

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
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## The Bloomfield Times.

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### THE BRAVE GOVERNESS, OR THE NARROW ESCAPE.

IT WAS in the days of stage-coaches, and before the wondrous power of steam had caused a journey of two or three hundred miles to be considered a merely moderate day's traveling, that the events narrated in this story took place.

Early in December of the year 182—the frost set in with extreme severity, and rendered a three days' journey, from London to the distant towns of Yorkshire and Westmoreland, exceedingly difficult and dangerous. Not but that the several stage-coaches on the road were well appointed, and their officials civil and experienced; but that, although the traveling might be sufficiently agreeable and invigorating whilst the daylight lasted, it became a totally different affair when darkness set in and the cold increased in intensity nearly to the temperature of Siberia. Then, too, there was the bivouacking—for it could scarcely be called more—at cheerless roadside inns, where a frosty welcome was afforded by a half-asleep landlady and a surly hostler, lantern in hand—unless, indeed, as sometimes was the case, the prospect of extra fees caused those individuals to be a little more active and obliging than usual. It is true that most of the stage-coach proprietors so timed their arrangements as to provide for their vehicles stopping for the night at some of the large provincial hotels, where a cheery landlady, a buxom hostess, spruce chambermaids, and a profusion of rounds of beef, noble cheeses, and tankards of spiced ale, were no undesirable objects in the eyes of cold and hungry travelers. Still, there were times when, from the distance between the regular stages, bad weather, or unforeseen accidents, it was necessary for the coach to stop for the night at some one of the numerous small public houses which crop up everywhere by the roadside in England. It might have been about a fortnight before Christmas of the season mentioned, and between eight and nine o'clock at night when the "Tally-Ho" stage-coach from London to the Yorkshire towns was making its way as best it might across one of the Yorkshire moors, towards its destination. It was no easy task for the driver, experienced though he was, to keep his horses in the beaten track, amid the numerous snow-drifts which, like so many pitfalls, lay all around as traps for the unwary traveler.

There was no sort of landmark to guide him—nothing to be seen but a vast, dreary waste of white, amid which stood out at intervals the bare black trunks of a few pollard oaks, all looking precisely like one another. The glare from the snow, aided as it was by an occasional gleam of the moon struggling to force herself through the heavy clouds by which she was surrounded, afforded a sort of fitful and uncertain light, which was all beside the stage-lamps that the driver had to direct him.

But John Dodson, the best hand at the reins between London and Newcastle, nothing daunted, kept on his horses as if he were on the high road, and, beyond an occasional remark volunteered to his colleague, the guard, over the roof of the coach, that "it were a darned nasty night

surely," he betrayed no sort of uneasiness.

Save the coachman and guard, there were no outside travelers. The "insides" were three in number—a lady and two gentlemen. *Place aux dames.* The lady Miss Catherine Farquhar, was from six to eight and twenty years of age, of a highly intellectual countenance, although like intellectual persons, not what would be called handsome. She was almost enveloped in a valuable set of sable furs, which would seem to denote that she was wealthy. Catherine Farquhar, however, was poor. She was a governess, and was on her way to the house of a lady of rank, residing a few miles beyond York, whose daughters she was engaged to instruct. The furs were a gift from the parents of a former pupil. The gentleman who occupied a seat by the side of Miss Farquhar was a man not much under forty, and he also was of a very intellectual appearance. He was, in short, a high class-man of Oxford, and, like Miss Farquhar, was proceeding to Lady Betterton's, to act in the capacity of tutor to her only son. Mr. Hortley was arrayed in the usual clerical black, and wore the usual blue spectacles which appear such a *sine qua non* with "professors" of all grades and ages. He and Miss Farquhar had been strangers until they commenced their journey, but with the usual facility of well-bred persons—they were both of good family—they had already become perfectly at ease with each other, and were beguiling the tedium of the journey by a conversation on topics of mutual interest.

There *vis-a-vis*, the third occupant of the coach, was one of those numerous persons to whom it is almost impossible to assign a station in life. He was a powerfully-built young man, somewhat under thirty and from his dress might at first sight be taken for a prosperous farmer or grazier. But, on closer observation, there was a sort of spruce flashiness about him which is not usually seen in either of the callings alluded to. His necktie, of a gaudy color was fastened by a rather valuable brilliant pin, and on his large but well-formed white hands there sparkled a ring or two. The mixture of Newmarket and Newgate about him was, in short, not easily to be described in words, and it would appear that his companions looked upon him with distrust as they but rarely spoke to him, and when they did so it was mostly in reply to some question he had addressed to them.

For some quarter of an hour or so the passengers had kept silence. The lady and her clerical companion, apparently occupied with their own thoughts, had relapsed into that sort of reverie which is often indulged in at the close of a long conversation. The younger man, with folded arms and closed eyes, had composed himself, as if for sleep, in the farther corner of the coach. A close observer, would have noticed that he was in reality engaged in watching his companions, and especially the lady, on whose dress he frequently cast a scrutinizing glance.

