

The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,
Editor and Proprietor.

AN INDEPENDENT FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

Terms: IN ADVANCE
One Dollar per Year.

Vol. IV.

New Bloomfield, Pa., September 20, 1870.

No. 38.

The Bloomfield Times.

Is Published Weekly.

At New Bloomfield, Penn'a.

BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

SUBSCRIPTION TERMS.

ONE DOLLAR PER YEAR!
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The Minister of Montclair.

IT was no use; the letter's danced before his eyes, the world seemed wavering and uncertain in those days. He laid his book down, and began to think of the great trouble which was shutting him in. When the black specks first began to dance between him and his paper, months ago, he had not thought about the matter. It was something, to be sure, he must have taxed his eyes too severely. He would work a little less by lamplight—spare them a while—and he should be all right. So he had spared them more and more, and yet the specks kept on their elfin dance; and now for weeks, the conviction had been growing on him slowly, that he was going to be blind. He had not told his wife yet—how could he bear to lay on her shoulders the burden of his awful calamity? Oh, it was too hard!

And yet was it too hard? Dared he say so? he, God's minister—who had told other sufferers so many times, that their chastenings were dealt out to them by a kind father's hand, and that they should count all that brought them nearer to Him, as joyous, not grievous.

Yet speaking after the manner of this world, his burden seemed greater than he could bear. What could he do—a blind, helpless man? He must give up his work in life—let another take his ministry—sit helpless in darkness, Heaven only knew how long. Could he be thus resigned?

Then suddenly a flash of hope kindled his sky. There might be help for him.—This gathering darkness might be something which science could remove. He would be sure of that before he told Mary, and then he became feverishly impatient. He must know at once, it seemed to him—he could not wait. He called his wife and told her, with a manner which he tried hard to make calm, that he was going to town the next morning, on a little business. She wondered that he was so uncommunicative—it was not like him—but she would not trouble him with any questions. She should understand it all sometime, she knew; still she thought there was something strange in his way of speaking.

The minister strove hard for the mastery of his own spirit, as the cars whirled him along the next morning, towards the tribunal at which he was to receive his sentence. He tried to think of something else, but found the effort vain. So he said over and over, as simply as a child, one form of words:

"Father, whatever way it turns, O give me strength to bear it."

Holding fast to a prayer as to an anchor, he got out of the cars and went into the streets. What a curious mist seemed to surround all things! The houses looked like spectres through it; the very people he met, seemed like ghosts. He had not realized his defective vision so much at home, where it had come on him gradually, and all objects were so familiar. Still, with an effort he could see the signs on the street corners, and find his way.

He reached at last the residence of the distinguished oculist for whose verdict he had come. He found the parlor half filled with people, waiting like himself. He was

asked for his name, and sent in a card on which was written, "Rev. William Spencer, Montclair." Then he waited his turn. He dared not think how long the time was or what suspense he was in. He just kept his simple child's prayer in his heart, and steadied himself with it.

The time came for him at last, and he followed the boy who summoned him into a little room shaded with green furniture, and on a table a vase of flowers. The stillness of the cool-scented air refreshed him. He saw dimly, as he saw every thing that morning, a tall, slight man, with a kind face and quiet manners, who addressed him by name, invited him to sit down, and then inquired into his symptoms with such tact and sympathy, that he felt as if he were talking with a friend. At last the doctor asked him to take a seat by the window, and have his eyes examined. His heart beat chokingly, and he whispered under his breath:

"Thy will, O God, be done; only give me strength."

Dr. Gordon was silent for a moment or two—it seemed ages to Mr. Spencer. Then he said, with the tenderest and saddest voice, as if he felt to the utmost all the pain he was inflicting:

"I cannot give you any hope. The malady is incurable. You will not lose your sight not just yet, but it must come soon."

The minister tried to ask how long it would be before he should be blind; but his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth, and he could only gasp.

Dr. Gordon understood, and answered very kindly, that it might be a month; possibly two.

He stood up then, to go. He knew all hope was over. He paid his fee, and went out of the room, and out of the house. It seemed to him things had grown darker since he went in. He hardly knew how he found his way to the cars. It was about two hours past his dinner time, and he was faint for lack of food, but he did not know it. He got to the station somehow and waited for the train to start for Montclair. All the way home he kept whispering to himself, "One month, possibly two"—as if it were a lesson, on the getting by heart of which his life depended. He heard the conductor call out "Montclair" at last, and got out of the cars mechanically. His wife stood there waiting for him. She had been anxious about him all day.

"O, William!" she cried, and then she saw his face, and stopped. There was a look on it, of one over whom some awful doom is pending, a white, fixed look that chilled her. She took his arm, and they walked on silently through the summer afternoon. When they reached home, and she had taken off her bonnet, he spoke at last.

