THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

CHAPTER I.

I Take a Country House.

This is the story of how a middle-aged spinster lost her mind, deserted her domestic gods in the city, took a furnished house for the summer out of town, and found herself involved in one of those mysterious crimes that keep our newspapers and detective agencies happy and prosperous. For 20 years I had been perfectly comfortable; for 20 years I had had the window boxes filled in the spring, the carpets lifted, the awnings put up and the furniture covered with brown linen; for as many summers I had said good-by to my friends, and, after watching their perspiring hegira, had settled down to a delicious quiet in town, where the mail comes three times a day, and the water supply does not depend on a tank on the roof.

And then—the madness seized me. When I look back over the months I spent in Sunnyside, I wonder that I survived at all. As it is, I show the wear and tear of my harrowing experiences. I have turned very gray—Liddy reminded me of it only yesterday by saying that a little bluing in the rinse water would make my hair silvery instead of a yellow white. I hate to be reminded of unpleasant things and I snapped her off.

"No," I said sharply, "I'm not going to use bluing at my time of life, or starch, either."

Liddy's nerves are gone, she says, since that awful summer, but she has enough left, goodness knows! And when she begins to go around with a lump in her throat, all I have to do is to threaten to return to Sunnyside, and she is frightened into a semblance of cheerfulness—from which you may judge that the summer there was anything but a success.

The newspaper accounts have been so garbled and incomplete—one of them mentioned me but once, and then only as the tenant at the time the thing happened—that I feel it my due to tell what I know. Mr. Jamieson, the detective, said himself he could never have done without me, although he gave me little enough credit, in print.

I shall have to go back several years—13, to be exact—to start my story. At that time my brother died, leaving me his two children. Halsey was 11 then and Gertrude was seven. When Halsey had finished his electrical course and Gertrude her boarding school both came home to stay. The winter Gertrude came out was nothing but a succession of sitting up late at night to bring her home from things, taking her to the dressmakers between naps the next day, and discouraging ineligible youths with either more money than brains or more brains than money. By spring I was quite tractable. So when Halsey suggested camping in the Adirondacks and Gertrude wanted Bar Harbor, we compromised on a good country house with links near, within motor distance of town and telephone distance of the doctor. That was how we went to Sunnyside.

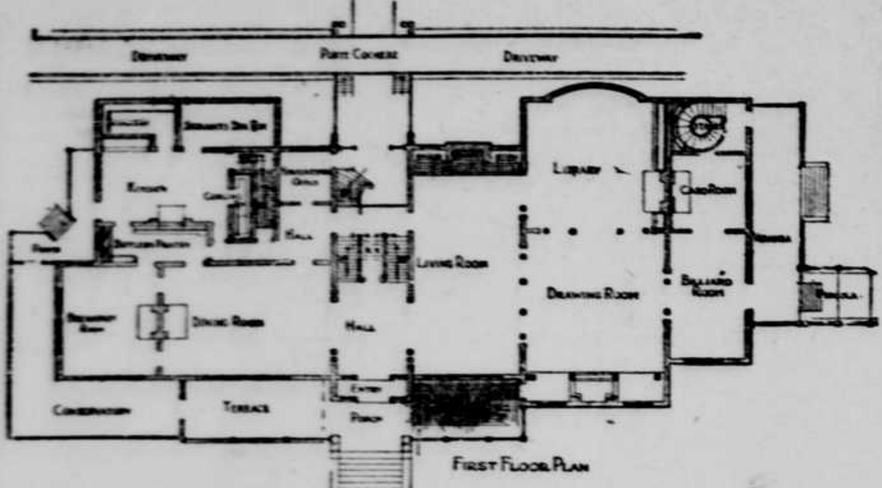
We went out to inspect the property, and it seemed to deserve its name. Its cheerful appearance gave no indication whatever of anything out of the ordinary. Only one thing seemed unusual to me: The housekeeper, who had been left in charge, had moved from the house to the gardener's lodge a few days before. As the lodge was far enough away from the house, it seemed to me that either fire or thieves could complete their work of destruction undisturbed. The property was an extensive one; the house on the top of a hill, which sloped away in great stretches of green lawn and clipped hedges, to the road, and across the valley, perhaps a couple of miles away, was the Greenwood Club house. Gertrude and Halsey were infatuated.