Suddenly the coach which for the last ten minutes had been jolting from side to side in a peculiarly uncomfortable manner, was brought to a standstill, and immediately the guard descended, and tapped at the window, which was let down by Mr. Hartley. A breath of icy wind rushed in, which made the teeth of the three passengers chatter in their heads.

"Here's a go, gentleman!" said the guard, with a broad grin on his burly face.

"Why what is the matter?" asked Mr. Hartley, rather impatiently, for the cold was intense.

"Well, sir, Jack, the driver, don't know where he is!"

"Not know where he is?" exclaimed the three passengers.

"Not a bit on't. He's traveled this here road nigh forty year, and never lost his way afore," repeated the guard, with a

triumphant chuckle, as if the whole affair were a remarkably good joke.

"Whatever is to be done?" cried Miss Farquhar.

"Why, miss, I don't know. We're to nigh ten mile from the highest stage Jack Dodson's guesses, and even if we knowed where we was, the 'osses is dead beat, and the gray mare's cast a shoe."

Here the younger of the inside male passengers asked, abruptly:

"Have we passed the Red Moor yet?"

"Oh, lawk! yes, sir—two mile or more as far as can be guessed by this 'ere' mask of snow, which hides the country; and the driver says the drifts is getting more dangerous every moment, 'cause of the falling snow."

"I know an old farm-house at the lee of the Red Moor," continued the seeming grazier, "where I am slightly acquainted with the people, who would, I think, give us and this lady a shelter for this inclement night."

The guard looked at the speaker with more of interest than he had yet displayed and said, inquiringly:

"You know the country, then, sir?"

"Yes, and could set the driver right; but it is no use, for if the horses are dead beat, they cannot go ten miles in such weather. We must return to the farm-house."

"I do not really see what else is to be done," said Mr. Hartley, with a perplexed air. It is quite certain that we cannot stop here all night, if only for the lady's sake, and it is equally certain that to proceed is impossible."

The guard bobbed his head from the window and disappeared to consult his colleague. Almost immediately he returned.

"Jack Dodson says as that's the only place, gentlemen; but he can't tell how to find the way."

"I'll show him," replied the young grazier, drawing his wrapper firmly round his throat and buttoning his coat tightly.

And he descended briskly, and took his seat on the box, by the chopfallen coachman.

The horses' heads were then turned, and the party retraced their steps. No sooner had they commenced the backward journey than Miss Farquhar, turning abruptly to her companion, said:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hartley; but are you not of opinion that there is something very strange about that gentleman—that person who has just left the coach? I feel an instinctive repulsion at the sight of him."

"I cannot say I much like him, Miss Farquhar; but people really are not answerable for their looks," responded the other, with a smile.

"N—o—n—o, certainly not," hesitated the lady; "and yet—"

"And yet what?"

Catherine Farquhar did not give a direct reply, but answered this question by another:

"What should you imagine him to be?" she asked.

"To be? Oh probably some well-to-do young farmer or grazier, with more money than modesty, and who does not entertain a very mean opinion of himself."

"He is—so flashy," continued Catherine "and that diamond pin and those rings assort ill with a velvet coat."

"My dear Miss Farquhar, it is not at all uncommon for vulgar young provincial men to be fond of dress and show."

"But that pin must be worth fifty guineas."

"Probably. Bullock-selling is a profitable business, I believe."

Miss Farquhar did not pursue the subject, and silence once more fell upon the occupants of the coach.

Presently, after a tedious and protracted scramble through the snow for nearly an hour, the coach stopped at the entrance to a small lane, the banks of which were stack-

ed up on each side by thick masses of snow. Some little way down this lane two or three lights were seen faintly glimmering, which the travelers supposed to be displayed in the windows of the farm-house in question.

"He must know the way well indeed to be able to find it on such a night as this," said Catherine Farquhar to Mr. Hartley in a half whisper, and with emphasis.

"Oh!" said that gentleman carelessly, "these drover-graziers know their counties well. He has probably traveled it often with his fat bullocks."

They now descended from the coach, and by the aid of a dark lantern which the guard produced from the boot, that worthy and the three passengers proceeded in the direction of the lights, leaving the coachman to follow them, somewhat more slowly, with his jaded horses. The young grazier led the way, with the encouraging remark now and then to his companions that it "was not much farther."

To the others, however, the distance though in reality but half a mile down the lane, appeared interminable. At every other step the luckless travelers went almost to their knees in snow and Catherine was at last about to succumb to the drowsy feeling produced by intense cold, and to declare that she would rather lie down and die than proceed farther, when the baying of a dog close at hand told them that they had arrived at their destination.

