

# THE RAMBLER WRITES OF GHOSTS TODAY AND OF DAYS LONG

On a Trip to Rippon Lodge He Stops Among the Oaks and Interviews a Specter. And the Ghastly Person Tells Him a Few Things of the Long Ago—The Famous Ghosts of History and Their Peculiar Antics, According to Famous Writers.

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**M**EN and women have no greater consolation than they find in ancestors. One reason is that ancestors are nearly always dead and cannot come to make a visit except in spiritual form, and in that form it costs very little to feed them, and the cold, material eyes of the neighbors do not see them. Therefore, the neighbors are not apt to make any comments on the cut of their clothes, their table manners and their way of speaking. Ancestors invisible and intangible are an asset to anybody. There is another advantage in having ancestors. They cannot defend themselves against the grossest and kindest misrepresentation. They can always be spoken of as the largest landholders and the largest slaveholders in Cockleburr county. An ancestor can always be spoken of as one of the richest men of his time.

A jovial, pleasant old spirit who is now sitting on the edge of the Rambler's ink bottle—ink bottle, that's all—whispers to him that many rich people in the good old days were as hard and mercenary in their thoughts and had just as many bristles on them as a great many wealthy men and women do today. It seems to be the right and prerogative of all ancestors to be, or to have been, rich, distinguished, honored and accomplished. There were no poor and the poorhouse or poorfarm records and the poor-house or poor-farm records are all at fault because they show that a great many men and women, who must have been ancestors, really had as hard time to get along as you do to pay your gasoline bill and keep up vain appearances.

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AN OLD PRINCE WILLIAM ROAD.

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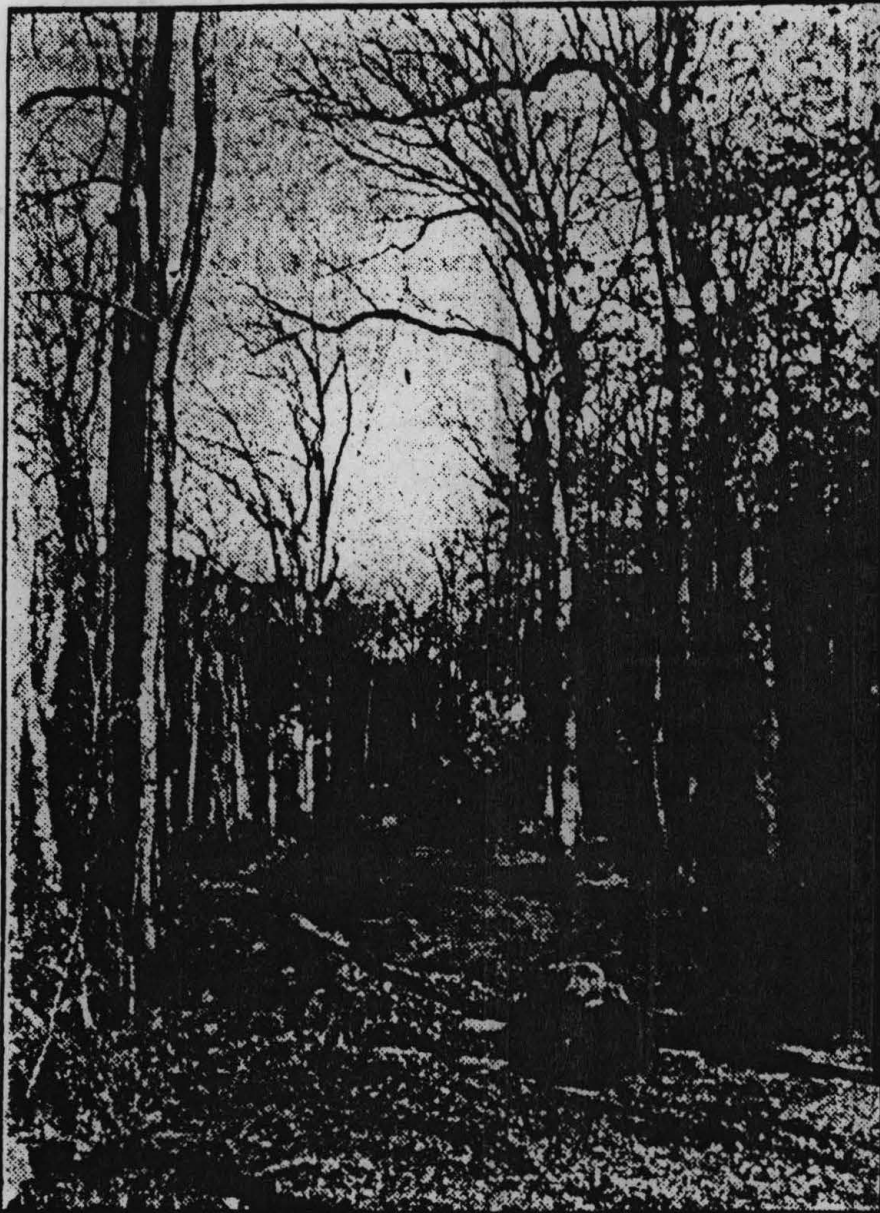
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least style about her. And her hats! There is never anything exclusive in them. Why, down there by the mortuary chapel, where many of the middle-class spirits walk on Saturday night, every third woman will have the same kind of hat on! And she never goes away in summer! You must not leave here, Mr. Rambler, with the impression that one must associate with everybody who dies!"