The property was owned by Paul Armstrong, the president of the Traders' bank, who at the time we took the house was in the west with his wife and daughter, and a Dr. Walker, the Armstrong family physician. Halsey knew Louise Armstrong—had been rather attentive to her the winter before, but as Halsey was always attentive to somebody, I had not thought of it seriously, although she was a charming girl. I knew of Mr. Armstrong only through his connection with the bank, where the children's money was largely invested, and through an ugly story about the son, Arnold Armstrong, who was reported to have forged his father's name for a considerable amount to some bank paper. However, the story had had no interest for me.

I cleared Halsey and Gertrude away to a house party, and moved out to Sunnyside the first of May. The first night passed quietly enough. I have always been grateful for that one night's peace; it shows what the country might be under favorable circumstances. Never after that night did I put my head on my pillow with any assurance how long it would be there; or on my shoulders, for that matter.

On the following morning Liddy and Mrs. Ralston, my own housekeeper, had a difference of opinion, and Mrs. Ralston left on the 11 train. Just after luncheon, Burke, the butler, was taken unexpectedly with a pain in his right side, much worse when I was within hearing distance, and by afternoon he was started cityward. That night the cook's sister had a baby—the cook, seeing indecision in my face, made it twins on second thought—and, to be short, by noon the next day the household staff was down to Liddy and myself. And this in a house with 22 rooms and five baths!

Liddy wanted to go back to the city at once, but the milkboy said that Thomas Johnson, the Armstrongs' colored butler, was working as a waiter at the Greenwood club and might come back. I have the usual



scruples about coercing people's servants away, but few of us have any conscience regarding institutions or corporations—witness the way we beat railroads and street car companies when we can—so I called up the club, and about eight o'clock Thomas Johnson came to see me. Poor Thomas!

Well, it ended by my engaging Thomas on the spot, at outrageous wages, and with permission to sleep in the gardener's lodge, empty since the house was rented. The old man—he was white-haired and a little stooped, but with an immense idea of his personal dignity—gave me his reasons hesitatingly.

"I ain't sayin' nothing', Mis' Innes," he said, his hand on the door-knob, "but there's been goin's-on here this las' few months as ain't natchal. 'Tain't one thing an' 'taint another—it's jest a door squealin' here, an' a winder closing' there, but when doors an' winders gets to cuttin' up capers and there's nobody nigh 'em, it's time Thomas Johnson sleeps somewhar's else."

Liddy, who seemed to be never more than ten feet away from me that night, and was afraid of her shadow in that great barn of a place, screamed a little, and turned a yellow-green. But I am not easily alarmed.

It was entirely in vain I represented to Thomas that we were alone, and that he would have to stay in the house that night. He was politely firm, but he would come over early the next morning, and if I gave him a

That Completed Our Demoralization.

key, he would come in time to get some sort of breakfast. I stood on the huge veranda and watched him shuffle along down the shadowy drive with mingled feelings—irritation at his cowardice and thankfulness at getting him at all. I am not ashamed to say that I double-locked the hall door when I went in.

"You can lock up the rest of the house and go to bed, Liddy," I said severely. "You give me the creeps standing there. A woman of your age ought to have better sense." It usually braces Liddy to mention her age; she owns to 40—which is absurd. Her mother cooked for my grandfather, and Liddy must be at least as old as I. But that night she refused to brace.

"You're not going to ask me to lock up, Miss Rachel!" she quavered. "Why, there's a dozen French windows in the drawing room and the billiard room wing, and every one opens on a porch. And Mary Anne said that last night there was a man standing by the stable when she locked the kitchen door."

