

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
Editor and Proprietor.

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## The Bloomfield Times.

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BY

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### MY FRIEND THE PARSON.

I HAD just arrived from Oxford, and was standing at the bookstall of the Paddington terminus, inquiring for a cheap edition of one of Leber's early novels, when a middle-aged man, a clergyman, came up to the same stall, and asked the bustling newspaper man, who was busy folding a bundle of newspapers still wet from the press, for a second-hand copy of Warburton's "Crescent and the Cross." I hardly know why, but the face of my fellow-purchaser struck me as a remarkable one; and being a little of an artist, and about as much of a physiognomist, I gave him a long and a studious look. He was a tall, strongly-made clergyman, in high-church costume—collarless coat, cassock waistcoat, and Roman collar; and there was a deep band of crape round his hat. A high wide brow, rather deeply furrowed by contemplation; keen, cold, gray eyes; a close pressed mouth; and a full bold chin, indicating an inflexible will—were the chief points I observed, combining to produce the face of a man of strong sense and determination. For a missionary bishop, or a Havelock—allaying the soldier and the man of religion—such a face seemed to promise every qualification. His manner, quiet, self-possessed, imperturbable, was just what might have been expected from such a countenance. As a head of my college, as my colonel, as the head of my firm, as my doctor in the hour of danger, as my priest, as my bishop, I could have believed and confided in such a man. A magnetic sense of power, physical and mental, seemed to pass from him and instantly overcome my weaker will.

"How much?" I said; "two shillings?"

"Two shillings."

I took out my purse, but found, to my mortification, I had no more silver, and only the two twenty pound notes my father had sent me for my trip in Cornwall.

"I am so sorry," I said to the bookstall keeper; "I have no silver, and only two twenty pound notes. I suppose I could not take the book, and pay for it when I return from Cornwall?"

"Not exactly," said the man, insolently as he slapped the damp papers together; "I've done that once too often. No, not for Joseph!"

"You need not be insolent," I said rather ruffled.

"We don't give credit, sir, at this establishment."

"Pray allow me to have the pleasure of paying for the book in question," said my fellow purchaser, stepping towards me. "I think I heard you say you were going west—to Cornwall. So am I. We are perhaps going to the same hotel."

I thanked him, accepted his offer, and explained that I had some notes in my purse, but no silver. I was going to the Great Western Hotel.

So was he. My luggage and his, he believed, had just gone on by the same truck. We walked together to the hotel. He proved most agreeable; a thorough travelled man of the world, full of anecdote and humorous allusion. The Reverend Henry Atkins, Vicarage, Bagshot, that was the name and address he gave, as we stood in the hotel-office taking our bed-rooms. We were both, we found, going to Exeter by the 7.15 P. M. train the next day. I changed one of my notes, paid back the small sum borrowed, thanked him, and we parted.

"I hope we shall meet again," he said, on parting.

He followed the porter who carried his trunk and bag up stairs. I watched him as he went up out of sight, and said to myself, "That man was born for a statesman or a general; what a pity such a mind should be restricted to the petty cares of a small parish! Well," thought I, "if every one was in his right place, the world would be very different."

I went to the theatre that night to see the last burlesque, as eager for London amusements as an Oxford man who had been reading hard for his degree might be pardoned for being. I did not stay for the last piece, and got back to the hotel about half-past eleven. To while away half an hour, I strolled into a billiard-room near the hotel. There was a rouéish sort of a pseudo military man there playing with a friend—a little Jew. They played reasonably well; and once or twice the Captain (as he was called) made a winning hazard that rather astonished me, had it not been obviously the effects of luck more than of skill. At the end of the game the Jew left, and the Captain, after one or two experimental strokes, in which he failed, asked me if I had any objection to a game. I accepted the invitation, being rather proud of my play. Just as I had selected my cue and chalked the end, the little Jew returned, and perched himself on a high seat close to the marker. Five shillings a game the Captain proposed, just to prevent it from being insipid.

"One gets so doozed careless," he said, "if one doesn't play for something. Mosy, be kind enough to touch the bell. I must have some brandy hot; that infernal champagne we had at Greenwich has, I declare, made me feel quite queer."

The waiter came; and after a gulp of the brandy, the Captain said he felt more himself, and made one or two very fair strokes; than he fell off again, and missed twice.

"Fred, you're no good to-night; not a bit of good," said the Jew. "I shall put my money on this gentleman, for he plays a good steady game."

"I made three very good strokes in succession encouraged by this praise, (ass that I was!) and every time I scored, the little Jew rolled back in his seat, and exclaimed with unctious—"Stroke indeed!"