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ABOUT this time the Rambler's pipe went out, the cold ashes fell upon the tombstone on which he was resting, and a couple of gravediggers, one telling a merry story which made the other laugh, came along the pebble path. All these things reminded the Rambler that he has made a wide digression, and very little progression, or, at least, a slow start, in getting down to the story of Rippon Lodge, on the road to Dumfries. There Col. Richard Blackburn, who came to the colony of Virginia from Rippon, in England, was laid at rest under a great flat stone July 15, 1757, in the fifty-second year of his age. Beside him, under another large flat stone, which never was inscribed, rests all that is mortal of his wife, who was a daughter of Rev. James Scott and his wife, Sarah Brown, a family which was the first to come into possession of a tract of land in Fairfax county, through which the road from Langley to Vienna runs now, and through which land flows that picturesque stream which many of us call Scotts run.

There at Rippon Lodge died Bernard Hooe, mortally wounded by Maj. Kemp in a duel that was fought across the Potomac in Maryland, by the side of Mattawoman creek. There sleeps under the tombstone George Atkinson, who came from Clifton, Nottinghamshire, England, who became owner of Rippon Lodge, and died there January 30, 1844. There stands a fine specimen of the Kentucky coffee tree, a tree of very wide distribution, but one of the rarest forest trees in our woods. There today lives Thomas Marron, whose grandfather was an assistant postmaster general in Washington sixty years ago, and who himself was long identified with the District National Guard.

Many of you will recall Tom Marron, who was on Col. May's staff as quartermaster of the old 1st Regiment, and who organized old Battery A. That is, Tom Marron was living at Rippon Lodge when the Rambler strolled in there, before winter set in and before the Rambler began his Analostan Island travels. The Rambler did not know who lived at Rippon Lodge—in fact, he did not know it was Rippon Lodge—when he entered that old estate late last fall, and the narrative of which he put aside until he got Analostan Island off his chest. But of Rippon Lodge anon!

## THE BLACKMAILER

By Frederic Boulet

and the parlor-house of parliament records and the poor-house or poor-farm records are all at fault, because they show that a great many men and women, who must have been ancestors, really had as hard time to get along as you do to pay your gasoline bill and keep up vain appearances.

