

The Bloomfield Times.

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Editor and Proprietor.

AN INDEPENDENT FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

Terms: IN ADVANCE
One Dollar per Year.

Vol. IV.

New Bloomfield, Pa., November 8, 1870.

No. 45.

The Bloomfield Times.

Is Published Weekly,

At New Bloomfield, Penn'a.

BY

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A Woman's Secret.

MISS TIGGS was not the legitimate or accepted form of an old maid; or, in other words, Miss Tiggs was not tall, scraggy, prim and sharp-nosed. On the contrary, Miss Tiggs was of roley-poley order, short, plump and full-faced, and without a bit more primness than was necessary to keep up the dignity of the profession into which the fortune of life had cast her, for Miss Tiggs kept a boarding school for young ladies.

Besides her pupils, Miss Leonora had two nephews—one an inmate of the establishment, and one away at school in a distant city at Miss Tiggs' expense, whom she had not seen for nearly five years. The one who was an inmate of the establishment, a youth of twenty, Walter Askam by name, was under continual sentence of banishment, or, in other words, since he had reached the mature age of fifteen had been told daily that he was too old to be a dweller in the same house with his aunt's twenty-five rose buds, and that he must make up his mind to immediate removal. He had made up his mind, but somehow the sentence, though reiterated almost daily, was never carried into effect, and so this wolf remained in the fold.

To say that Walter, out of all the twenty-five charming pupils of Miss Leonora, did not see anything to charm him into breaking through that terrible line of demarcation his aunt had laid down for him, would be saying almost more than nature is capable of. There was one, the neatest and sweetest little body that ever ate bread and butter—her name it was Kate Dillon, and her age sweet sixteen—that he was especially fond of, and that state of things had existed four years, since the first day she had been taken into Miss Tiggs' school, which happened in this way.

When Miss Tiggs went to school herself, she had an intimate, Lillie Pierce, by name, with whom the school-companionship was perpetuated. Lillie married and after six years of matrimony was left a widow with one daughter. Six years' more struggle with the world as a widow, and Lillie one day laid down the load of life, and left this daughter to the tender mercies of the world as embodied in Miss Leonora Tiggs, who closed the eyes of the dying woman, and breathed in her ear the comforting assurance that Kate should never want a mother while she lived; and well she kept the promise, for in the four years she had been under her hands she had grown into as elegant a little lady as could be found in a summer day's walk, and as wonderfully in love with Walter Askam as it was possible to be. All this could not help leaking out, and into Miss Tiggs' eyes and ears, and, as a consequence, troubled her amazingly. One restriction after the other had she put on the couple, but all seemed to be of no avail, and simply made the lovers regard her as a tyrant, and one whose breast was not susceptible to the *grande passion*.

At last came the climax. Miss Tiggs entered the breakfast room one morning noiselessly and suddenly, and caught Miss Katie kissing Walter right on the lips. This was too much, and the flat went forth. Had she caught Walter kissing Katie, there might have been some condoling, but the act reversed showed malice prepense and on the spot the sentence of separation went forth, separation, not banishment for Walter from the Tiggs mansion—for Miss Leonora

could not so suddenly make up her mind to so serious a step—but the rigid confinement of Katie to the girls' apartments, so that he would be isolated, and the lovers have no chance of meeting. This was the terrible sentence of Miss Tiggs, and a sentence that was carried immediately into effect, Miss Tiggs announcing to Walter as she rebuked him for his heinous immorality, that within a very few days he would have an opportunity of judging what he ought to be by taking for his exemplar his cousin Bob, who was to spend a month from school with her for the first time in five years. This fact did not interest Walter much, for really nothing did interest him save Katie, and the only point on which he could dwell in connection with the newcomer was curiosity. Cousin Bob, according to Leonora's idea, was perfection. He was only thirteen, but an Admiral Chrichton. What he couldn't do wasn't worth doing; as to good looks, he had more of them than he knew what to do with, and was expected with them every hour at Miss Tiggs' establishment.

To change the scene to the girls' apartments. Poor Katie had now been one whole week that she had not seen Walter, and she was not only broken-hearted, but desperate. The gossip among the girls about the coming cousin Bob did not move her one bit. She knew nothing, could think nothing, but Walter, and as long as Miss Tiggs was in the house it would be impossible for her to see him; and Miss Tiggs was always in when Walter was. All the girls pitied Katie, but what could all the girls do against fate? But there was one very little girl, and as reckless as she was little, and as full of fun as she was reckless. This very little girl was always up to all the mischief that could be hatched, and had often been heard to beam the ancient days when the girls had such fun—when they used to dress up in Walter's clothes and play various pranks, generally ending in some sort of punishment from Miss Tiggs, which was only looked upon as the salt that flavored the affair. This very little girl it was, putting that and that together, who one day said to Katie, who was only waiting for a proper opportunity to burst into a hearty cry;

"Why don't you dress up and pass yourself off with Miss Tiggs for Cousin Bob, and then you can see Walter as much as you please?"

Now it was a dreadful thing for this very little girl to do such a wicked thing as this, so very little as she was too; but what shall we say of Katie, who took her as quick as lightning in her arms, and said:

"Oh, you dear little creature! how smart you are! I'll do it right away."