"Mary Anne was a fool," I said sternly. "If there had been a man there she would have had him in the kitchen and been feeding him what was left from dinner, inside of an hour, from force of habit. Now don't be ridiculous. Lock up the house and go to bed. I am going to read."

But Liddy set her lips tight and stood still.

"I'm not going to bed," she said. "I am going to pack up, and to-morrow I am going to leave."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I snapped. Liddy and I often desire to part company, but never at the same time. "If you are afraid, I will go with you, but for goodness' sake don't try to hide behind me."

The house was a typical summer residence on an extensive scale. Wherever possible, on the first floor, the architect had done away with partitions, using arches and columns instead. The effect was cool and spacious, but scarcely cozy. As Liddy and I went from one window to another, our voices echoed back at us uncomfortably. There was plenty of light—the electric plant down in the village supplied us—but there were long vistas of polished floor, and mirrors which reflected us from unexpected corners, until I felt some of Liddy's foolishness communicate itself to me.

The house was very long, a rectangle in general form, with the main entrance in the center of the long side. The brick-paved entry opened into a short hall, to the right of which, separated only by a row of pillars, was a huge living room. Beyond that was the drawing room, and in the end the billiard room. Off the billiard room, in the extreme right wing, was a den, or cardroom, with a small hall opening on the east veranda, and from there went up a narrow circular staircase.

Liddy and I got as far as the cardroom and turned on all the lights. I tried the small entry door there, which opened on the veranda, and examined the windows. Everything was secure, and Liddy, a little less nervous now, had just pointed out to me the disgraceful dusty condition of the hard-wood floor, when suddenly the lights went out. We waited a moment; I think Liddy was stunned with fright or she would have screamed. And then I clutched her by the arm and pointed to one of the windows opening on the porch. The sudden change threw the window into relief, an oblong of grayish light, and showed us a figure standing close, peering in. As I looked it darted across the veranda and out of sight in the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

A Link Cuff-Button.

Liddy's knees seemed to give away under her. Without a sound she sank down, leaving me staring at the window in petrified amazement. Liddy began to moan under her breath, and in my excitement I reached down and shook her.

"Stop it," I whispered. "It's only a woman—maybe a maid of the Armstrongs'. Get up and help me find the door." She groaned again. "Very well," I said, "then I'll have to leave you here. I'm going."

She moved at that, and, holding to my sleeve, we felt our way, with numerous collisions, to the billiard-room, and from there to the drawing-room. The lights came on then, and, with the long French windows unshuttered, I had a creepy feeling that each one sheltered a peering face. In fact, in the light of what happened afterward, I am pretty certain we were under surveillance during the entire ghostly evening. We hurried over the rest of the locking-up and got upstairs as quickly as we could. I left the lights all on, and our footsteps echoed cavernously. Liddy had a stiff neck the next morning, from looking back over her shoulder, and she refused to go to bed.

"Let me stay in your dressing room, Miss Rachel," she begged. "If you don't I'll sit in the hall outside the door. I'm not going to be murdered with my eyes shut."

It was 11 o'clock when I finally prepared for bed. In spite of my assumption of indifference, I locked the door into the hall, and finding the transom did not catch, I put a chair cautiously before the door—it was not necessary to rouse Liddy—and climbing up put on the ledge of the transom a small dressing-mirror, so that any movement of the frame would send it crashing down. Then, secure in my precautions I went to bed.

I did not go to sleep at once. Liddy disturbed me just as I was growing drowsy, by coming in and peering under the bed. She was afraid to speak, however, because of her previous snubbing, and went back, stopping in the doorway to sigh dismally.

Somewhere down-stairs a clock with a chime sang away the hours—eleven-thirty, forty-five, twelve. And then the lights went out to stay. The Casanova Electric Company shuts up shop and goes home to bed at midnight: when one has a party, I believe it is customary to fee the company, which will drink hot coffee and keep awake a couple of hours longer. But the lights were gone for good that night. Liddy had gone to sleep, as I knew she would. She was a very unreliable person: always awake and ready to talk when she wasn't wanted and dozing off to sleep when she was I called her once or twice, the only result being an explosive snore that threatened her very windpipe—then I got up and lighted a bedroom candle.