"Mary, come here and let me look at you. I want to learn your face by heart." She came and knelt by him, while he took her cheeks between his hands and studied every lineament.

"Are you going away?" she asked, after a while; for his fixed, silent mysterious gaze began to torture her.

"Yes, dear, I am going; going into the dark."

"To die?" she asked.

"Yes, to die to everything that makes up a man's life in this world," he answered bitterly.

"Mary, I am going blind. Think what that means. After a few more weeks I shall never see you again, or our children, or the dear, beautiful world where we have lived and loved each other. The whole creation is only an empty sound, forevermore! O God! how can I bear this?"

"Is there no hope?" she asked with curious calmness, at which she herself was amazed.

"None. It was my errand to town today, to find out. I have felt it coming on for months, but I hoped against hope, and now I know. Oh, Mary, to sit in darkness, until my death day, striving for a sight of your dear face! It is too bitter; and yet,

boyish, romping Will, shy, yet merry little May.

"Hush, dears," the mother said, softly, "papa is tired. You had better run out again."

"No, Mary, let them stay," he interposed, and then he said, so low that his wife's ears just caught the whisper, "I cannot see them too much in this little while."

Oh, how the days went on after that! Every day the world looked dimmer to the minister's darkened eyes. He spent nearly all his time trying to fix the things he loved, in his memory.

It was pitiful to see him going round over each well-known, well-loved scene, noting anxiously just how those treeboughs stood out against the sky, or that hill climbed toward the sunset. He studied every little flower, every fern the children gathered; for all creation seemed to take for him a new beauty and worth.—Most of all he studied the dear home faces. His wife grew used to the dim, wistful eyes following her so constantly; but the children wondered why papa liked so well to keep them in sight; why he did not read or study more.

There came a time at last, one Sunday morning, when the brilliant summer sunshine dawned for him in vain.

"Is it a bright day, dear?" he asked, hearing his wife moving about the room.

"Very bright, William."

"Open the blinds, please, and let the sunshine in at the east windows."

Mary Spencer's heart stood still within her, but she commanded her voice, and answered, steadily:

"They are open, William. The whole room is full of light."

"Mary, I cannot see; the time has come—I'm alone in the darkness."

"Not alone, my love!" she cried, in a passion of grief, and pity, and tenderness. Then she went and sat down beside him on the bed and drew his head to her bosom, and comforted him just as she was wont to comfort her children. After a time, her tender caresses, her soothing tones seemed to have healed his bruised, tortured heart. He lifted his head, kissing her, his first from out the darkness in which he must abide, and then he sent her away. I think every soul, standing face to face with an untried calamity, longs to be for a space, alone with his God.

Three hours after that, the church bells rang, and as usual, the minister and wife walked out of their dwelling, save that now he leaned on her arm. In that hour of seclusion, he had made up his mind what to do. They walked up in a familiar way and she left him at the foot of the pulpit stairs, and went back to her pew in front. He groped up to the stairs, and then rising in his place he spoke to the wondering congregation.

"Brethren, I stand before you as one on whom the Father's hand has fallen heavily. I shall never see you again in this world—you, my children, for whose souls I have striven so long. I have looked my last on your kind, familiar faces on this earth—see to it that I miss none of you when my eyes are unsealed in Heaven. Grant, O Father, that of those whom Thou has given me, I may lose none."

There was not a tearful face among those which were lifted toward him, as he stood there, with his sightless eyes raised to Heaven, his hands outstretched as if to bring down on them the blessing for which he prayed. Some of the women sobbed audibly, but the minister was calm. After a moment, he said:

"My brethren, as far as possible, the services will proceed as usual."

Then in a clear voice in which there seemed to his listener's ears some unearthly sweetness, he recited the one hundred and thirteenth psalm, commencing:

"Out of the deep have I cried unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!"

Afterwards he gave out the first line of a hymn which the congregation sang. Then he prayed, and some said who heard him,

what am I saying? Shall my Father not choose his own way to bring me to the light of Heaven? I must say, His will be done."

Just then the children came running in; that the eyes closed on earth, were surely beholding the beautiful vision, for he spoke as a son beloved, whose very soul was full of the glory of the Father's presence.

The sermon which followed was such a one as they had never before heard from his lips. There was power in it, a fervor a tenderness which no words of mine can describe. It was the testimony of a living witness who has found the Lord a very present help in time of trouble.

When all was over, and he came down the pulpit stairs, his wife stood again at the foot, and he took her arm and went out silently. He seemed to the waiting congregation, as one set apart and consecrated by the anointing of a special sorrow, and they dared not break the holy silence around him, with common speech.

The next afternoon, a committee from the church, went to the parsonage. Mrs. Spencer saw them coming and told her husband.

"It must be," he said, to ask my advice in the choice of my successor.

"I think they might have waited one day!" she cried, with a woman's passionate impatience at any seeming forgetfulness of the claims given him by his years of faithful service.

