# STORY OF AN OLD BUILDING.

## The Romance of University Building in New York.

## TALES OF WELL-KNOWN MEN

### The Mysterious William Henry Hurlburt and His Company.

**Wonderful Collectio of Pictures Now in a Sealed Room- There the Scenes of "Cecil Dreme" Were Laid, Etc., Etc.**

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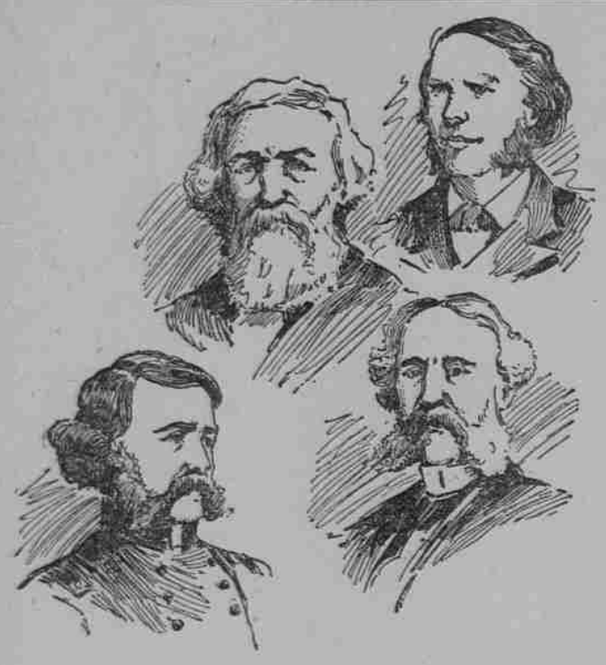
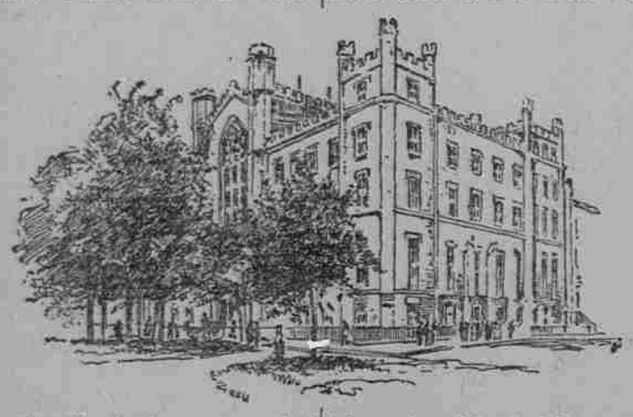
NEW YORK, Jan. 25.—A picturesque corner of Bohemia, one that has sheltered many a personality of more than national fame—is soon to yield to the inexorable hand of fate. The grey stone battlements and turreted building of the University of New York, for the past sixty years a landmark of the American metropolis, is to be removed—reverently razed to its foundation, stone by stone; but every block will be carefully numbered and the historic pile will raise again from a noble campus of forty-two acres, beyond the Harlem river, near 230th street. Thus will disappear from the limits of the city proper one of New York's most familiar monuments—a venerable structure from time to time, the nursery and the home of American genius. Why should I allude to it as a corner of Bohemia? Can the academic walls that claim Samuel F. B. Morse, Richard Grant White, Theodore Winthorp, T. DeWitt Talmage, Bishop Coxe, the three Drapers—John W., Henry and John C.—be so described? Yes, and odd as it may seem, the explanation is an easy one.



S. F. B. MORSE. T. DEWIT TALMAGE.
THEODORE WINTAROP. RICHARD GRANT WHITE.

Distinctly apart from its strictly academic functions the New York university building has long possessed a peculiar characteristic investing it, in the mind of the average passer-by, with a certain degree of mystery not altogether devoid of romantic charm. This is the custom of renting rooms upon the upper stories to tenants engaged in pursuits wholly unconnected with collegiate affairs. It is generally known, in an indefinite sort of way, that there thus exists, in an atmosphere of art, bohemianism and solitude, a little colony, appart from the madding crowd.

Few Americans are unacquainted with the novel "Cecil Dreme," written by Theodore Winthorp in the university building. Winthorp's own career was in its way as romantic as his novels. If you stand at the corridor window which looks into Waverly place from the third story above the sidewalk, the room immediately to your right and now numbered 31 is the room where Cecil Dreme, the hero of the novel, lived and had his being, and where so many prominent scenes of the story are laid. The corresponding room on the second floor, and now a part of the library, was once known by the imposing title of "Rubbish Hall," and during the period it was rented by the distinguished architect, Richard Hunt, Theodore Winthorp occupied it as his guest, and not only wrote "Cecil Dreme" within its four walls, but identified it with a most important portion of his plot. "Rubbish Hall" formerly opened into a smaller chamber at the rear wherein the fair heroine was confined by Densdeth, the villain of the tale, whilst her friends believed her to be dead. The original of Densdeth is said to have been no less a personage than the brilliant and erratic journalist, William Henry Hurlburt, who subsequently had the small annex to "Rubbish Hall" for a part of his own costly suite of apartments which he vacated on his departure for Europe in 1885. Robert C. Minor, the famous landscape artist, was until recently the tenant of Cecil Dreme's room, and while it remained his studio several notable events took place there. The society reception to the great Spanish dancer, Carmencita, was given in the studio a year ago, and all the adjoining rooms on the same corridor were pressed into service as well. It was the most notable social "crush" of its kind ever seen in the metropolis and was attended by all the leaders of New York society.



