

Heirloom Books

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— L. Timmel Duchamp

**NEW AMAZONIA:  
A FORETASTE OF THE FUTURE**

by

Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett

with an introduction by  
Alexis Lothian



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Introduction

"A Foretaste of the Future, a Caution from the Past:  
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forgive me, if it should strike you as rather unfeeling to enquire what you intend to do for a livelihood?"

"I could not possibly take offence where all have shown me so much kindness and consideration," was my reply. "I was, in fact, just deliberating the same subject when you came. I have been encouraged to think that I may hope to get on in the vocation to which I have already devoted some years of apprenticeship—that of an author."

"Yes, that is the opinion we have also formed, and it is in connection therewith that I have proposal to make to you. Will you write a book descriptive of your former life, associates, and customs? The Literary Bureau will publish it for you, and as there is sure to be a huge demand for it, your profits will be large enough to justify the State in at once presenting you with advance Letters of Credit. These Letters of Credit, as you know, represent money with us, and if you undertake to write this work, considering it a State commission, you will at once find yourself in a position of independence."

What other answer than "Yes" could I give to such a wonderful proposal as this? A certain very nice, but rather gushing, young lady whom I know would have at once exclaimed, "Oh! it's *too* lovely." I did not do that, but I managed to express my thanks and my acquiescence with such a mixture of enthusiasm and dignity as did justice alike to my desire to show my gratitude and to my sense of my own importance.

Let not the reader imagine that I had no legitimate room for the latter feeling, for I was undoubtedly a very prominent and important personage in New Amazonia. Circumstances over which I had had no control had placed me in a position of publicity which was none the less real

because it was none of my seeking. The probabilities were in favour of my popularity dying out as soon as I became less of a novelty. Meanwhile it was advisable that I should take the goods with which the gods had provided me, and make the most of the opportunities thrown in my way.

It did not take long to arrange my subsequent programme. I was to commence writing on the following day, and to submit my work weekly to the Bureau, which would make such arrangements as its heads might think fit for bringing my work under the notice of the public.

Still, in spite of the interesting nature of our conversation, I could not repress my melancholy, and was so depressed that my companion offered the consolatory remark, "That though I was parted from my beloved ones so long as I remained in my own probationary state, they were not deprived of the power of knowing my whereabouts, and were probably rejoicing in the fact that I had been placed in a sphere of action which could not fail to assist my attempts to perfect myself for the higher life."

I was conscious of finding a little consolation in the Principal's arguments, and remarked that it would have been some additional comfort to me if I could have known where my dear ones were buried, so that, though deprived of their society, I might at least do honour to them by visiting and adorning their last resting place.

The Principal did not exactly grasp my meaning at first. When she did, she was horrified.

"Is it possible," she cried in amaze, "that you can contemplate with equanimity the prospect of being laid in the ground to rot in repulsive putrefaction? To be the prey of vermin; to pollute the earth, air, and water around you;

and to be the source of death and disease to those whom you have left behind? It is too horrible to think of!"

"Why, what would you have us do?" I enquired blankly. "You wouldn't have us kept above ground, would you?"

"I would have you decently cremated, as we all are when we die. How can you expect to be healthy in mind and body, surrounded by the miasmatic emanations of putrifying corpses? It was demonstrated to New Amazonian satisfaction centuries ago that it would be impossible to rid the land of fever and pestilential diseases until this principal source of water pollution was removed. We still have pictures of ancient graveyards, and I can very well imagine what they were like. The hoary, venerable looking church; the funny upright slab of stone or marble marking the place where several bodies were undergoing the putrefactive process; the pretty flowers and the picturesque trees; the little brooklet, which winds its rippling way through or past the churchyard; its water, looking pure and limpid because it has percolated its way through the dead and decaying remains of your ancestors, and bearing no easily discernible evidence of the deadly impurities of which it is the conveying medium; I see them all, and can even follow the little brooklet as it feeds the waters of a larger stream, and finally becomes a component part of some great river, from which the water supply of one of your immense manufacturing towns is obtained. Very interesting as a picture, no doubt, but when you quietly contemplate the calm endurance of such a horrible state of things—Faugh!"