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ANCESTORS were always distinguished. My old friend, the spirit who sat on the edge of my ink bottle, laughed so merrily as I wrote that line that he fell in and I have just dropped the cork to him as a life preserver. Ancestors were always justices of something or other, member of the council, on the staff of the governor, sheriff of the county, the king's high jailer, or a colonel in the state militia. Well, we have all these kinds of men today, and to some of them we do not attach undue importance. We know that "Honest Sam," a member of the legislature from Skunk Wallow, is a crook, and that Col. Four Flush Falstaff of the governor's staff never smelled any stronger powder than talcum. But two hundred years from now, as ancestors, they will be a mouthful! Their portraits will hang in the parlor and a sweet little aristocratic lady, when she opens the door to visitors, will say, "Welcome to the hall of my ancestors!" Or it may be that her husband is the member of the family in whose pale blue veins flows the proud blood. Perhaps two hundred years from now, when some reporter asks him if it is true that he gave an N. G. check for his board bill, or when a bill collector asks him to come across, the little man may puff himself up to the explosion point and say, "Sir! How dare you! You do not know to whom you speak! Let me tell you, sir, that I am a descendant of the Hon. Honest Sam of Skunk Wallow and of Col. Four Flush Falstaff, who served on the governor's staff."

The little old spirit perched on the ink bottle puts another idea in the Rambler's head. It is this. If ancestors could have known how much distinction—nay, almost glory—would be conferred on their descendants by buying a piece of wild land at two shillings per acre, they would have bid the price of that land up. To be descended from Nicholas Tightwad, "the patentee or original grantee" of the tract of land called Chiniquapin Thicket, or Briar Tangle, is an honor which sets a man far above that bit of common clay, named Thomas Grubber, who bought Chiniquapin Thicket from "the original grantee," paying him a profit on his speculation, chopping down the trees, building himself a one-room log cabin and working at the praiseworthy job of raising corn and tobacco.

Many of the "original proprietors" took up land at two shillings the acre, not to live on it and make it bloom and bear fruit, but to hold it for sale at a higher figure to some landless man who felt within him the home-making urge. For ancestral purposes Nicholas Tightwad is much more ornamental than Tom Grubber, but somehow the Rambler feels that if he were walking through that country 250 years ago the sweet face of old Tom's daughter, Sallie Grubber, would make a stronger appeal to him than Miss Clarice Tightwad, in the parlor of her home on the main street of St. Mary's City or on the Duke of Gloucester street, or Boutetout street, or Queen street or Palace street in Williamsburg. But enough of idle thoughts along that line! Most men insist on measuring the importance of ancestors by the lands and offices they held. It is an unreasonable standard. Millions of ancestors, without land and who never held a public office—dog-catcher, coroner or senator—were worthy people when meas-

many ghosts in books—literary ghosts, as it were. Marley's ghost has frightened you into giving up a dollar at Christmas, and in the case of some of you that is proof of the tremendous power of a ghost. You are also aware that there are many haunted houses in Virginia and Maryland, and you could hardly believe that a house could be properly haunted without ghosts? Ghosts, perhaps, are just as well established as many other things you consider as facts.

The Rambler is not saying this in defense of ghosts. He feels that ghosts are well equipped to defend themselves. Hamlet knew that ghosts could be dangerous if they had a mind to, and he followed his father's ghost because it beckoned him and "waves me forth again," and because he did not set his life at a pin's fee. "And for my soul what can it do to that, being a thing immortal as itself?" Horatio had a pretty clear estimate of the danger of the ghost, and warned Hamlet that it might tempt him toward the flood "or the dreadful summit of the cliff, that beetles o'er his base into the sea." He thought that there the ghost might "assume some other horrible form, which might deprive your sovereignty of reason and draw you into madness."

But the particular ghost story which the little old spirit on the ink bottle urges the Rambler to tell follows:

The day was not far spent, but the shadows of the oaks made the cemetery dim. The Rambler put away the notes he had been making and moving off to another part of the great and beautiful burying ground he sat down on a flat tombstone to rest. He observed, as everybody else has observed, that some graves are carefully tended and others not; that some have costly monuments, others simple markers, and that at some graves no epitaph tells who sleeps below. He called to mind that verse of Horace's ode to Lucius Sestius, which runs:

Death, with impartial foot,  
Knocks at the hut,  
The lowly  
As the most princely gate.  
O favored friend, on life's brief date  
To count were folly;  
Soon shall, in vapors dark,  
Quenched be thy vital spark,  
And thou, a silent ghost, for Pluto's land  
Embark.