My bedroom and dressing room were above the big living room on the first floor. On the second floor a long corridor ran the length of the house, with rooms opening from both sides. In the wings were small corridors crossing the main one—the plan was simplicity itself. And just as I got back into bed, I heard a sound from the east wing, apparently, that made me stop, frozen, with one bedroom slipper half off, and listen. It was a rattling metallic sound, and it reverberated along the empty halls like the crash of doom. It was for all the world as if something heavy, perhaps a piece of steel, had rolled clattering and jangling down the hard-wood stairs leading to the card-room.

In the silence that followed Liddy stirred and snored again. I was exasperated; first she kept me awake by silly alarms, then when she was needed she slept like Joe Jefferson, or Rip—they are always the same to me. I went in and aroused her, and I give her credit for being wide awake the minute I spoke.

"Get up," I said, "if you don't want to be murdered in your bed."

"Where? How?" she yelled vociferously, and jumped up.

"There's somebody in the house," I said. "Get up. We'll have to go to the telephone."

"Not out in the hall!" she gasped; "Oh, Miss Rachel, not out in the hall!" trying to hold me back. But I am a large woman and Liddy is small. We got to the door, somehow, and Liddy held a brass andiron, which it was all she could do to lift, let alone brain anybody with. I listened, and, hearing nothing, opened the door a little and peered into the hall. It was a black void, full of terrible suggestion, and my candle only emphasized the gloom. Liddy squealed and drew me back again, and as the door slammed, the mirror I had put on the transom came down and hit her on the head. That completed our demoralization. It was some time before I could persuade her she had not been attacked from behind by a burglar, and when she found the mirror smashed on the floor she wasn't much better.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Famous Picture Matched

Companion Piece of a Painting in the Frankfort Museum Is in America.

One of the most widely-known collectors of old masters in this country recently has acquired from the Ehrich galleries two canvases for his collection. These are "Portraits of Frau Urmiller and Daughter," by a Suabian master of about 1525, and a "Portrait of a Venetian Lady," by Bernadino Licinio (about 1540).

