

The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,
Editor and Proprietor.

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BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

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"MOTHER'S FOOL."

"THIS plain enough to see," said a farmer's wife,

"These boys will make their marks in life; they were never made to handle a hoe, and at once to college ought to go. There's Fred, he's little better than a fool, but John and Henry must go to school." "Well, really, wife," quoth farmer Brown, as he sat his mug of cider down, "Fred does more work in a day for me than both his brothers do in three. Book larnin' will never plant one's corn, nor the potatoes, sure's you're born, nor mend a rod of broken fence— for my part, give me common sense."

But his wife was bound the roost to rule, and John and Henry were sent to school, while Fred, of course was left behind, because his mother said he had no mind.

Five years at school the students spent; then into business each one went. John learned to play the flute and fiddle, and parted his hair, of course in the middle; while his brother looked rather higher than he,

and hung out a sign—"H. Brown, M. D." Meanwhile at home their brother Fred had taken a notion into his head; but he quietly trimmed his apple trees, while somehow, either by hook or crook, he managed to read full many a book, until at last his father said, "He was getting 'book larnin'' into his head, but for all that," said farmer Brown, "he's the smartest boy there is in town."

The war broke out and Captain Fred a hundred men to battle led, and when the rebel flag came down, went marching home as General Brown. But he went to work on the farm again, and planted corn and sowed his grain, he shingled the barn and mended the fence, 'till people declared he had common sense. Now common sense was very rare, and the State-house needed a portion there; so the "family dance" moved into town, and the people called him Governor Brown; and his brothers who went to the city school came home to live with "mother's fool."

ANOTHER CHANGE.

I stand on the shores of the swift blue river, and watch the winds and the waves at play; and still, as I watch, the waves forever slip from my gaze and die away. "Stay, soft wind, and stand, fair river, and leave me never, thou perfect day;" and still, as I ask, the hours forever slip from my life and glide away.

The waves go by till my eyes are weary, they will not tarry nor turn again; "Life, new life," is their chorus cheery, "That strange new life in the vast blue main," my days go by till I stand despairing, for those who were evil and those are vain; yet hope, my heart, for the time is nearing, when I may try my life again.

THE GOVERNESS' SECRET.

CONCLUDED.

WE SOON regained our usual tranquillity. The mysterious robbery was an endless subject of wonder and conjecture. Mrs. Tenrhyn had some very strange theories on the subject. I do not think she cared much for the loss of the money, but the bracelet had been given her for a wedding present, and she valued it very much; she even declared her perfect willingness to give double the sum of money to any one who would restore it.

Poor Mr. Rivers met with no success. The notes were changed on the morning after the robbery by a gentleman whose appearance the clerk had not particularly remarked. They knew no more. It was the first time Mr. Rivers had been baffled, and he felt his disappointment most bitterly. His professional pride was wounded.

Emily's visit was drawing to a close. She was about to return to Tenrhyn Court, and was anxious that my wife, Miss Porson, and the two girls should accompany her there.

Among all the friends Miss Porson had

secured during her long residence with us, she had none more inclined to love her than Mrs. Tenrhyn.

"Never marry, Miss Porson," she would say to her at times, "never marry; but when you have succeeded in making perfect miracles of accomplishments of Grace and Clara, come and spend the rest of your life with me."

"I shall never marry, Mrs. Tenrhyn," our governess would reply, with a quiet smile.

One morning about a month after the robbery, we were all at breakfast, when there came a message to say that Mr. Barking, a draper with whom we had done business for many years, was waiting in the library, and particularly wished to see me.

"We saw Mr. Barking, yesterday, papa," said Clara. "We went to D— for our drive, and Miss Porson let us go in the shop with her."

"Yes," said Miss Porson, with a smile, "I did so; and the consequence is, confusion over the lessons. The dolls were obliged to have new dresses when Clara saw the pink muslin I had gone to purchase."

I hastily finished my breakfast, for I knew Mr. Barking had driven over from D—. I anticipated nothing more than a new pattern of some remarkable cloth, or perhaps to be asked for my advice in some matter of town business; but the first look I had of the usually smiling face told me something grave had brought my visitor there.

After the customary salutations had passed, Mr. Barking drew a purse from his pocket, and, coming near me, said: "You remember, sir, of course, the great robbery you had here some time since?"