Certainly, as presented by the Principal, the picture was not a nice one. But one does not relinquish all one's most sentimental customs without a struggle, and a warm

discussion ensued between us, from which, however, I emerged the loser, as I might have expected. When I came to think of it, it was not pleasant to reflect that every drink of water I had ever had had possibly meandered its way through the dissolving tissues of some recently departed victim of cholera or fever. Even the idea of past near relationship to the too generously diffusive corpse was not consolatory, for it had a sort of cannibalistic aspect about it which did not argue true affection for the departed.

I remembered that in my country one of the chief objections to cremation, apart from the purely sentimental reasons promulgated, was that in cases of foul play the process annihilated all the chances of ever discovering the real cause of death, as no analysis of cremated remains can be made. On reflection, it struck me that it was less important that one malefactor should be brought to book, than that whole communities should be exposed to the risk of poison.

I reflected also that the system of "Life Insurance" was mainly responsible for the crimes of our modern poisoners. Given the abolition of a system whereby our relatives and guardians are interested in our speedy demise, and the substitution of the plan which prevailed in New Amazonia, whereby every child of the State had its old age provided for, and poisoning, by becoming so evidently useless, would at the same time become our rarest crime.

So I thought, while admitting to Principal Grey that burial was a dangerous and unsatisfactory mode of disposing of the dead.

By-and-bye we began to talk of other things, and in the course of conversation it occurred to me to make some

enquiries relating to Mr. Augustus Fitz-Musicus and his future plans.

"I am afraid," was the rejoinder, "that Mr. Fitz-Musicus can never be converted into a sober New Amazonian. He has revolted against wearing our National costume and says that rather than sacrifice his British individuality, and look like everybody else, he will brave the probability of becoming a laughing-stock, and that he will wear his old clothes to rags rather than have his individuality swallowed up in a general resemblance to every nincompoop in the country. I am afraid it would necessitate him to live as long again as he has done, to bring him into the exact likeness of a native of New Amazonia. But his vanity is inextinguishable, and nothing could bring him to the belief that his appearance does not eclipse that of our handsomest men. When last I heard of him, he was seeking some stuff with a large pattern. He says that if he can find a nice big check, he may perhaps consent to have a suit made in native style, but he is not at all sure yet."

"But how does he intend earning his living?"

"He is not at all sure about that either. He says he will think about it. But he protests meanwhile very bitterly against a destiny that has placed him among people who can be sordid and vulgar enough to ask him, the pampered scion of a great house, to degrade himself by attempting to earn his own living. He considers that the Mother ought to be proud of being honoured by his sojourn amongst us, and that she ought to be only too glad to extend her hospitality indefinitely to him."

"And the Mother — what does she think of his peculiarities? Are they found annoying?"

"Well, to a certain extent, yes. We abhor ingratitude. But in this case, we are being forced into the belief that this Englishman is not exactly a responsible agent. I am afraid that he is not quite sane. But, of course, unless he becomes very much worse, it will not be found necessary to adopt stringent measures with him."

"And if his peculiarities should become much more pronounced?"

"Ah, then — then, we shall be compelled to do something. He has already lost so much time during his prolonged state of unconsciousness, that it will be a charity to release his spirit, if it becomes evident that it is withheld from further progress towards Heavenly bliss by being confined in a body which is more likely to promote retrogression than progression."

As I listened to this calm utterance my blood positively ran cold. Full well I knew what she meant. The peculiar tenets of New Amazonian religion had been carefully explained to me, and I knew that the life of Mr. Fitz-Musicus was destined to be a short one, unless he restored the native belief in his sanity. I was quite unable to talk much more after this, and my friend, observing that I seemed fatigued and had better rest, left me to my own resources. But I felt incapable of resting, for I was too excited. Clearly the life of the eccentric Augustus was in danger, and I was impatient to see him and warn him without delay.

I knew where he was located for the present, and I resolved to see him at the earliest opportunity. All night I was restless and perturbed, and though six o'clock was still early for the British masquerade, I dressed myself with my usual care and set off to visit him, knowing that we should have a better chance of talking undisturbed by taking a