As I turned round to chalk my cue and take the red ball out of the left-hand top pocket, into which I had struck it, I saw to my surprise, the stern calm face of my friend of the morning fixed steadily on me. He had come in unnoticed by me, and was sitting near the marker, and speaking to him in a low voice. I nodded to him and went on with the game, which I won in a canter.

"Like my confounded luck!" said the Captain, tossing down the five shillings, and spitefully digging his cue into the chalk till it squeaked with pain; "but I'm always a happy-go-lucky. Come, I'll have another go."

Touch the bell, marker; thank you.—Excuse me a moment, sir; I must go and secure my bed. I didn't tell them I should sleep here. Come along, Mosy, and see about yours."

The moment they had gone, the Vicar of Bagshot came straight up to me with a very serious and earnest expression on his face.

"You may think me intrusive," he said, "but do let me strongly advise you not to play another game with that fellow. That is Macdougall, one of the most notorious billiard-sharppers in London; the Jew is an accomplice. The rascal has let you win the first game; he'll now propose higher stakes, and win. They've gone out now to get something to make it go into your head faster before the betting begins. I have no motive, you must see, but the interest I feel for a young man unacquainted with London tricks. Hush! here they come."

Just at that moment the brandy and the two thieves came in. I observed the Jew instantly go towards the smoking glasses and stir one of them round, as he turned his back to me.

The captain pulled off his coat, turned up his right shirt-cuff, and spotted the red ball with his usually gay nonchalance. "You begin," he said.

"Thank you," said I, putting on my coat, "I don't think I shall play any more to-night."

"Not play? not play? why, you engaged with me," he said, looking round the room in surprise, half in suspicion, half in anger. "May I ask, sir, what has produced this sudden change of intention?"

"Marker," said I, "You may take that brandy and water—I have had enough; I'm afraid you'll find it rather strong."

"O, I see," said the Captain, unmasking at once and advancing threateningly towards the Vicar, who was watching him like a hawk. "This fellow here whoever he may be, has been good enough to slander me and my friend while my back was turned. And pray, sir, who are you?" As he said this he walked up to the Vicar, flourishing the butt end of his cue menacingly. "I don't know your name," he

said, with a long impudent fixed stare, "or where you are from parson, but you're as like a lag I once knew in Australia as two peas. You remember gentlemen Jack, Mosy?"

"Of course I do, and s'elp me, but he's the very image of him," jabbored the Jew.

"You were, then, I presume; in the same chain-gang," said the Vicar, as he rose and clenched his fist, "I'll bear the insolence no longer. You are both notorious billiard-sharppers; the marker knows it, and has been paid for admitting you. The police all know you. One word more, and I'll ring the bell and send the waiter for a constable, and give you in charge. Now you be off. I won't take the trouble to knock down this sham Captain for his insolence—a feather would do that. Go, both of you; I'll not let my friend here be robbed by two such pitiful thieves."

The Captain was a poltroon. I saw that he could have stabbed the Vicar on the spot. His color came and went. He had once resolved on a rush; then a fear seized him, as he saw his adversary standing like a marble statue—a phalanx in himself. Muttering and cursing, the two rascals slunk away, like Satan from the spear of the archangel.

"Perfect strangers to me, I assure you, gents," said the marker; "never seed 'em afore in my life."

"You don't take your brandy," said I.

"Don't seem to care for any more, thank you, sir. You pay for the table, sir?"

"He doesn't deserve it, but still pay," said the Vicar. So I paid.

"The police shall know how these rooms are conducted, depend upon it," he said to the marker as we left; "you might as well garrote a man at once. What a city!" he said to me as we turned to the hotel, and I thanked him for his good advice. "What a whirlpool of godless iniquity! Adulterated bread—adulterated wine—adulterated beer—adulterated medicines—the very adulterating ingredients themselves adulterated! At every foot one walks a snare; in every street a pitfall; virtue only disguise, and vice itself as like virtue as if she was her twin-sister; sham everything! When will the fire descend upon it? when will the fire descend?"

In the coffee-room, where we sat talking for half an hour, I expressed my surprise at the Vicar's entering a public billiard-room.

"You do not know me," he said. "I am like Paley; I am never afraid of humbugs. I like to see the devil's schemes, that I may counteract them. We Church of England men know too little of the world; that is why the Bellias and the Asmodei of cities cheat and fool us so often and outrageously. I make a point, when I visit the metropolis, of occasionally going to such places. Another night you might have met me at Cremorne, or at the equally dangerous Alhambra. It is my duty, sir, and however unpleasant, I go everywhere to see sin and folly at their flood-tide. You will at least admit that my experience of rascality has been useful to you to-night?"

