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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Unexplainable Noises Recalled By Old Yarn

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I HAVE to thank Norman Nicholson, Charlottetown for a most unusual story that was told to him almost 40 years ago by William H. Townshend who was born in Rollo Bay, near Souris.

A former bridge and building inspector for the CNR, Mr. Townshend reported that the incidents to which he was referring had had some coverage in the press of the time - it was back in the 1890's - and could also be verified at the time he told it, in the 1920's, by older residents in the Harmony district.

The story as he told it, starts with a widow left with a small son and daughter, trying to wrest her living from a small clearing in the forest. Somehow she managed to provide sufficient food and clothing for the family to survive, but the strain of the constant toil, the worry and loneliness gradually changed the woman's personality until she became obsessed with a haunting fear.

SHE WAS AFRAID the children would leave her alone when they grew up and as she became more subject to this fear, she became increasingly hostile to any visitor who chanced to call at the humble home. Probably schooling for the children was not available in the district, but the mother kept the children close to home and wouldn't think of letting them depart.

The old story suggests that things "went reasonably well" for the little family, despite the difficulties, until the boy was 17 - the girl was several years younger - and he started to disobey his mother. Tired of the constant restraint, he would disappear down the trail that led through the forest, and this wandering continued until he informed his mother one day that he was taking a young girl home to be his wife.

Fears Are Confirmed

THIS CONFIRMED the mother's earliest fears that she would be left alone by a family that would be taking on interests of their own. Strenuously resenting the proposed marriage, she was reported to have said she would rather see the devil come into the home, than see the young girl come in as her son's wife.

Nothing personal was intended against the girl. The mother had developed an unexplainable fear of anyone else coming into her son's affections, and this outburst was described as a culmination of the jealous resentment that had been building up in her heart.

The whispers heard through the community indicated that the daughter-in-law and the devil had both moved into the home in the forest. That could be laid to the fanciful

superstition of that far off day, but intolerable tensions were building up, as they do in any home where domestic strife abounds, and it increased as the weeks went by.

THE DIFFICULT condition took an extra toll from the young sister confronted by forces which she did not understand, and torn between her loyalty to her brother and mother, the girl was rapidly reaching a stage of nervous exhaustion, and conditions were further distorted as strange things started to happen almost nightly after the young girl had retired.

The rest of the story, Norman tells me, is told in Mr. Townshend's own words:

Strange Experiences Described

"ANOTHER YOUNG chap and I went to the cabin one night, and though it was evident we were intruding and were not welcome, we sat down and refused to consider any hints to leave. The family retired to another room and the daughter went to bed.

"It was in the middle of winter and everything was deathly still when a knock came to the door, I opened the door but there was nobody there.

"A few minutes later there was a noise like a bunk chain being whipped across the shingles from one end of the cabin to the other. We both ran outside but found everything as quiet as death, and the winter moon made it as bright as day. In those days I was afraid of neither man nor the Devil, but I could feel the hair raising on top of my head.

"We had heard it was suspected there was some connection between the girl and the ghostly noises, so we went back into the house and took a lamp to the room where the girl was sleeping. She was lying rigid in bed with her hands clenched and there were deep beads of perspiration on her brow.

"But we found when we awakened her that she appeared to be normal in every other way, except that she was unusually pretty, and very shy. I never went back to the house, but other incidents continued to happen."

Marriage Ends Unusual Incidents

THE YOUNG girl was later taken to Charlottetown by doctors for examination. After her return home, the old story said people would hear a train blowing in the distance, then the sound of a train grinding to a stop at the nearest station, and then pulling away. These noises always came, it was said, after the girl had retired for the night.

The rather grim story has one good feature. There is a happy ending. She was taken to New York, where her case was studied by several famous specialists. But a doctor from Montreal fell in love with her, married her and the ghostly incidents vanished, never to return.

One explanation given later was that the young girl was extremely sensitive, and she had a vivid imagination. A few moments after falling asleep she would have vivid dreams, and had some power of transferring sound she heard in her dream to the mind of a person close by, a "form of mental telepathy" some observers called it, though modern psychiatrists probably have other explanations resulting from their advanced

study of similar problems. But this story created a sensation in the Eastern Kings area at the time.

Townshend Remembered As Curler

I REMEMBER Bill Townshend as a curler and one incident came to mind when I heard Frank Acorn, Bob Schurman and others talking of several "difficult shots" made by skip of two competing rinks, and the difficult part was that they had to go through a narrow port - two stones out in front of the "house" placed so they left little more than the width of a stone to go through.

My recollection of Bill Townshend is that he was curling in the old rink once and was confronted with a final shot that called for him to go through a double port - and it was fairly long - before he could get the stone into the house for shot.

The veteran curler took a couple of looks at it, then slipped up to the kitchen overhead, came down wiping his lips - and I'm sure it wasn't water - said "I think I can make it now" and proceeded to do just that.

I wonder if Hal Spillett (?) was there at the time, and saw the shot which had the men around the old rink talking for days.

NORMAN TOLD me another yarn that is different, but I think you will enjoy it.

Donald MacPherson who lived on the Junction Road (now Glen Valley) near Fredericton, had never been to a doctor in his life. But an attack of "stomach irritable(?)" when he was about 70 years of age caused him to go to a doctor.

He had heard a great deal about the fame of the Kier doctors in Malpeque, so he hitched his horse and started the long journey. Just as he was nearing his destination, though, he passed the largest cemetery he had ever seen. Without any hesitation he turned his horse around and headed for home. His reasoning was that if the Kier medical men were as good as they were cracked up to be, there would have been no need for such a large cemetery in their area. Mr. MacPherson lived to be 90 and never did get around to going to a doctor, Norman assures me.

I should say this is no reflection on the Kiers. I never had the privilege of meeting any of them, but I have heard many stories of their skill, and talked with several patients who always praised them highly.

How's This For Sponge Bath?

THIS STORY is unusual as well as humorous and a friend in Western Prince County told it to me some time ago. "Old Harry was blessed with a very dirty wife. She never used water or soap. He became seriously ill and among the remedies the Doctor prescribed was a sponge bath".

The next day a neighbour visited Harry and asked "How are you feeling?"

"Not very well", came the reply, "This stuff is getting awfully hard."

On investigating he found that Mrs. Harry had made a batch of the old-fashioned sponge the cooks of the day used to start their homemade bread and had opened her husband's shirt and poured the stuff over the upper part of his body.

The sponge was half cooked with the heat from the fever and Harry was in a veritable "strait jacket". Names have been omitted and changed but my reliable friend

assures me the story is true. I visited the area a few months ago and was the guest one evening at the home of the neighbour who was the visitor on that occasion except it's the son who's living there now.