"I need not say indeed I do," was my reply. "One of the notes advertised as lost was for twenty dollars; the number 333, the date June 4th, 185—," continued Mr. Barking.

"You are quite right, Mr. Barking," said I. "All the other notes were traced to New York. That one was not amongst the number of those changed at the bank."

Mr. Barking looked still graver as he opened the little purse, and took from it a crumpled bank-note, slightly torn.

"This is the same note, I fear, sir," he said, and laid it before me.

It was indeed. I could hardly believe the evidence of my own eyes. It was the identical piece of paper that Emily had shown my wife, while laughing over some little adventure she had with it. I took it up, and examined it over and over again. There was no mistake; it was the same. I looked at Mr. Barking without a word; some dreadful conviction came upon me; I knew not what. At last I said, "From whom have you received this note? There is no doubt it is one of those stolen."

"That is what I have hardly courage to tell you, sir," he replied. "Please remember, before I do so, that I utterly disclaim all notion of the reward. I would not touch one cent of it. What I have done is solely for the sake of justice, and that wrong shall not fall upon an innocent person."

"I quite believe it," I said; "but tell me, where did it come from?"

The man spoke slowly, and with an effort.

"It was brought to my shop, sir, yesterday morning, by a lady," said he. "I knew the note at once from the description. I said nothing about it to any one. I gave the change, and decided to bring it at once to you. I could not come yesterday—"

"But," said I, interrupting him, "who was it?"

"It was Miss Porson, sir, your governess," said I. "Miss Porson?" I exclaimed; "incredible! There is some great mistake."

Miss Porson is no more capable of a theft than I am myself."

"For all that, sir, she brought the note to my shop yesterday," said Mr. Barking.

I was literally speechless; a torrent of thought rushed through my mind. I could find no words. One thing struck me. Knowing how the note was advertised, how could she willfully take it to the very shop where handbills about it hung in the window? I asked Mr. Barking that. He could say nothing, save that she had done so. I felt convinced there was some great mistake.

"Come with me," I said; "I will show you there is some mystery; that Miss Porson knows nothing of this."

We went back to the breakfast-room. I remember the scene so well. My noble little Henry was sitting on Miss Porson's knee, smiling, as he listened to her. My wife and Mrs. Tenrhyn were watching them, and enjoying Harry's delight at the fairy

tale. I sent the children all away, and then turning to Miss Porson, said, "You were at Mr. Barking's shop yesterday, Miss Porson, were you not?"

"Yes," she replied, with a look of surprise, "I was."

"Will you tell me what you bought, and what you paid?" I asked.

"I bought several yards of pink muslin, for which I paid four dollars."

My wife and Mrs. Tenrhyn looked bewildered.

"What money did you give Mr. Barking?"

"I gave him a twenty dollar note, and he returned me the change."

"Would you mind telling me from where you had that note?" I asked, quietly, for something in the sweet pale face and clear eyes smote me with a strange pain.

"It was my own, Mr. Ferne," she replied; "I have had it for some weeks. Why? Is there something wrong about it?"

"You see," I said, placing it before her, "it is one of Emily's stolen notes—the very twenty dollar note described in the bill."

A startled scream broke from my wife. Mrs. Tenrhyn seized the note.

"It is!" she said. "It is mine!"

My eyes were riveted on Miss Porson's face. I never saw a look so ghastly or so strange as she wore then.

"I am lost!" she said. "I am bewildered. I never saw Mrs. Tenrhyn's money. I could not have her note. I never saw it."

"There may be some mistake," I said.

"Tell me from whom you had that note, and all will be well."

The pale lips grew paler. She threw up her arms as I have seen men do when about to die.

For some moments there was dead silence. Then Mrs. Tenrhyn went up to her and said, "Tell us, Miss Porson. Where did you get that note from?"

"I cannot!" came at last hoarsely from the quivering lips.

"You mean will not," continued Emily, in a clear voice. "You who have been loved and trusted by us, one and all, if you can clear yourself, and say from whence that note came, do so. If not, the shame be upon your own head."

There was no answer.

"Speak, Miss Porson," I said. "Clear yourself, if you can."

"I cannot," she said, looking at me with sad, despairing eyes.

I saw Emily was growing angry.

