

The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,
Editor and Proprietor.

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BY
FRANK MORTIMER.

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CORRIE SHERWOOD'S HERO.

An Excellent Story.

I DO not imagine Grantley to have been much above the average of New England towns in regard to virtue and religion. It had its scores of Christian people who frowned upon all not of their peculiar stamp and superscription; it had also its fair quota of scoffers who lived, like parasites, on the shortcomings of those same pious ones. It had, like other small towns, its petty aristocracy, its middle and lower classes; and taken altogether, was perhaps a fair sample of the majority of moderate-sized New England towns.

Alfred Lindsey had a good deal to contend with from the start. The class of people are not yet extinct who believe it impossible for any thing to come out of Nazareth. There were those who believed it the wildest recklessness in James Sherwood in taking a Lindsey into the store, even in the irresponsible situation of errand boy.—It had been more a matter of impulse with him, than from any deliberate benevolence he felt towards young Lindsey, or the class he represented.

I do not mean to insinuate that the Lyndseys were sinners above other men. Indeed, I rather incline to the opinion that, according to their gifts and opportunities, they were full as good as their betters. To be sure their gifts, pecuniarily considered, were exceedingly small, and they were not the sort of people to make opportunities.

Had they been fortunate enough to have been born rich, they would have made good-natured, respectable citizens, but not men and women of energy and enterprise. There was, perhaps, half a dozen families of them, and all singularly alike in character and disposition. If there be one thing above another a genuine New Englander thoroughly despises, it is shiftlessness and indolence. In a country where every man is expected to invent at least a patent gridiron, or an "improvement" on one already invented, people of the Lindsey pattern are at a sorry discount.

For three generations the Linseys had been "hewers of wood or drawers of water." Some of them had been offered opportunities of becoming artisans, but so long as they got enough to eat, and an extra shirt in case of emergency, they were content to let well enough alone. They never went to church, and had no need of fine clothes. They had very little literary taste—the annual Town Report and Farmer's Almanac furnished their year's reading. This again was not particularly expensive. They had no foolish pride of appearance, and old hats and coats, though a trifle less transparent, had the merit of costing less than window glass. They believed in taking the world easy. They fulfilled, literally the command to "take no thought for to-

morrow." They worked barely enough to keep them out of the alms-house, yet were forever hovering on the verge. People said it was "no use trying to help them," though I am rather doubtful about the experiment ever having been tried.

Up to his twelfth year Alfred Lindsey had followed in the steps of his predecessors.—He had lived principally in the streets, picking up occasional jobs of work and pretty good knowledge of human nature. No one thought to look under the tattered hat, or they might have seen a pair of brilliant gray eyes looking keenly out at the world—the busy, restless, struggling world, upon which he was only a fungus growth. Some such thoughts crept into his brain, sometimes. A longing to crowd himself into the busy ring and fight his way with the rest sometimes came over him, keeping him awake for hours after his two brothers, George and Ben, were asleep. But there never seemed to be an opening. No one saw him, apparently, and so he waited till one day Fate cleft the way for him.

An unusually heavy fall of snow, solidified by frequent rains falling upon and freezing in it, had distinguished the winter.—The streams were already swollen beyond precedent, when a strong south wind, accompanied by a heavy rain, set in. Mr. Sherwood's residence was situated on a little knoll, below which the river bent abruptly, broadening to a beautiful pond, dotted in summer with snowy lilies, and in winter by gay parties of skaters.

"Papa, isn't the river rising?" Corrie Sherwood asked, pausing at the door, on her way to her chamber.

"A little, I presume; but it won't rise high enough to reach you, little one, if you hurry off to bed," the father answered, smiling at the flushed little face, looking out of a tangle of soft chestnut hair.

"You are quite sure, papa?"

"Sure! Why, Corraline, what puts such absurd thoughts into your unusually wise little head? The river never rises half way up the knoll. Go to bed without any fears my child."

"The river does roar fearfully, James," Mrs. Sherwood said, going to the door and opening it a little way.

"Well, my dear, it's chained fast to its bed, and can't get away," he answered, with the air of a man who is conscious of having said a clever thing.

Mr. Sherwood was the merchant of Grantley. There were several grocers, and simple "storekeepers," but only one Mahomet. The others were respectable citizens, merely—Mr. Sherwood eminent and honored.—All "the best" people in Grantley—I use the word in its social, not its moral sense—patronized his house. If he sometimes took advantage of his popularity and respectability, and sold the same quality of goods at slight advance on the other Grantley dealers, it did not lessen his sales. The prestige of trading at Sherwood's was worth a small percentage.

"I wish you would go to the door and look out before retiring," his wife continued, strangely oblivious of her lord's cleverness.

"You and Corrie are nervous," he said, rising.