By the faint glimmer of the lights in the windows—more than one of which lights had been extinguished since they first entered the lane—they could barely discern that the house was a long, low, straggling building, of the same style as that occupied by the famous Mr. Squeers, and that it was surrounded by a large number of crazy barns and outhouses. It was situated in a hollow of the hill, which afforded it protection from the bleak winds of the surrounding moor; but as even in summer time it was an isolated, lonely place, and indeed, the only human habitation for miles, it may be readily surmised that, blockaded as it now was by the snows of winter, its appearance was desolate in the extreme.

The Red Moor was said by some to be so termed on account of a murder which had taken place there many years previously; but it is more probable that it took its name from the great profusion of heather which was rather of a crimson tint than of the usual purple hue. In winter, however, it was a bare black waste of litter and bog except when covered, as now, by a thick white mantle of snow.

Miss Farquhar shuddered when she beheld the grim-looking, shed-like building, and even Mr. Hartley experienced an unpleasant sensation when he felt the thrill that ran through his companion's frame as she leaned upon his arm.

"My sakes!" he said, "but this be a black-looking hotel."

"Any port in a storm friend," said the grazier. "Besides, it is better in than out."

And he knocked against the door heavily with his foot.

The summons was answered by a tall masculine-looking virago, weired, grizzly looks and seamed face, as they showed themselves in the ghastly light of the rush candle which she carried in her bony hand, rendered her a not unfitting representative of one of Macbeth's witches.

Her first inquiry, pitched in a key which denoted excessive wrath, was:

"Who the de'll comes here, knocking a lone woman out of bed at sic-like hours?"

But no sooner had she set eyes on the drover than she exclaimed, in a tone of intense surprise:

"My certie! Joe, is it?"

Probably at some sign from the person she addressed, the virago now changed her note.

"I beg your honor's pardon—I mus mistake."

"No apology, good dame; but will you

take in myself and these my fellow-travelers for to-night? We have met with a mishap in the snow."

"Tak' ye in! and that will I! When did ever auld Elsie turn the traveler frae her door and on sicca a nicht?" Walk in, sirs and Madam—walk in, my bonny man (to the guard). For though I'm lone, and the gudeman's e'en gone to York with the kye, I see warrant I'll find ye the bit and sup, and the best ye's be glad of, the nicht."

Thus speaking, and with a volubility that left no room for a word to be slipped in, she ushered them into her kitchen, or, at least, an apartment which answered the purpose having first directed the coachman who had now joined them, where he might stable his poor weary horses for the night.

The driver took the lantern from the guard, and proceeded to secure his steeds and the other persons followed their hostess into the house.

The dame set before her guests a savory dish of cow-heel and bacon, and homely as was the fare, so sharpened were their appetites that all—even Miss Farquhar made a hearty meal; nor did the latter disdain to taste and to highly praise the very excellent Yorkshire ale which seasoned the repast.

She had not long been concluded when the woman of the house rose, saying that she must now see after the sleeping accommodations of the travelers, or, at least, prepare a bed for the lady. The gentlemen, she said must do as they best could with cloaks, and a plaid or two in an inner room, which she would presently show them. With this intimation she left the room, to the satisfaction of the weary governess, who felt scarcely capable of keeping her eyes open any longer.

After her departure there was no conversation, for almost all the travelers felt the influence of fatigue. Even the guard—for they had all supped together, as under such circumstances the distinction of class were for awhile forgotten—yawned wearily as he sat looking abstractedly at the red cinders of the wood fire. The only one of the party who appeared to be wide awake was the seeming glazier and he, after a few minutes, left the room, his departure being unnoticed by the others, who had all closed their eyes, the coachman and guard snoring audibly.

After an interval of a quarter of an hour the passenger returned, followed by the mistress of the house, bearing a tray, on which appeared six steaming glasses of hot brandy-and-water. The entrance of the pair disturbed the occupants of the kitchen, who looked surprised at this new addition to their entertainment.

Old Elsie spoke. "She had just maken bauld," she said, "to bring thee and the luddy a wee drap o' sperrits to gar them sleep canny, and troth she wadna be the waur for a toothful hersel'."

Sayin which, it was to be noticed that she took one of the glasses in hand herself, handed another to the grazier, and placed the tray with the remaining four upon the table before the guests.

The guard took his readily, and Mr. Hartley also drank half a glassful, but, to the surprise of them all, the coachman would not do so.

"He had a flask of his own," he said, "of which he had taken as much as he wanted whilst he was in the outhouse, looking after his horses."

As for Miss Farquhar, no persuasion would induce her taste the spirit. Then observing a frown on her hostess's brow and not wishing to appear wanting in civility, she added that she was greatly obliged for the attention, but that the one glass of ale which she had taken was quite ample for her wants, and she begged to retire at once.

Accordingly she was conducted, somewhat surlily, by the woman, to an adjoining apartment, which indeed, although appearing cold and cheerless from its white