"Will you tell me, Miss Porson," she said, "what became of my bracelet? I care nothing for the money. Restore me that, and you may go free and unpunished."

"Do you believe me guilty, Mrs. Tenrhyn?" she cried. "Do you believe I stole your things?"

"I do," said Mrs. Tenrhyn, looking scornfully at her. "How else can I explain that note? I would have given it all," she added, passionately, "twenty times over, rather than have known you guilty of such a crime."

"She clasped her hands in dumb despair."

"In one word, Miss Porson," I said, "tell us honestly, without fear of punishment: Did you take the money and bracelet?"

Her lips moved as though she would say "No," but I could not hear the sound.

"For the last time," said I, "I ask you, will you tell me from whom you had the note?"

"I cannot!" she gasped at last. "Punish me, do with me what you will. I will say no more. Death would be only kindness. Can you give me that?"

"Come from her, Laura!" cried Mrs. Tenrhyn, seizing my wife by the arm. "That woman is a hypocrite as well as a thief. She will not speak; let her have the measure of her sin."

They went and left me with her. I spoke kindly to her. I used reason, threats, arguments, but all in vain; she would neither clear nor accuse herself.

I dismissed Mr. Barking, returning him the twenty dollars he would otherwise have lost, and then sought Laura and Emily. I found my wife in the deepest distress; she was truly attached to Miss Porson, and like myself, was quite overwhelmed by the shock. Emily was grieved and angry by turns.

After a long debate we arranged our sad business. I have liked Mrs. Tenrhyn better from that moment. She turned to me and said, in a voice full of emotion, "Miss Porson has wronged me and betrayed my trust; but she saved your child's life, and for that claim she has upon you she shall remain unpunished by me. Send her away

from here, and let the matter be forgotten; do not let me be pained by seeing her again."

I went back to the breakfast-room. I found her sitting as I had left her; the pale face had grown calmer, and the wild eyes had a wistful expression that went to my heart. I carefully closed the door.

"Let me know my doom, Mr. Ferne," she said. "I cannot bear this suspense."

"I do not ask again of your guilt or innocence, Mrs. Porson," I replied. "I bring to you a full pardon from Emily and Mrs. Ferne, but they do not wish to see you again. You must leave at once. Mrs. Tenrhyn wished me to add that she shows you this clemency because you saved little Harry's life."

Her lip quivered, and hot tears rained down her face.

"I thank them," she said. "I will go now, at once, Mr. Ferne. Tell them I am grateful with my whole heart."

"You have not acted generously, Miss Porson," I said, "to those who have trusted in you, and would have proved true friends to you until death."

"I thank you," she said, "once more for your kindness and noble conduct to me. I will go now, if you will allow me; my things can be sent after me when I have found a home." Her voice faltered; then she continued, "I have one more favor to beg of you, Mr. Ferne. There is the change given me for that fatal note; that belongs to Mrs. Tenrhyn, not to me. I have not one cent in the wide world. Will you lend me some money to take me to New York?"

"No money! Why, Miss Porson, you forget," I said, with some surprise. "You have been here six years, and have received five hundred dollars each year. You told Mrs. Ferne last year you wished to invest the five hundred dollars you had saved. Where is that money now?"

"I cannot tell you," she sobbed. "I have not one cent."

I do not know why, but from that moment a firm conviction of the poor girl's innocence took possession of me, and never again left me.

In a few minutes Miss Porson stood ready dressed and waiting to go. I had arranged to drive her to the station myself, as my wife was most anxious that the servants should know nothing of what had happened.

It was not until she had been gone some weeks that they were told the thief had been traced, and the mystery solved. Their suspicions and guesses never pointed at her.

One thing moved me; as we were going out of the hall-door, Miss Porson said to me, in a tone of urgent entreaty, "Mr. Ferne, will you, as a last kindness, let me see little Harry once again?"

I fetched the child. She clasped him in her arms, she kissed each little feature in tearful agony; then, as though blind and groping her way, she put out her hand and said, "Now, take me out. I can bear no more."

I put her in the carriage and drove her with a sad heart from the home she had so long loved—the home she was never to see again.