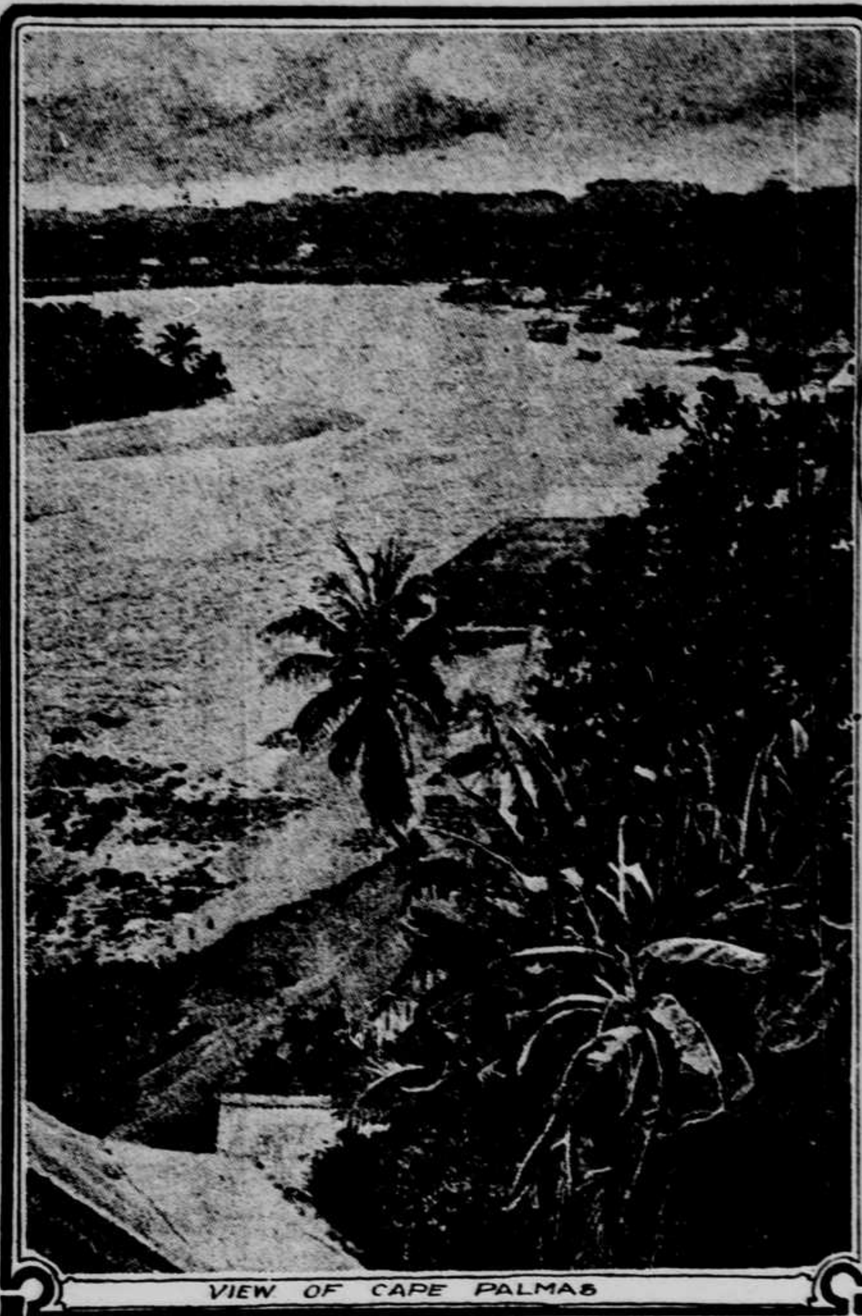
Especially interesting in connection with the example of early South German portraiture is the fact that it is the companion piece to a painting in the Frankfort museum, representing Herr Urmiller and son. Until four or five years ago the Frankfort work was always attributed to and admired as a Holbein. The latest criticism, however, has attributed the painting to some unknown but extraordinary master who painted in the neighborhood of Augsburg in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Licinio, whose work consists principally of portraits and family groups, worked during the greater part of his life in Venice and indicates the influence of Titian. Examples of his pictures are found in the principal galleries of Europe. The delicacy of outline, richness of color and purity of condition make the picture recently acquired from the Ehrich galleries a notable example of Licinia's work.

The Well Traveled Air Route.

Life and accident insurance companies have put the ban on aviators. It was not so long ago that a number of the big companies were up in the air themselves, and they know it is a dangerous situation.

OUTBREAK IN LIBERIA WORRIES WASHINGTON



VIEW OF CAPE PALMAS

WHILE the outbreak in the negro republic of Liberia, on the west coast of Africa, is of a purely local character, it has caused some disturbance in official Washington because of apprehension that the warships of some foreign power might intervene, and thus give such power a foothold in the little nation that was founded and has been protected mainly by the United States. The present trouble is confined to the Grebos, native traders who have refused to pay their taxes, with the result that the Liberian government sent an expedition to enforce the laws. The men of the revolting tribe fired on the factories at Cape Palmas and the Liberian troops shelled the enemy's position. The German gunboat Sperber offered to clear out the rebels, but the offer was declined by President Barclay.

RADIUM AS A CURE

Dr. Abbe Says Giant Cell Sarcoma Yields to Treatment.

Wide Removal of Apparent Disease Is Undoubtedly More Often Curative Than in Other Types of Growing Tumors.

New York.—Dr. Robert Abbe of this city, the foremost advocate in this country of radium as a curative agent in the treatment of cancer, recently read a paper before the Practitioners' society on "Radium as a Specific in Giant Cell Sarcoma," in which he recounted some 11 cases of cancerous tumors of rarther unusual characteristics, all of which apparently had been cured by radium. Some of the patients were present at the meeting and were examined by the physicians present.