Standing on the broad, polished granite steps of his elegant residence, Mr. Sherwood looked down, in a double sense, at the low tumble-down hovel of Tom Lindsey.—It stood at the edge of the pond, in close proximity to the old "grist mill." The light shone out from one of the dilapidated windows, revealing a wild, turbid sea of broken ice and floating boards.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it carried off Tom's hut. I'm sure I hope it will!"—Mr. Sherwood said, coming back to his warm luxurious room. "The pond is full of floating boards, so I suppose Morton has suffered some. But he piled his boards on the river's edge to save storage. But I'm not afraid of its injuring me, and other people must look out for themselves; with which quite unheard-of sentiment Mr. Sher-

wood, merchant, retired to his virtuous repose.

"Papa, papa, wake up! Allie Lindsey is out here in a boat. Their house is carried away; and O papa, the water is all over the meadow!"

Mr. Sherwood sprang hastily to his feet, thoroughly awake.

"How came you to know about this, Corrie?" he asked, as he hastily dressed.

"Allie woke me shouting under the windows. I don't think I was sleeping very soundly, papa."

"Where is the boy, now?"

"Gone back with his mother—O, I didn't tell you his father, and George and Ben were carried away in the house. He managed to get into a boat, and took his mother out of the window, but the ice got between them and he couldn't save the rest. Ben jumped out into the water, but just as Alfred was reaching to draw him into the boat, a great piece of ice came crashing against it, carrying down poor Ben, and crushing some of the fingers on Alfred's hand. Then he saw how the water was up round our house, and he rowed clear up here, with that wounded hand, too, to tell us of the danger. Isn't he a real hero, papa?" the bright eyes flashing out their admiration.

"Yes, Corrie," he answered, promptly, a true hero."

It was hard work, but by daylight the cows, horses and swine had been driven to a place of safety. Had the work been delayed two hours longer three thousand dollars worth of stock would have perished in the waters. The water was nearly five feet deep in front of the house, and the broad, beautiful meadows stretching back to the wood was one broad lake of foamy waters, when the gray light of morning broke over the scene.

Alfred Lindsey completed his bravery by rowing against the current nearly a mile, and procuring men and boats to take away the beleaguered family.

Poor Tom Lindsey and his two boys were washed up on the meadows, crushed almost past recognition by the ice and timber.—Only Alfred and his mother, a weak, fair-faced woman, utterly devoid of ambition or energy, were left, and they utterly destitute and shelterless.

"I ought to do something for Alf," Mr. Sherwood said, after the excitement and peril were beginning to subside in Grantley, and he had ventured back to his house again. "I hardly know what is best. Giving into the Lindseys is like pouring water into a sieve."

"Why don't you hire him, papa?" Corrie asked soberly. "You could pay him more than he earned, if you thought it was right, you know."

And this was how it happened that Alfred Lindsey became a clerk—for he was soon promoted from his original post of errand boy—in the highly respectable mercantile establishment of Sherwood & Son.

As I said before, young Lindsey had much to contend against. First came his own long-seated indolence. He had never been confined to labor, and though his resolution was strong to succeed, the flesh was sometimes weak. His mother, grown weak and fretful, grew also selfishly unreasonable, and instead of helping him forward, was a perpetual drag and hindrance to his efforts, by her demands on his time and purse. With their improved finances she had developed a weak vanity for dress, and upbraided Alfred that he could not indulge her in her rapidly increasing wants.—Then there were the prejudices of all Grantley to overcome.

The thriftlessness, and indolence, and impotence of a score of uncles and cousins was a continual "old man of the sea," about his neck. No one thought to honor him the more because of them, recognizing the merit that he had vindicated itself despite untoward circumstances. He was "a Lindsey," and that fact was never lost sight of, but continually urged against him, as in

itself something too monstrous for forgiveness. We all know how the stigma of a name will cling to one, particularly in a country town, where every one's antecedents are thoroughly known, and how hard it is for one of a proscribed family to rise above the level, or pass the bounds society and common opinion have set for him.

It argued therefore no ordinary strength of character when at twenty-one Alfred Lindsey had so far overcome and lived down the prejudices of his townsmen as to be admitted—still a little reluctantly, but yet admitted—to be a young man of ability and promise.

From the first, Robert Sherwood had been Alfred's firm friend. Five years his senior, with fine natural abilities, and a superior education, it is easy to see the great help he could be to a boy like young Lindsey, if he chose. He did so choose. He spent his evenings in teaching him those studies which he had himself acquired at a great expense, and rejoiced enthusiastically when the pupil's thought sometimes outstripped the teacher's. He braved even his father's displeasure, by recognizing him as his social equal upon every possible occasion, and by his friendship and countenance forced others to do so.

"If I am anything, it is you who have made me," Alfred said, his lips trembling in spite of him, as Robert Sherwood put a paper in his hand on his twenty-first birthday, declaring him a junior partner in the great house of Sherwood & Son.