Well, well, the wickedness of young ladies at boarding schools never can be estimated, and therefore there need be no wonderment when we assert that Katie and this very little girl were soon laying their good-looking heads together and contriving how this notable plot could be accomplished, and at last concluded that nothing could be done without calling in the aid of Molly.

Now Molly was the maid-of-all-work for the young ladies—general dressing-maid, chamber-maid, errand-maid, and made to do all kind of things either by love or bribery; the first being the motive with Kate Dillon, for Molly had been heard several times unblushingly to declare that she would run her head off to serve that young lady, though how far running one's head off can serve any person is a problem not easily solved.

And now these three Kate, Molly and this very little girl, have their heads together, and soon the problem was solved,—first, that a suit of clothes must be got, which Molly settled by engaging to borrow the Sunday-go-to-meetings of a nephew, which she had presented him herself; and why shouldn't she borrow them, which—taking Kate in with her eye—would just fit? After this master-stroke, the trouble was almost over, for there was

nothing else but to manage the arrival between four and five o'clock p. m., this being the hour between school and supper, and of Walter's coming home, and the time when Miss Tiggs always went out. It was a bold move, but Molly could fix it. The deception could not be expected to last long for Miss Tiggs must soon find it out and punishment must follow, but Katie was willing to take all risks, so that she should only once again pass an hour with Walter.

Is there any wonder that when Miss Tiggs returned from her afternoon exercise, Molly, who was on the watch, announced that Mr. Robert Tiggs had arrived, and was at that moment in the parlor, and that Miss Leonora, with a pleasant flush mantling her yet good-looking cheeks, made very hasty steps toward that spot, and caught in her arms an apparently good-looking boy of about thirteen, who modestly returned her caresses and answered the hundred questions that were showered upon him? How came he to arrive a day sooner than he was expected? Anxiety to see his aunt. Where was his trunk? Left behind to be delivered tomorrow, for the same reason. Delicate flattery! How could Miss Tiggs withstand it! She was delighted. Several times she held the nervous and blushing boy at arm's length and declared, delightedly, that she could see nothing of the likeness of five years ago, he had so improved; and then, leading him up in front of the mirror, affirmed that he had grown very like herself—in fact, the likeness must strike everybody.

How many kisses and embraces all this was interspersed with cannot be recorded, but in the midst of it in walked Walter. The meeting between the cousins was a queer one. On his entrance Walter was constrained and offered his hand, but Cousin Bob, however backward he might have been with Aunt Leonora, was not so with Walter, for in a moment he had his arms about his neck and gave him one of the soundest kisses on the lips that had been seen or heard in that house for many a long day. Aunt Leonora saw this approvingly, but Walter rather winced under it at first, until, as it were, suddenly undergoing a revolution of sentiment, he gave a quick, piercing look at his new cousin, and as vehemently caught him in his arms and duplicated the kiss; which was all that was wanted to make Miss Tiggs burst out into a little cry of admiration, and clap her plump little hands with as much delight as though she had found a penny.

After this there was nothing for Miss Tiggs to display her delight in so practical a way as in a question of supper. For over a week Walter had taken his supper alone to keep him away from Katie, but to-night, according to Miss Tiggs' arrangement, Cousin Bob should take supper with him; and away she fluttered to make the arrangement.

Now, we are not going to intrude on the privacy of those two cousins when left alone by their aunt; so we will not only close the scene on this part, but on the supper, only asserting that if ever there were two perfectly happy cousins, that roof sheltered them. In fact, Miss Tiggs knew it, for as they rose from the table this little lady said:

"I am so delighted, Bob, to think that you and Walter have taken so great a fancy to each other that I am going to leave you as much together as possible. You shall always breakfast and sup together." ("Just like you, aunt you are always so good good," says Walter. Bob said nothing.) "And," resumed Miss Tiggs, "I have given Molly orders to change the single beadstead in your room, Walter, and put in a double one. You shall sleep together."

This was kind, but why there should come to the faces of these two happy cousins such a blank look of sudden misery, none could define but themselves. Certainly, Miss Tiggs could not, for this elder-

ly young lady was proverbially short of sight, and desperately fought against the use of glasses except in the retiracy of her own room. Therefore it was that the blank look must have escaped her notice, though Walter felt that she had read to their very hearts' cores when, a few moments afterward, and before their speech was restored, she said in a grave and altered tone of voice:

"Walter, you can go up stairs for half an hour. I wish to have some talk with your cousin." (She certainly did emphasize "cousin.") "He can go with me to my room, and I will ring when I want you."

And so these two happy cousins separated, each feeling like detected felons led to their punishment.

We shall follow Katie to Miss Tiggs' rooms, where they arrived without a word spoken on either side. It was a very droll beginning that Miss Tiggs made toward having some talk. First, she turned the gas, which had been burning brightly, to so low a point that there was something less than "a dim religious light" in the room; and secondly, she went deliberately to a closet and bringing a bottle labelled "Sherry," and two glasses, set them on the table, filled the glasses, and motioning for her companion to do the same, she quietly emptied one of them. This was an extraordinary refraction for Miss Tiggs, and only indulged in on momentous occasions, as the recipient knew, though only by hearsay. This disposed of, she settled herself in a large, easy-chair and motioned her *édevant* nephew to a seat at her feet; then, without further preliminaries, she opened on the trembling girl.