"I owe you a thousand thanks," I said. "I had heard of billiard-sharppers, but had never met any before."

"I think I'll wish you a good-night now," he said, "as I am accustomed to early country hours, and I begin to feel what the children call 'the sandman' busy at my eyes. To-morrow, then, at 7.15, we meet. Good-night."

So I wished the Vicar good-night, and we parted. I was out nearly all day, making calls and transacting business. I got back to the hotel about half-past six, ordered down my luggage, and asked at the bar if the Rev. Mr. Atkins was gone. The porter said he was on the platform waiting for me. He had just paid his bill and taken his luggage forward.

I took my ticket but did not see him. I got my luggage labeled Exeter; still he did not appear; but when the guard opened the door of a first-class carriage for me, I found a plaid and some books on the opposite seat.

"There's a gentleman, sir, a clergyman taken that seat. He's been looking for a friend. I suppose that's you, sir. If he don't look sharp, he'll miss the train."

The guard had already come for the tickets. The sharp cry, "Take your seats!" had just gone forth, when the Vicar took his place, laughing, opposite me. I hardly knew him at first, for he wore a large dark great-coat, and had on a traveling-cap drawn down over his eyes and with flaps over his ears. He had a roll of papers and two magazines in his hand.

"How I hate this fuss and fury!" he

said, as he folded his plaid over his legs; "how I hate this destruction of all individuality! When I was young the coach journey was a deliberate quiet affair—the traveler was a recognized individuality. The coachman and guard knew you and chatted; the landlord chatted; the ostler chatted; the insides and outsides knew you, and chatted. There was interest in every village; the people came out to see you pass; the inn-dinner was amusing. Now you are a mere parcel sent by train. The pointsman, the signalman, are mere machines, not cared for by you. Whiz, rattle, battle, scream, hiss! away you are flashed, and the only thing to break journey is the name of a station so pronounced as to be unintelligible."

I laughed, and hinted at the annoyances delays and dangers of the old system—the overlaid coaches, the exorbitant landlords, the endless fees.

"Well," he said, perhaps in a future age of balloons or electric-spark expresses people will talk of the delight of railway traveling. The past is always praised in order to spite the present."

Then we fell to reading. We had scarcely begun before—whirr!—the darkness of a tunnel fell upon us.

"It is always so," said my amusing companion. "I never began to read in a railway car in my life that we did not pass through a tunnel before I had read the first page."

My travelling companion was an extraordinary person. He had been everywhere, and seen everything. No capital of Europe but he knew intimately.

"You seem surprised," he said, "at my having traveled so much; but when I was at Oxford I spent all my long vacations in traveling; and during the little time I was in the army, before more serious conviction induced me to enter the church, I saw something of the colonies."

The Vicar's information seemed boundless. He discussed the Geology of Devonshire and the mineralogy of Cornwall. He had views on military tactics and artillery. He was interested in engineering and chemistry, and seemed quite conversant with all the latest discoveries in the latter science.

"I went the other day," he said to me, as it began to grow dark, "to a lecture on alchemy. The professor expressed his belief in great discoveries shortly to be made in something that would supersede coal and steam in aerial navigation, and in the transmutation of metals. But I tire you."

"Not at all."

He expressed his own and Liebig's belief that the manufacture of diamonds and gold would soon be possible by the merest tyro. He showed us small rubies that had been produced by chemical action. There seemed no bound to the discoveries this thoughtful man did not suggest—the principle of beef and corn from the common earth, gold and jewels from the very roadside flints; gold would soon, he said, be of no value, poverty would disappear from the earth; new manures would soon turn the deserts into prairies, and double the resources of the world. He ridiculed steam; he—

All this was profoundly interesting; but, somehow or other, wearied by a long day's fagging about London, I felt drowsy, and the words of my companion seemed suddenly to change into a buzz, buzz, that kept in cadence with the sound of the train as it tore through part of Devonshire.

I fell asleep, and a dream arose before me. I was alone at night in a railway carriage with a man who thought me asleep. He stole towards the door, unlocked it quietly with a railway-key he drew from his pocket, and opened it. Then rifling my pockets, (some strange numbness prevented my crying out,) he dragged me to the door, and shut me out into the darkness.—The horror of that moment and some rustling movement of the carriage awoke me. I scarcely know why, but a strange instantaneous caution prevented me moving or at once opening my eyes. At that moment I felt a light hand with practised care, touch my breast-pocket, where my money was, and felt hot breath upon my cheek, as if some one was listening to my breathing.

