

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER, }  
Editor and Proprietor.

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## THE BLOOMFIELD TIMES

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BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

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## The Haunted House.

BY ARTHUR L. MESERVE.

WHY I left, the filthy and gloomy office of Messrs. Bite & Tear, "Attorneys and Counsellors at Law," as their legend reads, and where I had acted in the capacity of clerk for the past dozen years, was for a two-fold reason. The first was, my health was beginning to fail, from too close application to my business, and the old doctor who had been in our family for years, declared that I must have country air, and plenty of it, before I could hope to be better; and the other was, I wanted to pay a visit to my old friend and chum at school, Tom Jones, whom I had seen but once since I had entered the employ of Messrs. Bite & Tear. These reasons being deemed sufficient by my employers, I was granted a leave of absence for a couple of months, and throwing together a modest amount of apparel I sallied forth for the depot, and was soon whirling along towards the place of my destination.

I had learned that the train did not run nearer to Wicklow than half a score of miles; but I was told, on board, that I should find a conveyance at the little wayside station which would take me there, and therefore I felt somewhat disappointed, when I stepped on the lonely, unsheltered platform, to find that I was monarch of all I surveyed, there not being a road, or a human habitation in sight.

A cross-road led away into what seemed to be the heart of a wilderness, but which one to take, the right or the left, was more than I could possibly conjecture. In my uncertainty and doubt, I blamed myself for not having written Tom to meet me at the station, as he would have done, but then I wanted to take him by surprise. In one thing I had succeeded, and that was in surprising myself, for I had not the least idea that such a wild, wilderness-looking place could be found before the end of a day's ride from the Hub.

I was just on the point of adopting that method which all lost travellers are supposed to put in practice, that of setting up a stick and bending my steps in the direction which it fell, when, much to my relief, I heard the clatter of wheels, and a loud voice, apparently addressed to the beast its owner was driving, and in a moment more a rough-looking team appeared coming down the road, and in a little time it had driven round to the platform with a flourish.

"Going to Wicklow?" he asked, as he took me in at a glance, and picked up the small mail-bag, which, up to this time, had been lying unnoticed at my feet.

I replied in the affirmative.

"Get aboard, then, ain't got no time to lose. Most half an hour behind time, and Old Mailkeys, at Wicklow, will be mad as a hornet if I'm late. Any body would think

he was postmaster general by the airs he puts on."

I meekly obeyed this rather imperative summons, took my place on the seat with him and away we went towards Wicklow at a round pace.

The country was wild nearly all the way there, and my companion was not communicative, answering my questions by the shortest possible answers. Once only did he seem inclined to open his mouth, and that was when our journey was nearly over, and my attention had been attracted by an old, dilapidated and apparently deserted house, standing in a dark grove of cedars a little back from the roadside. I inquired who lived there, and he replied, with a sharp look in my face:

"Nobody."

"Why not?"

"It's haunted."

"By what?"

"A ghost, to be sure," he answered, with another glance into my face.

"Of whom?"

"Of a man who was murdered there ten years ago, or thereabouts."

"Why does he walk?" was my next question.

My driver looked at me as though my question astonished him.

"What makes ghosts come back any way?" he said, answering my question by asking another.

"I don't believe they do," I answered. "But why do people hereabouts say this house is haunted?"

"Because of the lights and noises seen and heard here on dark nights, and of the bloodstain on the kitchen floor."

"Where the former owner of the house was killed?"

"Yes."

"What of it? Anything more than a dark stain, as is usually the case where human blood is spilt upon wood?"

"Yes, much more. On certain nights, when the ghost walks, and also during the day before, the dark stains upon the floor turn to a blood-red, as though blood had been spilt there."

"That can hardly be. People who think they witness this miracle have to draw largely on their imagination, and allow their eyes to deceive them."

"There is no chance for your being deceived. It is there as plain as the nose on your face. But yonder is Wicklow."

He pointed to the village lying some half mile away on a slight elevation. This turned the topic of our conversation, and the haunted house was not again recurred to.

I gave Tom a genuine surprise, as I had intended to, and he was glad to see me as I knew he would be.

One day I said to him, the thought suddenly occurring to mind:

"What is it, Tom, about that haunted house over yonder? The driver told me something about it the other day as we came along."

My friend looked grave.

"I hardly know what to tell you," he said. "People that live over yonder say that the house is haunted, and I must confess that I have seen things there that I cannot account for."

"You, Tom?"

"Yes, I myself. You may think I am foolish and smile if you will, but I have seen things that cannot rationally be explained."

"What are they, Tom?"

