



The Rising of Gouverneur

Morris

Charles Skinner
North American

Advanced
4 min read

Gouverneur Morris, American minister to the court of Louis XVI, was considerably enriched, at the close of the reign of terror, by plate, jewels, furniture, paintings, coaches, and so on, left in his charge by members of the French nobility, that they might not be confiscated in the sack of the city by the sans culottes; for so many of the aristocracy were killed and so many went into exile or disguised their names, that it was impossible to find heirs or owners for these effects. Some of the people who found France a good country to be out of came to America, where adventurers had found prosperity and refugees found peace so many times before. Marshal Ney and Bernadotte are alleged to have served in the American army during the Revolution, and at Hogansburg, New York, the Reverend Eleazer Williams, an Episcopal missionary, who lies buried in the church-yard there, was declared to be the missing son of Louis XVI. The question, "Have we a Bourbon among us?" was frequently canvassed; but he avoided publicity and went quietly on with his pastoral work.

All property left in Mr. Morris's hands that had not been claimed was removed to his mansion at Port Morris, when he returned from his ministry, and he gained in the esteem and envy of his neighbors when the extent of these riches was seen. Once, at the wine, he touched glasses with his wife, and said that if she bore a male child that son should be heir to his wealth. Two relatives who sat at the table exchanged looks at this and cast a glance of no gentle regard on his lady. A year went by. The son was born, but Gouverneur Morris was dead.

It is the first night of the year 1817, the servants are asleep, and the widow sits late before the fire, her baby in her arms, listening betimes to the wind in the chimney, the beat of hail on the shutters, the brawling of the Bronx and the clash of moving ice upon it; yet thinking of her husband and the sinister look his promise had brought to the faces of his cousins, when a tramp of horses is heard without, and anon a summons at the door. The panels are beaten by loaded riding-whips, and a man's voice cries, "Anne Morris, fetch us our cousin's will, or we'll break into the house and take it." The woman clutches the infant to her breast, but makes no answer. Again the clatter of the whips; but now a mist is gathering in the room, and a strange enchantment comes over her, for are not the lions breathing on the coat of arms above the door, and are not the portraits stirring in their frames?

They are, indeed. There is a rustle of robes and clink of steel and one old warrior leaps down, his armor sounding as he alights, and striking thrice his sword and shield together he calls on Gouverneur Morris to come forth. Somebody moves in the room where Morris died; there is a measured footfall in the corridor, with the clank of a scabbard keeping time; the door is opened, and on the blast that enters the widow hears a cry, then a double gallop, passing swiftly into distance. As she gazes, her husband appears, apparelled as in life, and with a smile he takes a candelabrum from the mantel and, beckoning her to follow, moves from room to room. Then, for the first time, the widow knows to what wealth her baby has been born, for the ghost discloses secret drawers in escritaires where money, title deeds, and gems are hidden, turns pictures and wainscots on unsuspected hinges, revealing shelves heaped with fabrics, plate, and lace; then, returning to the fireside, he stoops as if to kiss his wife and boy, but a bell strikes the first hour of morning and he vanishes into his portrait on the wall.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com