There is hardly anyone now living who has any personal recollection of the author of "Cecil Dreme." The late George William Curtis was perhaps his closest friend.

William Henry Hurlburt had the suite of rooms opposite the library on the Waverly place side of the building, lit by five windows looking out upon the latter thoroughfare. They are situated on the first floor above the street entrance and were splendidly furnished during his tenancy. Mr. Hurlburt entertained considerably, but his guests were selected much less from among his fellow tenants than from outsiders. In fact, his movements were always mysterious, and he did not admit everybody to the full freedom of his chambers, which had certain alcoves and curtained recesses tacitly recognized as private. Considerable changes have been effected in the administration of the building since his time, and very many of the old tenants have vacated and scattered, so that information concerning his habits is rather scant. One story, however, is current which tells of a distinguished looking lady who used to come and go, visiting his appartments unchallenged and apparently always able to gain admittance at any hour of the twenty-four, whether the owner was supposed to be at home or not. Nobody seems to know who she was or whence she came, but one fact was undisputed, she never either entered or left the building save alone and unattended. In personal appearance she is described as having been possessed of more than ordinary attractions of face and figure. When Mr. Hurlburt went abroad some seven or eight years ago, having previously disposed of his entire household effects, the lady simultaneously vanished. Whether the peculiar collection of pictures which Mr. Hurlburt was known to have owned, and which hung in chosen parts of his rooms for the inspection of chosen eyes, were sold by public auction or by private contract at the time he broke up house, does not seem to have been placed on record, at least it could not be ascertained even upon close investigation. Anyway, he led a free and easy, gay bachelor existence when within his college precincts.

Samuel F. B. Morse, the father of the electric telegraph, once lived in the top room of the northwest tower at the Waverly place corner of the building, and some of his first experiments in telegraphy were made upon its roof. The Drapers also experimented there with photography. Commander Gorringe, who performed the feat of transporting safely from Egypt the famous Cleopatra's needle which stands in Central park, New York, was for a time a tenant of the university structure, and lived there nearly to the date of his death.

The English artist knew his Shakespeare from cover to cover, and was besides gifted witn considerable dramatic power. A favorite amusement upon moonlit nights was a reunion on the university roof, when the ghost scene from "Hamlet" would be performed by Barnard. Anyone familiar with this roof knows how, upon a bright night, its battlemented parapet and corner towers stand out boldly in relief, forming an excellent setting for the famous scene. You could readily imagine yourself upon the walls of the ancient castle at Elsinore, where the melancholy Dane confronted his father's shade. The company sat in a corner smoking and Barnard, attired in a white sheet, would go through the scene with precision, to the infinite pleasure of his audience. They used to say of him that but two things in America suited him—green corn and the University building.

The strange case of Hermit Gammage, who was found dead in his room, No. 59, in the University building last February, is one of the somber incidents that have occassionally checkered its history. One Saturday afternoon a servant found his door open and a key in the lock. Just after she entered the room loud screams were heard and the next room tenant, who was one of the first to come on the scene, gave the writer a vivid description of what he saw. "The servant woman had fainted, and no wonder, for her feminine nerves could not be expected to stand the strain. The night of a brief February day already fallen and the deep gloom of the chamber was revealed only by the glimmer of a single candle guttering in the socket, and the flame from one jet of a small oil stove. Old Mr. Gammage was sitting on the edge of his bed, his body bending forward and his forehead resting on the top of the stove, the flame of which had already burned away a portion of one side of his head. He was quite dead and had probably been so for twenty-four hours. When they lifted his face from the stove they found that his features were calm and untouched by the flame, and the greater part of his long white hair was also uninjured. "The poor old recluse had died alone and unnoticed, and had it not been for the fact of his leaving the key in the door the body might have lain there for weeks undisturbed. For thirty years Henry Ten Broeck Gammage has made his home in that dusty, half furnished, comfortless chamber. He had no intimates, nor even casual visitors; the servants of the building never entered his room to clean it, for he performed that function himself, and what water he used he carried up stairs each evening before retiring. The one thing he took any interest in was the extraordinary collection of pictures, the exact value of which has never been determined, and which were found stored in his room in piles like lumber. There were more than 300 canvasses and he always claimed that at least three were respectively original works of Velasquez, Gainsborough and Reynolds. When the hermit's memoranda was searched a letter was found addressed by him to Senator Leland Stanford offering the senator the entire collection for Palo Alto university and stating that the pictures had been gathered from the galleries of Cardinal Fesch of Rome, Daveschoort of Ghent and Meert of Domberg. He had always valued the Velasquez at $40,000. Curiously enough the estate of the dead hermit is still in the hands of the public administrator and the room where he died remains officially sealed. It is therefore just as it was the day his corpse was discovered and the dust gathers thicker and thicker upon the art treasures he left behind him in its cheerless undisturbed solitude. No one knows what wealth may be lying buried in that sealed room, for the pictures have never been appraised.