The paper is printed in full wifth details of the cases in the Medical Record. In conclusion, Dr. Abbe says:

"This review of a group of cases of one type of malignant cell growth, all showing peculiar, I may say unique, retrograde changes, tending always to return to the normal, gives a demonstration of the efficacy of radium, as clear to the clinical student as to a demonstration of Euclid on a classroom blackboard.

"There is no similar record in surgery, as far as I know. It may be supplemented by other remarkable cases in radium literature dealing with sarcomata and epitheliomata. The disappearance of a round cell sarcoma of the eyelid, which I have shown before this society, is a notable one.

"Again, in a remarkable destructive sarcoma of the humerus, where the bone has been fractured in the growth, reported by Dr. W. G. Morton of this city, the skiagraphs show the cure by a radium treatment of six weeks. I have recently read a letter from a patient, her arm as well as the sound one for all purposes, washing, ironing, etc., and remains cured for five years.

"We have, then, to face a pathological and surgical problem which needs explanation. Why should an overgrown mass of a certain group of cells of the body, like these narrow cells, grow riotously and constitute a tumor which absorbs healthy structures opposing its expansion and destroy the body in a manner justifying its name 'malignant?' And, again, when the powerful Becquerel rays emitted from radium penetrate the mass, why should the retrograde of all malignant cells proceed with orderly retreat, until the tumor has entirely gone? Or, again, how shall we explain the reassembling of the original cells out of the mass, so as to shape the parts like the jaw bone, the roof of the mouth, the humerus,etc., so that the appearance and functions are restored?

"Is it a bold speculation that permits one to venture in this field of biology when the master minds admit ignorance of what constitutes the vital force which energizes each cell, and constitutes life as a whole. Yet we may be permitted to suggest that there are already known definite facts as to the nature of the rays, that they are electrons emitted with tremendous force, traveling in straight undeviating lines, each carrying an electric charge, if, indeed, they are not themselves electricity; speeding at 70,000 miles a second; retarded by dense objects, like masses of lead or steel, or bone or stone, only to escape beyond and resume their travels into space. It is recognized that radioactivity exists everywhere, but it is only when we concentrate it in our powerful little tubes that we can study definite effects.

"The alpha, beta and gamma rays have different electrical charges and different effects. The alpha are suppressed entirely in the glass tube. The beta, carrying negative currents, escape feebly, and the gamma, carrying their own electricity,penetrate everything. It is not conceivable that the riotous outgrowth of cells constituting a tumor may be due to a loss of equilibrium in the balance of electric forces sustaining the normal cell growth, and that the supply of one needed element—possibly positive electricity, possibly negative—will restore the balance, and enable the cells to resume their orderly growth?

"The surgical estimate of giant cell sarcoma is one of a varied degree of malignancy. Wide removal of the apparent disease is undoubtedly more often curative than in other types of actively growing tumors.

"My conviction is that every case of myeloid sarcoma should be given treatment by radium before any operation, and that we may expect many cures."

School Girls for the Farm

Lend a Far More Willing Ear to the Call of the Land Than Do the Boys.

Chicago.—Girls in the middle grades in Chicago lend a far more willing ear to the call of the land than the boys. The latter are about evenly divided between their yearning for the freedom of the great out of doors and their loyalty to city bred instincts, and the street car and the nickel theaters are the deciding factors with most of them. These facts developed after a talk the other day to about 100 boys and girls from Chicago schools by Edmund E. Perkins, reclamation expert of the United States government, in charge of the Chicago office.

Colored lantern slides gave point to Mr. Perkins' talk and were watched quietly until there was flashed upon the screen a scene in Yellowstone park, wherein a huge bear smiled (if bears may be said to smile) at the spectators out of the picture. This awakened sudden interest and exclamations of "Ain't he a big one?" "Gee, I'd hate to meet him!" etc. The girls, singularly, just laughed at him.