Then he fell to musing on whether there is equality in death or after death. A little way off was a ragged green box-brush, about which grew tall, rank grass. In the shabby greenery there appeared to be a form that was not shapen like a gray tomb. It had the outlines of a woman. The Rambler lighted his pipe, and as the thin blue smoke rose among the oaks this is what he thought he saw and heard:

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THE form that was not shapen like a gray tomb came toward him. It was a woman. She had rather a haughty air, as so many women have. Her bones were old and yellow, and they rattled as she walked. No doubt she had been a beautiful woman, "yet to this favor shall she come at last!" Her dress, which seemed once to have been of cream-colored satin, was now nearly as gray as the gown of a Quakeress, and it was stained with rust. The skirt was full, with big, wide flounces from the hem to the hips. You can see skirts like it in old pictures and in the National Museum. The sleeves were long, with much puffing at the shoulders, and the bodice or basque was low cut, showing the yellow ribs of the wearer. As she came near she raised the bony fingers of one hand to her eyeless sockets as though adjusting a lorgnette, and looked calmly at the Rambler.

The air along this pebble path a midnight when the moon is shining and I positively believe she make her own shrouds; at least they look homemade. I am sure she never thinks of going to a fashionable shroud-modiste! There is not the

# THE BLACK

By Fred

Translated From the French by  
WILLIAM L. McPHERSON.

"MONSIEUR, there is a gentleman outside who says he is an agent of some philanthropical society in Paris."

"Show him in," said M. Blestat, folding up his newspaper.

The servant ushered in a tall, thin personage, unkempt and seedy looking.

"Monsieur, I am honored," began the visitor, taking a seat to which M. Blestat beckoned him. "It is a charming house you have here—one of the best in the city."

"Will you kindly let me know the object of your call?" M. Blestat interrupted.

"I shall do so with pleasure. You are M. Theodor Blestat, merchant widower, fifty-five years of age, father of a young man of twenty-eight M. Philippe. Don't be impatient. You will soon understand everything. We shall dismiss the philanthropic society. That was only a means of getting in to see you. I came for another purpose. Your son, my dear monsieur is engaged to Mlle. Claire Verralive. The engagement dinner has already taken place. A good alliance—a very good alliance. A beautiful girl, with a fortune, influential relatives and high social standing. M. Verralive is a man of the old school, upright, conscientious, honorable, thoroughly conservative. His life is as clear as a crystal."

M. Blestat was a little bored. "I know M. Verralive's good qualities, as well as anybody."

"Then, my dear monsieur, what would he think of your brother Auguste?"

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M. BLESTAT almost jumped from his seat. His face grew livid.

"My dear monsieur, merely to see you at this moment would end all doubts," observed the visitor, with infinite satisfaction.

"The proposition which I am making here," he resumed, "is somewhat delicate. But my aim is to avoid in your interest the circulation of an annoying gossip. You will note, also that I am only an intermediary. The people who send me don't live here. They live in Paris. Well, they have known your brother. They know—yes, yes, they know everything. His escapades at Nantes and in Paris and, then, the grand climax at Bordeaux—his trial and his conviction. That's long ago—twenty years, at least. And he died down there, poor Auguste, before his prison term was up. Yes, one might think that I had all been forgotten! But there are people who remember it, and they chose this moment to send me here to say to you: 'Monsieur Blestat, does M. Verralive know that your brother was in jail? Have you told him so?'"

"That is the first point. Now, if M. Verralive did know, would he allow his daughter to marry you

did the price of that land up. To be descended from Nicholas Tightwad, "the patentee or original grantee" of the tract of land called Chiquapin Thicket, or Briar Tangle, is an honor which sets a man far above that bit of common clay, named Thomas Grubber, who bought Chiquapin Thicket from "the original grantee," paying him a profit on his speculation, chopping down the trees, building himself a one-room log cabin and working at the praiseworthy job of raising corn and tobacco.