Secret societies were sometimes gotten up by the tenants and their friends. Their object was conviviality. The members used to issue a "round robin," signed by each, excepting the member selected as a victim, and to whom the robin was directed, calling upon him to provide entertainment for them upon a certain evening, when an immense punch bowl was filled to the brim and partaken of by the assembled guests. Extraordinary artistic ingenuity was expended on the preparation of these round robins. Many of them are genuine works of art and also most amusingly worded. The ambrosial nights organized by the issuance of a round robin, were always especially favorite occasions.

When the building leaves its old site, to be re-erected on a new one, surely if there are "sermons in stones," those that composed the university's walls can preach eloquently of the past to their new environment. THOMAS DONNELLY.

## CHINESE GIRLS' SMALL FEET.

**A Freak of Fashion that Causes Frightful Suffering.**

An English paper quotes from a writer in the *Japan Mail*, who appears to have special knowledge of the well-known Chinese custom of compressing the feet of female children of the better classes in China. He hopes that fews of his readers have been so unfortunate as to see the naked foot of an orthodox Chinese lady. But many have looked at photographs of this terribly twisted and distorted member, and the sight must have suggested thoughts of barbarous suffering inflicted upon a particularly sensitive part of the human body.

Year by year hundreds of thousands of little girls throughout the wide empire of China are subjected to a ruthless process which crushes the bones and wrenches the sinews of their tender feet until at last a revolting deformity is produced and the foot, crumpled into a shocking monstrosity, becomes almost valueless as a means of locomotion. The wretched girl emerges from her period of feverish torture a mutilated cripple, condemned to hobble through life on feet which preserve no semblance of nature's beautiful mechanism, having become as hideous as they are useless.

At intervals the missionary cries out, the traveler writes, and the charitable agitate; but the poor children never benefit. For them there remains always the same ruthless bending of bones, the same agonizing application of tight ligatures, the same long months of bitter pain and unavailing tears. Perhaps, he suggests, it is to this singular contrast between the general refinement and cultivation of the Chinese, on the one hand, and this callous cruelty on the other, that we must attribute the periodical appearance of apologists for the appalling custom.

Some people say that, though the foot is ultimately deformed, though the woman is indeed condemned to be little better than a cripple, yet the process is not very painful after all. The bones are soft, they say, in early yovth, the sinews supple. Twisting, crushing and wrenching are operations that may be performed without much suffering on baby feet, whereas adults may be maddened by the torture. To this the writer replies:

"Let no one talk of the yielding character of young bones or the pliability of baby sinews. We have listened with our own ears to the cries of a little girl undergoing the torturing process. Such agonizing wails never before fell on our ears, They were the shrieks of a child absolutely wild with suffering. When the ligatures were loosened and the shocking succession of breathless screams ended in long-drawn wails of exhaustion and misery, the listener turned almost sick with horror and sympathy. Yet a mother was the deliberate torturer of a poor baby, and a father callously listened to its heart-broken cries.

"Think that this fiendish barbarity is being practiced daily and hourly throughout China."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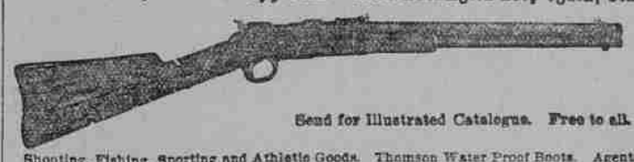

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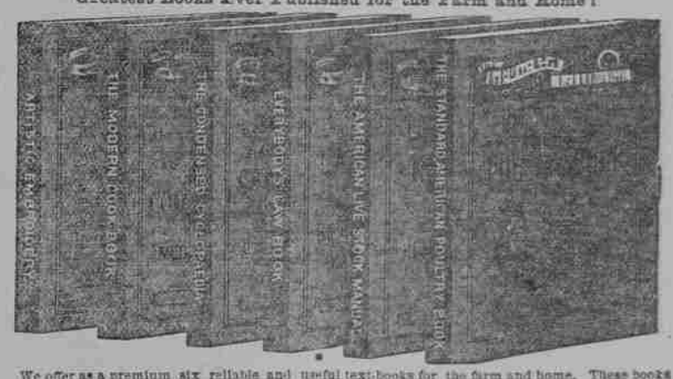


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