"Probably the same as the driver told you, though I have seen none of the lights or heard the sounds; but I have seen the blood stain when it was almost as dark as ink, and then again when it was a light crimson—like fresh blood. How should this be? I doubt if you can explain."

I could not. The most I could do was to say that he must be mistaken. That his eyes had played him false, and that the change in the blood-stain was owing to the manner in which the light fell upon it—

But he would not be convinced; neither would I.

One morning Tom was called away. He was going to a town some twenty miles distant, and would not return until late in the night, perhaps not until the next day. He invited me to go with him, but I declined. I had a project of my own on foot. I meant to pay a visit to the haunted house, and I did not want Tom to know of it. So his absence was the chance I coveted.

Tom took an early start, but I did not; I had less than a mile and a half to go, and I was in no hurry. So I lingered about the house, making company for Tom's mother until nearly the middle of the forenoon.— Then I took down Tom's rifle, and, with the remark that I was going out shooting for an hour or two, I left the house.

I promised to be back by noon, in season for dinner, so, once out of sight of the window where I had left Tom's mother sewing, I increased my pace to a smart walk, and in half an hour's time I stood in front of, and curiously contemplating, the haunted house.

There was nothing very peculiar about it to distinguish it from other old houses that had been deserted for a number of years. It had the same lonesome, weather-beaten, deserted appearance that all such old buildings have, and as there was no one to stay the ravages of time, it was fast going to decay. Beneath the eaves the swallows had built their nests, and were flying busily to and fro in the sunlight. They, at least, were not afraid of the blood-stain, or the ghostly sounds that came sometimes from within.

The front door was fastened, so I could not effect an entrance there, and I clambered over a dilapidated fence and went round to the backside, in search of another entrance. Here I found one, and the door, instead of being fastened, I found standing open a foot or more.

I may as well confess that I paused for a moment before I went in. I may as well, also, own up, that I caught myself listening to catch some sound that might come from within. But all was still as death; so I pushed open the door and entered.

I found myself in a sort of back hall, or entry, from which a door opened upon either side. One of these rooms, I reasoned must be the kitchen, and in it I should find the token of the terrible deed which had helped give the house its bad repute.

I turned to the left, and pushed open the door. A glance about the room showed me that I was in the kitchen. So I was standing in the room where a murder had been committed, in the years that had passed.

I must confess that I did not give the surroundings more than a passing glance. My eyes, almost in spite of myself, I found were sweeping the floor, and they were not long in resting upon the blood-stain. There it was, about half way from the broad open fire-place to the sink on the opposite side of the room, and, what was more, it was of a blood-red, as though the life-fluid had been spilled there ten minutes before.

This I had not expected, notwithstanding the story which Tom had told. I did not believe that the blood-stain could change its color, but here was the proof right before my eyes. I knew that it could not have retained it from the first; therefore what could it mean? What I had before learned now flashed upon my mind. The blood-stain turned only to a crimson when there was to be a new manifestation. Tonight, then, the ghost would walk again.

Leaving the kitchen, and the stain, which would rivet my eyes in spite of all that I could do, I walked over the rest of the house. But I made no new discoveries there. To all appearances the house had not been disturbed since the family of the murdered man moved out of it. After examining every room, I ventured down into the cellar. I will here acknowledge that I had hesitated a moment before doing so, but I went, and there I made a discovery. Near where the stairs descended there

was an angle in the wall, and near it a cellar window, and it chanced, at this time of day, the sunlight fell through it, and rested on the earth behind the step, and there it revealed an object which at once attracted my attention. It was nothing more nor less than a tin basin half-full of newly-mixed red-paint!

In a moment light flashed upon my mind, and I sprang up the stairs two at a time, and rushed straight for the blood-stain, where I knelt down and drew my hand across it, an act which I would not have done ten minutes before. I raised my hand, and saw that it was stained by some red substance. It was not the gore of the murdered man that lay thereon; but red-paint, like that in the basin below stairs.

In a moment the trick was all plain to me. Ghosts would have no need of this device, but human beings might. Whenever the old stain was repainted, then some sort of band assembled there, who, for reasons of their own, did not care to have company, or too much light thrown upon their proceedings; hence this device of theirs which proved so efficacious.

I was not long in making up my mind to solve this mystery, which had puzzled the good people of Wicklow so long. I would pass the night there and see what it brought forth.

A glance at my watch showed me that it was nearly twelve, and that Tom's mother would soon have dinner in readiness, for the good woman would have considered it almost the unpardonable sin if the nocturnal repast was not ready when the "sun was square in the window," as she always went by that when it was fair.

