

The Skeleton In the Closet

Thereby Hangs a Tale.

By F. A. MITCHEL

The city of New York was founded on the southernmost point of Manhattan Island and first grew to the eastward. Later it started up Broadway, and the east side, as it is called, fell into decadence. But till after the beginning of the nineteenth century the handsomest residences were in the neighborhood of the East river.

Some years ago workmen engaged in tearing down an old dwelling near Franklin square—in which Washington lived when first inaugurated president—came upon a closet built in a wall in which was a skeleton. How it got there was a mystery, for there was no opening to the closet, it being inclosed within four thick walls. The find was referred to a historical society, which appointed Helleger Bogardus, an antiquarian, to investigate the whole matter and report. The following is extracted from the papers filed with the society:

"The fact that the skeleton was found within four solid walls is easily explained. The house was repaired and altered during the last decade of the eighteenth century, and the wall wherein was the door to the closet was made whole. The apartment inclosed was of such size that workmen would not necessarily have seen what it contained, especially since there were no windows to admit light in that part of the house.

"As to there being such a closet at all, the story connected with it is a sufficient explanation, for the opening, which was walled up, was closed by a sliding panel. What has not been satisfactorily explained is the use for which the closet was designed. At the time the house was built such secret chambers were not unusual, especially in the homes of those who were in constant danger from some enemy. But in America when the country was first settled avenues of escape were rather tunnels through which the settlers might save themselves from besieging Indians. It seems probable that the house in Franklin square was thus provided by its builder, Meinbeer Van Vranken, simply because he had a similar closet in his residence in Rotterdam, for it appears that his ancestors were prominent officials in the Netherlands during that period when the bloodthirsty Duke of Alva held the country in his grip."

But to the story I have unearthed concerning the skeleton found in the closet. Meinbeer Van Vranken came to America in 1658, bringing with him what was in those days a fortune. Soon after landing he sent to Holland for brick with which to build his residence and completed it in 1662, modeling it after his home in Rotterdam, even to the secret closet. When it was completed the house was the finest in the city, which was then a Dutch town and called New Amsterdam.

Now, it was in 1664 that the city was captured by the English, the Dutchmen refusing to make an effort to defend it despite the protestations of their governor, Peter Stuyvesant, who stamped with his wooden leg and swore by St. Nicholas that they were an arrant set of cowards, un-

worthy of the protection of their patron saint.

This change in the government was also a bitter pill for Meinbeer Van Vranken to swallow. He was Dutch from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, and his ancestors, who had been sailors, had fought the English when the Netherlands were a power on the sea. Now, meinbeer had a very pretty daughter, Anneke by name, who much more readily adapted herself to the new country than her old father, who could be content in it only so long as it was Dutch. When the English landed many of the inhabitants of New Amsterdam went down to the Battery, where the aquarium now stands, to see them come ashore. Among them was Anneke Van Vranken, buxom and with eyes as blue as the heavens above and two ropes of flaxen hair hanging down her back.

One of the boats which brought supplies ashore was commanded by Ralph Eggleston, a midshipman, nineteen years old, three years Anneke's senior. Though six feet in his stockings, he wore the jacket of a middy, decorated with brass buttons, that shone resplendent in the sun and added to the attractions of his handsome person. His eye lighted upon Anneke, who stood among those looking on, and Anneke's eye lighted on him. To her this young man giving orders to a dozen stalwart men, who obeyed his slightest command, was little less than a god. But the young man was on duty and, having unloaded his boat, set off for his ship, lying out in the Hudson river.

Busy as he was, however, young Eggleston found time to give Anneke Van Vranken an admiring glance, and in return there was a rapture in her eyes at what was to her a heavenly vision. It was but a few days after this that while walking under the guns of the fort, whereon the English had replaced the Dutch flag, Anneke met the midshipman, who was on shore leave, strolling about with a brother officer.

This meeting seems to have resulted in an acquaintance between Ralph and Anneke, but how it was brought about

Our First Daguerreotype.

The first daguerreotype ever taken in America was a picture of the Unitarian church, Washington square, New York city. The exposure was made by Professor S. F. B. Morse and occupied fifteen minutes.—Magazine of American History.

Most Disheartening.

Stewart Edward White tells of his greatest disappointment. It happened when he was five years old.

"I understood that those who maintained perfect deportment in school during the week would be given their choice of sweetmeats. I therefore behaved myself with extraordinary propriety. When the time came and I demanded my sweetmeats I found that it was my choice of a seatmate that had been offered. I never quite forgave that teacher and shall always consider the week of good conduct one lost out of my life."—Exchange.

Witty Retort.

"I tell you, Pat, my boy," the big man of the town confided, laying a patronizing hand on the young Irishman's shoulder. "I wish I had your tongue."

"Sure, sor," grinned Pat, "but it would do yez no good without me brains."—Woman's Home Companion.

Good Family.

"My daughter appears to have married very happily," remarked a lady. "Her husband has not wealth, it must be admitted, but he has family."

"Yes, I heard he was a widower with six children!" a neighbor sniffed acridly.

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