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**T**HE Rambler has in mind to tell a story about a very old house on the road, or rather off the road, between Occoquan and Dumfries, and where dwelt plain people, pious, unostentatious people, in comfortable circumstances, brought about by their own industry and thrift. Many descendants of these people are living in Virginia, Kentucky and other parts of the world, and if they are good as these ancestors of whom the Rambler means to write, he would be willing to take a long walk with them and eat lunch in the woods. These are tests and trials of compatibility.

But before the Rambler gets to Rippon Lodge, the little old spirit on the ink bottle grins at him and reminds him that once upon a time he promised to tell his readers a certain ghost story. Some of you smile at ghosts—and run away from them—but the Rambler has seen many ghosts. He has seen some of them on the stage, for it would seem that many ghosts have theatrical talent. The most persistent and celebrated of these, as well as the most talkative, was the ghost of Hamlet's father, royal Dane, who burst his carements to revisit the glimpses of the moon. You have seen the ghost of Banquo. You have seen him sit in Macbeth's place at table and have seen him come and go. Macbeth saw him, too. You know that Brutus told Volunnius that the ghost of Caesar "hath appeared to me two several times by night; at Sardis once, and this last night here in Philippi's fields."

Mark told Gloucester that he (York)

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"I suppose you are acquainted with the good woman whose tomb is here?"

She liked not the question. She gave rather a disdainful toss of her bare skull, and in a voice, well modulated, but still having in it some tones like the creaking of a rusty hinge on a vault door, she said: "I know the lady you refer to, but she is not a speaking acquaintance of mine! We live in different neighborhoods in this cemetery. Our families belong to different sets."

"Julius Caesar! Madame!" exclaimed the Rambler, "and does that make a difference even among ghosts?" "Well," said the specter, "one should not expect persons of different spheres in life to be particularly neighborly just because they happen to be dead. The lady you speak of, I think, lived up in the brickyard section where Dupont Circle is now, or out in the suburbs where Sheridan Circle is, before she came here, while my family lived on Indiana Avenue! At one of the moonlight receptions which I hold at my lot on Tuesdays I have heard it whispered that the lady, at one time, did her own housework!" As the specter said this its bones seemed to shudder, but the skeleton in the dress that had been cream-colored satin, continued:

"I have also heard that her parents were engaged in trade; that her father ran a merchant mill on Rock creek, Cabin John or Pimmit run; that her grandfather was a toll-gate keeper on the Marlboro pike, and that her great-grandfather at one time had something to do with

a crystal."

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"That is the first point. Now, if M. Veralive did know, would he allow his daughter to marry your son? That is the second point. My dear monsieur, I realize that this is very embarrassing for you. You are honesty itself. You have lived a blameless life. Your son is an exceptional young man. There is no question about that. But we are business men, discussing a business proposal. You see what I am coming to, don't you? Now, don't take the trouble to argue about it. The truth is written in your face. Any one looking at you now could read it. So the third and last question is: 'How much will you offer us to suppress this scandal?' Quote your figure and I will quote mine."

There was a long silence.

"Who are you?" asked M. Blestat.

"I was a witness at poor Auguste's trial. We had been friends. He had spoken of you several times. Rightly or wrongly, he thought that you had left him in the lurch, and he held that against you. It is self-understood that when one has an honorable reputation, he doesn't want to compromise it. But a brother is a brother, in spite of everything! Yes, I know that you had a son and wanted to keep all this hidden from him. And poor Auguste had so little self-control. He was a flighty person, like myself. You are perfectly normal, monsieur. So much the better for you. In short, having been recently in straitened circumstances, I thought of you. By accident I learned that you were a prominent merchant here. Some friends gave me their advice. We formed a little association, as it were, to exploit my idea. They furnished me the money to come here. So, I came and made inquiries. It was lucky I arrived just before your son's marriage. That made things easier."

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"I SEE, however, that you don't wish to name your own price. I will tell you ours—a hundred thousand francs. It's a good figure, but