When I got back, minus game, the good woman rallied me somewhat on my want of luck; and then I told her of my visit to the haunted house, but not of the discoveries I had made there. This part I kept to myself, as did I, also, the determination I had formed of spending the night there. When at sunset I imparted this information to her, the good woman received it almost with affright, and begged me not to do it, but I answered her that my mind was fully made up on this point, and begged her not to impart my intentions to any one, unless it was Tom, should he return. This she promised, and as soon as the sun went down I set out upon my self-imposed task.

When I arrived at the deserted house, I found everything quiet, and as I had left it; and, entering the kitchen, I stowed myself away in a small closet opening therefrom, the door of which I left open a little way, so that I could command a view of the door by which I had entered, and also of that which led to the cellar beneath. Thus ensconced, I waited, with what patience I could, for any development which might take place.

Slowly the minutes dragged themselves along. An hour went by, and still all was as silent as death. Another hour was well told, and then I began to grow impatient. Would those for whom I was looking never come? At last I heard a footfall outside the door. Instinctively I placed my hand upon the revolver I carried in my pocket.— Would I have occasion to use it?

The footstep sounded closer, and at last it was on the threshold. The door was pushed open, and a footfall sounded in the entry. Then came another, and I was aware that two men were standing in the room.

I heard them moving along the floor, and then the scratching of a match. It gave a promise of burning, and then went out, and an impatient voice exclaimed:

"D—n the match. Give me another one, Jim, this is gone out."

The voice sounded familiar. Surely I had heard it since I had come to Wicklow; but where, I could not bring to mind.

The next match did its duty, and communicated its blaze to the candle which one of the men held, and in a little time it was burning clearly, diffusing a bright light about the room. It revealed the faces of

the two men to me and as I gazed upon one of them, I was no longer in doubt as to where I had heard his voice before. It was the driver of the express wagon who had taken me from the depot, and who had first given me the history of the house in which we now stood. It was he who had addressed his companion as "Jim," and now they both moved along to the spot which had possessed such fascination in my eyes until I had solved the mystery connected with it.

Jim held the candle above it, moving it to and fro, but taking care to shade the blaze with his hand, so that it might not shine out too brightly through the windows.

"Do you know whether any one has been here to-day, Sam?" asked the one who had not before spoken.

"Yes, one sure; that chap I brought over from the depot t'other day was in here this forenoon."

I gave a start of surprise. How did he know this? Had my movements been watched, and, if so, did they not know that I was even then secreted somewhere about the house?

"He here! Then he must be a detective, as we thought he was, in the first place," said the other, in evident alarm.

"No, I don't think he is," returned my driver. "I've made all sorts of inquiries, and I have found that he is really an old friend of Tom Jones's, and that prying his nose into other folks' affairs aint in his line; but if he makes it so, he had better not have come to Wicklow, that's all."

[CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.]

## Bride and Bridegroom a Century Ago.

TO BEGIN with the lady: her locks were strained upwards over an immense cushion that sat like an incubus on her head, and plastered over with pomatum, and then sprinkled over with a shower of white powder. The height of this tower was somewhat over a foot. One single white rose-bud lay on its top like an eagle on a hay-stack. Over her neck and bosom was folded a lace handkerchief, fastened in front by a bosom-pin rather larger than a copper cent, containing her grandfather's miniature set in virgin gold. Her airy form was braced up in a satin dress, the sleeves as tight as the natural skin of the arm, with a waist formed by a bodice, worn outside, whence the skirt flowed off, and was distended at the top of an ample hood. Shoes of white kid, with peaked toes, and heels of two or three inches elevation, inclosed her feet, and glittered with spangles, as her little pedal members peeped curiously out.

Now for the swain: his hair was sleeked back and plentifully beflowed, while his queue projected like the handle of a skillet. His coat was a sky-blue silk, lined with yellow; his long vest of white satin, embroidered with gold lace; his breeches of the same material, and tied at the knee with pink ribbon. White silk stockings and pumps with laces, and ties of the same hue, completed the habiliments of his nether limbs. Lace ruffles clustered around his wrist, and a portentous frill, worked in correspondence, and bearing the miniature of his beloved, finished his truly genteel appearance.

A little boy inquired at the August post-office recently, if there was a letter for Chester Pillsbury, and while the clerk was looking for the letter, and the little fellow, thinking to help him in his search, said, "He is married now, and I spose they put Mister onto his name!"

Hasty youngster to a closely muffled comrade, "I say, Ed., what'r you stoppin' for?"

"I want to get my handkerchief."

"What for?"

"To blow my nose."

"O, let the wind blow it; come on!"

An Irish gentleman fought a duel with his intimate friend, because he jealously asserted that he was born without a shirt to his back.