Her secret was well kept, but it was many long months before the memory of her gentle presence and strange conduct died away. My wife mourned her deeply; the children were always asking when she would return. But gradually the whole matter faded from our minds; a new governess took her place, Mrs. Tenrhyn married again, and my wife felt, I believe, a grief too deep to care ever to mention Miss Porson's name again.

Twenty years passed away; my daughters were both happily married. Harry—a splendid fellow he was, too—lived with us; he was a bachelor, and declared that, until he found some one as lovable as his mother, he should continue so. My wife was well and strong, and all things prospered with us. My hair had grown gray, and Laura's brown locks were tinged with silver; and yet the strange episode of our earlier life was not forgotten.

Mrs. Tenrhyn, now Madame Castella, resided with her husband in gay, sunny Florence; we heard from her often, and contemplated paying her a visit.

One morning, in the post bag there came for me a large packet; the handwriting was strange, and yet seemed half familiar. I opened it quickly; it contained several sheets of paper, closely written, and, to my intense surprise, at the end I found the name of Teresa Porson. The paper fell from my hands, for my amazement was great. I collected the sheets, and,

shut myself up in the library, read them. They were as follows:

"Twenty years have passed, Mr. Ferne, since I was dismissed from the kindest home and dearest friends I ever had. Twenty years since I held little Harry in my arms, and covered his dear face with my tears.

"I am laying now on my deathbed; the light from my home in heaven seems falling on me; by this light read, I beseech you, the truth I ought perhaps to have told you twenty years ago."

"Did you ever quite believe in my guilt? I sometimes think not, for I read compassion, such as one seldom feel for the guilty, in your face, when I looked on you for the last time. I must tell you something of my history, and I will be as brief as possible.

"I never knew the love or care of parents. I was a little child when they both died. My father's sister took care of me and brought me up. She knew she could not leave me any money; she therefore gave me what she considered equivalent to a fortune, a very superior education. She denied herself almost the necessities of life, that I might study in France and Germany. She died when I was eighteen, and her annuity of course ceased. I was then thrown entirely upon the world; but, thanks to the care of my kind aunt, I was able to do well for myself.

"I was but nineteen when I entered Mr. Norman's family as governess to his little girl. Mrs. Norman died when my pupil was born. There were two sons. The eldest, heir to his father's position and estate: the youngest, Allan, in meeting with whom I met my fate. Ah! I know it was wrong. I should never have loved him, but I was young and so lonely, and he loved me so much.

"He persuaded me to be married privately, and, to my grief and sorrow, I consented. I left his father's house under pretense of going to live with some friends, and we were married. He took me to a pretty little home, and for one short year we were perfectly happy. Then my Clarissa, my baby, was born, and earth seemed to me heaven.

"I cannot tell you how Allan fell but so it was. He soon tired of our once happy home and of me. Drink, gambling, and vice made a perfect wreck of my poor husband. At last he could no longer support me. He bade me work for myself, and I did so. I would sooner have begged for my bread than have been separated from my baby.

"I worked for my husband and myself too. His father paid his debts many times until even he cast off, and would have no more to do with him. Allan did something in the end which compelled his father to offer him a sum of money to leave the country.

"My husband went to England. None of his family were aware of his marriage, nor do I think they have ever known it. Soon after he left the country my baby—my one earthly treasure—died. My heart, my love, and the happiness of my life, lie buried with her—my darling, idolized child!

"I came then to live with your family, and found more peace and kindness under your roof than I had ever known before. You remember seeing the little shoes and golden curl that fell from my box. They had belonged to my baby. I used to sleep every night with them pressed to my heart. Little Harry reminded me of my child, and I worshiped him for her memory.

"One morning you may not perhaps remember it—you gave me a letter from my husband. I had been obliged to let him know my address, for I had had some important business to transact for him. I need not say I had ceased to love him. I thought him settled far away in England; but to my infinite distress I found he had returned to America, and had resolved to see me. I hesitated long as to whether I should confide my story to Mrs. Ferne. I never had the courage to do so. Would that I had; my life would have been very different.

"I was in a state of great agitation, when, the day before the robbery, I had another letter from my husband, saying that he must see me that night, as his life was at stake, and asking where he could meet me. I told him at the end of the shrubbery at eleven o'clock. When all in the house had retired, I went out to meet him. I was horrified at the dreadful change in him, and still more at the news he had to tell me.

CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.