudder was the queer, fascinating light shining through the windows, which affected me like a wail from the dead. I expected the next moment to hear a piercing cry from within the house.

"You seem impressed," he said very gently, and his voice sounded sweet and low. He replaced the curtain over the picture, and, as he did so, said slowly and sadly, "Only a man with a haunted heart can paint a haunted house."