"Nonsense! You've earned the compliment—for it's not much more, you have got to put work instead of money into the firm, and I know we shall be the gainers—fully and faithfully. I hope, of course, it will be better for you, but it's no more than fair to tell you that things don't look just as I wish they did, for your sake, particularly. I'd like to promise you a larger income," he answered, earnestly.

"You are more unselfish than I," he replied, a slight color rising to his forehead. Adding, after a little pause, "I wish I had had the good fortune to have been born poor. The unlimited use of money is little better than a curse to a boy."

"It did not spoil you, at least."

"It entailed a curse that will follow me to my grave!" he said, vehemently. "It has made it a necessity—it has fitted a yoke upon my manhood, and I cannot break it! Well, perhaps it will come out all right—I mean that it shall," he added, earnestly, his fine face a trifle clouded.

"If you are in any sort of trouble—now, or ever—where I can serve you, I will do it gladly, even if it costs me my life, or what is more, my good name," was Lindsey's impulsive answer.

"I hope we shall be reduced to no such desperate straits as that, my dear fellow," he replied, smiling, "but your good-will is just as truly appreciated. By the way, I suppose you received Corrie's note?"

"Yes, but I don't think I had better come," coloring vividly.

"Not come! Why, it is got up expressly in your honor, as I read at once through that transparent little sister of mine. I would like to see you settle it with her, if you slighted her invitation."

"I am sorry to say it, because I know it will pain you," Lindsey said, hesitatingly; "but I am quite sure it would be more satisfactory if I absent myself. Don't think I mind it, it is very natural, and I can easily make an excuse that—"

"You mean that it would be more satisfactory to my father, I suppose, Lindsey?" he interrupted, gravely.

"I think so, yes."

"But am I of no account?" And Corrie—why the girl would cry herself sick over the disappointment! You are a most wonderful hero in her eyes, Alf. Her worship dates back to the time of the flood—the flood on the Connecticut, I mean," he said, laughing to cover his companion's embarrassment.

"Miss Sherwood has been very kind to

remember a poor fellow like me, at all," he replied, just a little stiffly. Then, his face softening, "I won't mind, though, if it will be any pleasure to you to have me come."

"It is not simply my pleasure that I am considering—you know it would be that—but the right of the thing. I do not consider one man's prejudices of birth should stand in another's way, a barrier between him and his rightful position. My father understands that you are to come."

"Very well; it is settled, then," Lindsey replied, turning to his desk.

But all day the thought annoyed and troubled him—the thought that he should not be quite welcome in the house of his wealthy senior. He was not at all blinded by the partnership just conferred on him. He knew quite well whom to thank for that. Besides he was proud, if he was "only a Lindsey." He knew very well that he should receive cool looks and scanty recognition from a portion of the guests. They were too well-bred to be positively rude; but there is the quiet ignoring of one's presence—the grouping together, leaving one quite alone and aside, with a score of other petty little circumstances, that tend to make the proscribed one uncomfortable. He expected to be subject to any or all of these annoyances, but because Robert desired it he would submit to the ordeal.—Possibly, too, though I cannot say, considering that he did not himself admit it, the pretty pink-tinted note which Corrie had sent him had some influence in his decision.

Through all the nine years since that night of storm and terror, Corrie Sherwood had been different to him from other girls. He blushed, even now, at the remembrance of the tearful kiss she had given him when he had lifted her light form out of the boat, in the gray dawn of that wild, frightful February morning. To be sure it was but a childish impulse of gratitude, and neither of them was more than a child, but he had never forgotten! The memory had been, simple as it was, a strong incentive to effort. Not that any presumptive or sentimental passion had grown out of it. He had never dreamed of being in love, in the received sense of the term, with his employer's daughter; yet her smile was brighter than sunshine to him, and her friendship the one thing desirable in life.

Contrary to young Lindsey's expectations, he was cordially received; the fact of his admittance into the firm, acting a most potent open sesame in that mystical circle known as "good society." Mr. Sherwood, too, met him more cordially than he had expected, though with a still little stiff, patronizing air, which said, quite as plainly as words, "You are very welcome among us, and under the circumstances have a right here, but I beg you to remember that you are not exactly of us—you understand."

But Robert and Corrie paid him the most flattering attentions, and as he promenaded up and down the long, brilliantly-lighted rooms, with Corrie Sherwood's fair hand resting lightly on his arm, and her beautiful eyes lifted trustingly to his face, he forgot all annoyance and discomfort, and lived only in the enchanted present.

But Fate which takes a malicious pleasure in making people miserable, dropped a grain of bitterness into this cup of sweetness. It was near the close of the evening's entertainment, and Lindsey had sat down for a moment near the window. The blinds were closed, but the window itself was open. Two gentlemen were talking outside. The first voice he did not at once recognize, only the words sent the blood in a quick wave from his heart to his face.

CONCLUDED IN TWO MORE NUMBERS.

A Western minister told his congregation that the first step to ruin was a yard of gay-colored ribbon. The next day a young woman out shopping told the clerk that she wanted "three more steps to ruin" to match a piece.