The delegation had reached the door by that time, and the minister did not answer her. She waited on the men into the study, and left them there, going about her tasks, with a heart full of bitterness. It was natural, perhaps, that they should not want a blind minister, but to tell him so now, to make the very first pang of his sorrow sharper by their unthankfulness, it was too much.

An hour passed before they went away, and then she heard her husband's voice calling her, and went into the study prepared to sympathize with sorrow. She found him sitting where she had left him, with such a look of joy, and peace, and thankfulness upon his face, as she never expected to see it wear again.

"Mary," he said, "there are some kind hearts in this world. My parish wants me to stay with them, and insist on raising my salary a hundred dollars a year."

"Want you to stay with them?" she cried, hardly understanding his words.

"Yes, I told them that I could not do them justice but they would not listen; they believe that my very affliction will give me new power over the hearts of men; that I can do as much as ever. They would not wait a day, you see, lest we should be anxious about our future."

"And I thought they were coming in indecent haste, to give you notice to go," Mrs. Spencer cried penitently. How I misjudged them! shall I never learn Christian charity!"

So it was settled that the minister of Montclair should abide with his people.

For three years more his persuasive voice called them to pursue the better way; and then his own summons came to go up higher. In those three years he had sown more seed and reaped more harvest than some men in a long lifetime. He did his work faithfully, and was ready when the hour came for him to go home. Just at the last, when those who loved him best, stood weeping at his bedside, they caught upon his face the radiance of a light not of this world. He put out his hands with a glad cry—

"I see, I see! Out of the dark into the light."

And before they could look with awe and wonder into each other's eyes, the glory had begun to fade, the outstretched hands fell heavily, and they knew that the blind minister was gone "past night past day," when before him there would be no more darkness.—*Louise Chandler Moulton.*

The Criminal Class in Peru.

No such thing as a single pickpocket or burglar exists in Peru, the stealing being all done by large gangs of horsemen and in broad daylight, on the outskirts of the town and in lonely and solitary grocery and provision stores, etc., in the suburbs. During the frequent revolutionary disturbances the police and watchmen who always carry guns and not pistols, have orders to shoot down, without hesitation, any person seen alone on the house top; and as many an inoffensive and thoughtless foreigner or American has been shot down or killed for simply going up on the flat of a house in the night time, it has so intimidated the negro or Cholo thief, that they dare not be seen prowling around alone after nightfall, and if seen in company with several of their kind after dark, they know they are watched by the police. So that a city of such wealth, with so many diamonds, silver and gold, and such costly dressings by the fair sex, Lima is less infested by robbers than any other city in the world, and even any city of twice the watchmen. Many families, whose silverware is not plated, and whose display would tempt a burglar one night in New York, go to their beds night after night without even locking their area door or back entrances; and although the petty pilfering of household servants in small articles is almost of daily occurrence; yet such a thing as a wholesale burglary is never known here.—*Letter from Lima.*

A French Thief.

The other day, says a French paper a lady went into a haberdasher's shop, Rue Richelieu, and bought a pearl-gray silk dress. The shopman had noticed a tolerably well dressed man standing at the door after the arrival of the lady and seeming to watch all her movements. Stepping up to the cashier's desk the lady drew a 200 franc note from her purse. At that moment the man outside rushed into the shop gave the lady a box on the ear, and tore the note out of her hands. "I had forbidden you to buy that dress," cried he, "but I watched you, and you shall not have it." With these words he hastened away, the lady fainted; and the persons employed in the shop, supposing the intruder to be an offended husband, made no remark and let him go. When the lady recovered the proprietor of the establishment expressed his regret at this violent scene, and pitied her for being dependent on so brutal a husband. "My husband!" cried the lady, eagerly. "Sir, that man is not my husband; I do not know him, I have never seen him." The pretended husband was a daring thief.

The Strongest Man.

There is a man living in Calhoun county Mississippi, who is supposed to be the strongest man in the State, if not in the entire south. He is thirty five years of age, and weighs two hundred and twenty-five pounds. He has been known to carry three bars of railroad iron, when it takes from three to five ordinary men to carry one. He can take a cask containing forty gallons of whisky or water, (the former is preferred, we presume,) and raise it from the ground and drink out of the bung-hole with as much ease as another could out of a pitcher; and he has frequently taken a barrel of flour under each arm, and balancing a sack of salt on his head, carried them for several hundred yards with apparently but little effort. He offers to bet that he can lift thirteen hundred pounds.

An amusing incident occurred recently at a rural school. The subject was the history of Samson and the question, "What foolish thing did Samson ever do?" Expectation was on tip-toe to ascertain his peculiar weakness, when from a front seat came the reply, given with a solemn preciseness and irresistibly ludicrous accent, "He went down among the Philistines and got a wife!"