"Robert," says Miss Tiggs, "I have much to say to you, and I feel that I must say it to-night, before I sleep."

"Robert?" says Katie to herself. "Then she has not detected me."

"For," resumed Miss Tiggs, "there's no knowing what a night or day may bring forth."

Katie thought so too.

"While you were away from me, Robert, I did not feel the importance of this as I do now, but seeing you has brought it all to my mind, and I feel that you must and ought to know it."

Katie did not feel so sure of that, but was afraid to dissent.

"I am now going to tell you some part of my past life; but while I want this known to yourself, so that in case of my death you will know how to act, while I am living you must keep it always a secret locked in your own breast."

"Oh, dear! what was Katie Dillon to do now? Here was some fearful revelation coming that she did not want, and which she was sworn to keep. There was no help for it; hear it she must. Miss Tiggs went on:

"Robert, the world, even to my own relatives, has always considered me unmarried. This is not true. I have been married, and you are my child." Oh, horrors! for Katie Dillon to sit there and listen to such a confession, which she knew was not intended for her ears! She buried her face in her hands while Miss Tiggs burst into a succession of sobs.

"My poor boy, I don't wonder you hide your face for shame of your mother. And yet it is true. At an age when I should have been thinking of anything else—for I had reached thirty-five—I loved your father and married him. He was my English teacher, and for fear of the world's opinion I kept the marriage secret."

How Katie did squirm on the little stool at the good lady's feet, and how guilty she felt in listening to all this? but she could not speak, for her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

"Three months after we were married, my poor Robert, your father left me for a few weeks to go home and close his old parents' eyes, and I never saw him again. The vessel in which he sailed was never heard of."

Katie sobbed aloud, and buried her face

in Miss Tiggs' lap, half in shame at her deceit and half in sympathy; for she dearly loved her adopted mother, and felt her sorrows her own.

"Shortly after, you were born, and from that time I have passed you off as my nephew, though I knew it was wrong; yet now that it has gone on so long, it may go on until my death."

"Oh oh, oh! Miss Leonora!" sobbed Katie jumping to her feet. "I am such a wicked girl to be sitting here listening to all this, but I declare I didn't know what was coming till it was all said—I declare I didn't! Oh, indeed I am not as wicked as I look. I hope you'll forgive me. Oh dear! oh dear!"

Miss Tiggs didn't scream. She got up as quietly as though she were going to her breakfast, turned up the gas to its full height, opened a bureau drawer, put on a pair of spectacles and surveyed the trembling and crying Katie from head to foot; and having finished the inspection, only ejaculated, "Well, well!" and sat down.

Now it was Katie's turn to talk, and talk, she did. The whole story ran glibly off her tongue. Her great love for Walter, her despair at not being able to see him, the plot to reach that end, even for a few hours, braving punishment and peril: her sorrow at being made the recipient of Miss Tiggs' secret, when she thought she had been discovered and a reproach about to be administered—all this came in a storm of words, mixed up with sobs and tears; and yet Miss Tiggs only sat and said, "Well, well!" until it was all over, and then she rose up and taking the poor girl in her arms, kissed her and said, "I forgive you, Katie, I don't believe you intended wrong."

"Oh, indeed I did not!" Katie sobbed.

"And now," said Miss Tiggs, "as you have my secret, I suppose I must make a bargain with you to keep it. What shall the bargain be?"

"Let me see Walter sometimes," she answered, smiling through her tears and throwing her arms about the little lady's neck.

"That you shall, and more too. For if you love each other as much as you seem to, and it is not, as I first took it to be, child's play, God forbid that I should be the one to separate you. You are both young to marry yet, but if in another year your minds have not changed, we will see what can be done."

And Miss Tiggs was as good as her word, and always did declare, when the real cousin Bob came home, that he wasn't half as good-looking as his representative. As to Miss Tiggs' secret, a secret it always remained until she saw fit to make it known herself, which she did when she retired from business a few years after.

"Bird in Hand."

No doubt the readers of the *Times* who have traveled over the railroad from Lancaster to Philadelphia, have been amused as the brakeman would call out the stations, at the singular name of "Bird-in-Hand," and no doubt the remainder of the old proverb of "worth two in the bush," would at once come to mind.

At a recent visit to that place we came across an old gentleman who gave the following explanation of the manner in which it received its name. During the Revolutionary war, while Washington was with his army in that section of the State, word was received that a small Tory band had their head quarters at the place now called "Bird-in-Hand," and could be easily captured. A force was therefore sent to perform that duty, but while on the way, some Tory sympathizers endeavored to turn the officer in charge to another point by telling him of a larger camp of British which could easily be surprised and captured. The officer however, saying "he was sure of capturing the Tory party, and that a "Bird in the hand was worth two in the Bush," kept on his way, and met with success, and ever since, the locality has been known by the name at the head of this article.