Presently I felt the breath no longer, nor the motion of the hand, and heard my companion—for the breath and hand were his—return to his seat. A moment or two after, without moving, I opened one eye for an instant only, and to my horror and surprise saw the Vicar sitting at the farther window perfectly bald and with a wig in his hand—a pair of black moustaches and a beard were on his knees, and he was slipping a pair of large green spectacles into a ash-green case; a little bottle and a small sponge were on the cushion by his side.

What did this mean? Was it possible

this intellectual, thoughtful clergyman was, after all, only a common swindler flying from justice?—What should I do? Should I at once arouse, and denounce him? No; he might be armed, and might shoot or stab me before I could summon the guard to arrive at the next station.—No. I resolved to lie still, and wait till I could either change carriages or inform the police.—The train rattled on, as if bound to rush forever through illimitable space—on, on, through the yielding darkness.

All at once a strange medicated smell spread around me, and before I could open my eyes, a sponge steeped in chloroform was pressed chokingly tight over my nose and mouth. I tried to resist, but I felt an irresistible faintness creep over me; at the same moment my watch and purse flew from my pockets, and I was dashed back contemptuously upon the seat—a living corpse.

When I awoke, I was lying on a bed in the Exeter Hospital, faint, exhausted, and scarcely able to move. The doctor said I had had so heavy a dose of chloroform, that my recovery for a long time had seemed doubtful. I need hardly say I had been stripped of everything by my friend the Vicar, who was a professional thief of the highest class.

About two years after that event, the following paragraph met my eye in a Leeds paper:

"STRANGE DEATH OF A THIEF.—On Thursday a first-class passenger by the night-mail north fell from a carriage a few miles beyond Carlisle and was killed on the spot. It is supposed that he was a professional thief, and having chloroformed and robbed a fellow-passenger, a rich manufacturer from Bradford, was trying to creep into an empty second-class carriage, the better to escape at the first station, when he lost his hold and fell, and the train passed over him. A guard had recognized him as John Rogers, alias, 'Gentleman Jack'—a returned convict, long notorious for railway robberies. Rogers, who was an accomplished and well educated man, had once been in the church; but having had his gown taken from him for disgraceful conduct, he left England, and obtained a commission in the Neapolitan service; being eventually driven from that also, he turned swindler, card-sharper, and swell-mobman. Latterly, having escaped from Australia, he has infested the chief English lines of railway under various disguises, and from time to time chloroformed and robbed any passengers who were unlucky enough to travel with him by night alone."

### Painless Extraction of Teeth.

Dr. A. C. Castle states that he has for thirty years extracted teeth without pain, without giving chloroform, ether, or nitrous oxide gas. One method is the application of ice to the temples, which is somewhat distressing, the sensation of cold striking deeply. The other, to which he gives the preference, is done by an assistant with each of his middle fingers, pressing the points of the fingers with persistent firmness and force into the hollow behind the ridge of the temporal bone, which forms the external bone circle orbit of the eye.—Pressure for one minute is all that is necessary, so numbing the whole nerve as to allow the teeth to be removed with sensation so slight as to be scarcely noticed by the patient. The practice is as simple as it is harmless, and leaves no after unpleasant sensation. It is an instinctive method often adopted by people themselves, who press their temples with their fingers to alleviate temporarily the acute paroxysms of nervous headache.

⚡ Bow-legs and knock-knees are among the common deformities of humanity; and wise mothers assert that the crookedness in either case arises from the afflicted one having been put upon his or her feet too early in babyhood. But a Manchester physician, Dr. Crompton, who has watched for the true cause, thinks differently. He attributes the first-mentioned distortion to a habit some youngsters delight in, of rubbing the sole of one foot against that of the other; some will go to sleep with the soles pressed together. They appear to enjoy the contact only when the feet are naked they don't attempt to make it when they are socked or slippers. So the remedy is obvious; keep the baby's soles covered.

⚡ An old farmer who was asked by an impertinent attorney if there were any pretty girls in the neighborhood, answered, "Yes, lots of 'em—so many that they can't find respectable husbands, and lately some of 'em 's been taken up with lawyers."

⚡ The trial of Mrs. Wharton, charged with poisoning General Ketchum, is now in progress at Anapolis. The prosecution have closed their testimony. The defence will probably occupy the whole week.