"Our country, you know, is only a child itself, compared to other nations," said the lecturer. "And, like you boys and girls, we have been spending all our 'pocket money' for 'toys, candy, peanuts, dolls,' etc., without saving a bit. Now, we've grown older, we have begun to see we must save a little or we won't have any left. Our 'pocket money' is our valuable lands, trees, etc."

After it was over the children were asked for their views. Each of three girls, about 15 years old, who said they lived in the middle West side, said, with a sigh. "I only wish I could live in a nice place like that, where you could get out of doors and get fresh air and have fresh things to eat."

To which all the other girls, about 40 in all, added eager assent. The boys were divided, however. One said:

"Give me the city, where you can have street cars and go to see nickel shows and things. You can sell papers and make money here, too."

PROFESSOR DIGS IN SUBWAY

He and Several Students Working for $1.50 a Day to Get Practical Experience.

Cambridge, Mass.—A Harvard professor working as a laborer at $1.50 a day is one of the human interest features of the Cambridge subway. Covered with clay, a slouch hat on his head and the laborer's every-day overalls, it is difficult to distinguish him from the ordinary subway excavator. He is Prof. H. U. Ransom, B. A., teacher of mathematical and civil engineering at the Harvard summer school.

"If a man expects to do contracting on his own hook all the book work that he can learn will avail him nothing unless he gets a practical experience," he says. "So I got this job as laborer."

Other college men on the subway are Jack Lyons and George Homer, friends of the professor; H. W. Routenberg, a former Yale man; Jack McKnight, Holy Cross, and D. R. Bates of Worcester Technical.

American Hunting Best.

Chicago.—The United States and Canada afford a greater area for hunting and fishing than any other part of the globe, and the game is more exciting and interesting than that found in any other country, according to Count Gorsko Skorsvewski of Berlin. The count was in Washington the other day on his way back to Europe after a nine weeks' hunt through the northwest.

Plan to Bribe Washington

Old Paper Discloses Suggestion Dukedom and Revenue to Maintain It Be Offered to Him.

London.—Some interesting papers are to be found in the newly published volume of the Historical Manuscripts commission, which contains many documents from among the treasures of Mrs. Stopford-Sackville of Drayton House, Northamptonshire.

Lord George Sackville, to whom almost all the letters quoted are addressed, was secretary of state for the colonies from 1775 to 1782, and received most important dispatches from the seat of the war of independence—from Admiral Rodney, for example.

A long paper by Sir John Dalrymple contains a notable suggestion that jars somewhat on our fuller historical knowledge of Washington's disposition. It was nothing less than that the king should write a private letter to Washington offering him a dukedom and the revenue to maintain it, provided that he would ask "terms for America fair and just," such terms to be granted by the British. Lloyd Delany, the bosom friend of Washington, and at that time in London, was suggested as messenger.

A host of other engrossing incidents of all kinds—connected and unconnected with the war—are in these manscripts, which include important letters from Gen. Wolfe.

POLICE DOG CALLED MARVEL

Criminals in Russian City Say Animal Is Possessed of Evil Spirit—Amazes Crowd.

Moscow.—The criminal classes are beginning to believe that a police dog called Tref is possessed of an evil spirit. It was rumored in the night shelters and criminal dens that Tref was on the track of certain robbers. A number of bank notes and other valuables had been stolen from a man named Pokrofsky. Tref was put on the scent of the thief, and after taking a circuitous course entered a night shelter and made straight for an old coat, in which $250, stolen from M. Pokrofsky, was found. Tref then went to a shop where silver articles stolen from M. Pokrofsky were discovered. A cabman at this time complained that he had been robbed of a fur coat. Tref within a few minutes found it concealed in a courtyard. This last exploit was witnessed by a crowd of amazed spectators.

Corsets for Men Barred.

New York.—Corsets for young college students who must take the part of women in college theatricals have been officially tabooed by the dramatic director of the New York university actors. The prohibition follows an attack of syncope suffered by an undergraduate the other night at a dress rehearsal while tightly laced.

Speaking of the pace that kills, Halley's comet is wasting away.