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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Yarns Are Gruesome But Ghosts Harmless

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GHOSTS, APPARITIONS, and elves had a large place in the beliefs of our forebears in the Old Country," W. D. Johnston, Montague suggested when I called on him at Hillside Inn where he resides. "When they emigrated to our Canadian shores they took their religion and their ghostly beliefs with them, and they stuck as tenaciously to one as to the other. If you would oppose them or make little of those beliefs, you would bring down their wrath upon your head," he emphasizes.

But the Montague man insists there is nothing evil or harmful about the people or spirits who belong to the ghost world, though he "listened to the old folk relate some awesome tales concerning those persons from the ghost world," when he was young.

"Long ago when Montague was only a small village", Mr. Johnston told me, "it was claimed that a man met with foul play on the road leading to Wightman's point." His ghost, the old story said, "was seen there many times in later years."

"A fine Christian gentleman, Charlie Poole, a carpenter by trade, lived in Montague. In those days caskets were unknown by that name, they were called coffins. They were made wide at the shoulder, tapering a little toward the head and they had a very long taper toward the foot."

Coffin Maker's Saws Tingle

FACTORY MADE coffins were not available then and the local carpenter was called on to build one when it was needed. I have heard many forerunners about death and coffins, of noises in piles of pine boards, of the sound at midnight of ghostly saws and hammers working, but here is a different note.

Mr. Poole, I was told by Mr. Johnston, would know when he was about to be asked to make a coffin. "The saws hanging on pegs in his workshop would tingle – give a ringing sound."

Incidentally, Mr. Johnston made many coffins. He worked for the Montague Furnishing Company and made coffins for people in every province of Canada. He made a trial shipment of three coffins once, he told me, for a dealer in Capetown, South Africa but the freight charges were so high, the business was not economically sound.

Some of the old ghost stories would fairly curl your hair, and Mr. Johnston recalls "the most blood-curdling" of which he ever heard and it goes something like this:

Two men were returning home from Charlottetown in a cart. Shortly after they passed a saw mill on the Town Road, between Millview and Pownal Corner, "one of them looked back and saw something horrible looking." He nudged his companion and "both were almost petrified with fear as they looked at a headless man. A few days later a man fell on the rotary saw in the mill and his head was cut off by the saw."

Terrible Dread Of Nightly Travel

A RELATIVE of Mr. Johnston knew a man who had a terrible dread of being out after night fell. If he was away from home with a horse and wagon, "he would almost kill his horse in an effort to get more speed out of the animal so he would get home as soon as possible." There was a most convincing reason for this fear.

If darkness overtook this man on the road he would be attacked by some horrible creature that would take the form of a ferocious bird. "It would fly upon the man and punish him most severely, and he couldn't get rid of it," Mr. Johnston recalls the old story said. The man used to take a lantern with him when possible "to keep the evil spirits away," but how well that worked I cannot say.

This is a forerunner, of which many were experienced in other years, and some of them in the not so long ago.

Two women were down at the North Shore of the Montague River. On their way home in broad daylight, they saw a light leaving the home of a neighbor; it moved along the roadway, turned East and then moved along the roadway and disappeared. The women were mystified by this strange sight. In the course of a few days a child in the home took sick, and died a few days later. The day of the funeral, the procession wended the same way en route to the Brudenell cemetery.

"One of the women who saw the light was my mother-in-law." Mr. Johnston told me.

Another story told of a man who met a funeral when he was driving along the road one night. It was so real to him that he pulled his horse to one side of the road, and waited for the procession to pass.

Even more interesting to me is the story of the horse pulling over to the side of the road by itself, and refusing to start for a few minutes. A few days or possibly a week later, the man would meet a funeral at the same spot. I've heard of that happening when I was a boy, though I never had the experience myself.

Black Dog Devil-Tam O'Shanter

THIS GRUESOME story was told to me by a fine old gentleman who lives in Eastern Kings, but does not want me to use his name, lest some of his friends should think he was trying to get some notoriety as a story teller.

A man lived in his declining years with his family of four sons and two daughters. The sons and daughters were so bad to him that they earned his bitter resentment. So, the old story says, "he willed his farm to the devil".

A black dog was seen around the farm many times. The black dog came and lay under the man's coffin once, before he was buried, the story stated.

Residents of the community used to fill an old fashioned muzzle-loading shot gun with dimes and nickels and fire it at the animal, but the silver never took any effect.

The reference here is to the old belief that only a silver bullet would kill an evil spirit. Incidentally the "devil appearing in the form of a black dog" is an old belief. Wilfred "Sandy" MacLeod of Moore and MacLeod's, who is now a Southport neighbor, tells me that the old "black dog-devil" story goes back to Bobbie Burns and his "Tam O'Shanter".

I DIDN'T realize when I started this column that Saturday, May 15 is the 103rd anniversary of the birth of C. W. Judson, the grand old gentleman of Churchill. Several years ago I did a column on this man which took readers back to the days of yesteryear.

Congratulations came from the Queen and from the Prime Minister, then John Diefenbaker, when Mr. Judson observed his 100th birthday at Churchill three years ago.

Mr. Judson lives with Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Lamont and she is his granddaughter. I haven't seen him now for more than a year but the man had a grip in his hand like a wrestler, when I last saw him. Mrs. Lamont tells me he still has that grip.

Born in Cherry Valley he spent most of his life there where he was secretary of school trustees once. He moved later to Pownal, before he went to live with the Lamonts. He has been confined to bed now for almost two years, but is in reasonably good health.