

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
Editor and Proprietor.

AN INDEPENDENT FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

Terms: IN ADVANCE  
One Dollar per Year.

Vol. IV.

New Bloomfield, Pa., December 6, 1870.

No. 49.

## The Bloomfield Times.

Is Published Weekly.

At New Bloomfield, Penn'a.

BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

## The Missing Bonds.

IT WAS a genuine, old-fashioned, New England kitchen, wide, and cool, and airy, with a great wooden clock behind the door, its worn face embowered in a hazy mist of asparagus boughs, and a floor as white as if it were strewn with lilies—a room where the sunshine came, interweaving itself through the morning-glory vines that hung their heart-shaped leaves and blue, transparent cups athwart the deep-set windows. And Miss Agnew herself, seated in the splint-bottomed rocking-chair, where the hay-scented breeze came in from field and meadow, was no unfitting representative of the neat, methodical New England house-keeper of olden time, in her brown calico dress and stiffly brushed "front curls."

Her very occupation savored of the housewifely element; she was preparing sunny-checked pears for preserving, and as, one by one, the juicy "quarters" dropped with a clink into the shining tin pan by her side, Miss Agnew beamed contentedly down on her work, proudly conscious that she was fulfilling the whole duty of woman.

Close beside her sat a young girl of seventeen, with limpid, wine-brown eyes, and cheeks as bright as the piles of pink clouds even now closing in around the fiery gates of the September sunset. Apparently she was busied in removing the cores of the fruit, but the swift, deft motion of her hands was merely mechanical; in reality she was listening, with a soft, shy smile to the gay, rambling chat of a tall young man who leaned against the open doorway deliberately selecting the rosiest and fairest pears for his own private delectation.

"So your worldly wealth troubles you, does it, Aunt Hetty?" he demanded, after a minute or two of silence.

"Trouble is no word for it!" sighed Aunt Hetty, energetically darting the point of her knife into a plump, scarlet-flecked "Duchesse d'Angouleme." "It just drives me distracted, James Montclair!"

"I wouldn't own United States bonds," remarked James, mischievously. "Would you, little Mabel?"

Mabel's cheeks flushed pinker than ever, at this direct address; the long lashes dropped over her hazel eyes.

"I don't know, James," she answered, softly, "I should like to be rich, like Miss Agnew."

"Well, you needn't, child," said Miss Agnew, shortly. "The Bible talks about the 'deceitfulness of riches,' and I'm sure deceitfulness isn't the only drawback. I do declare, I'm sometimes tempted to put it all in the fire!"

"You had a great deal better put it into my pockets, Aunt Hetty."

"You see," went on Miss Agnew, without heeding her nephew's irreverent interruption, "I took 'em down to the bank to deposit—I thought there would be an end of all care for me—and, don't you believe they wouldn't give me the sign of a receipt! Of course I wasn't going to leave my bonds there for the benefit of the first defaulting clerk that chose to cut and run. So I brought 'em home, and put 'em in a box under the garret floor, between the cross beams. And then I thought of the rats—just suppose they should take my bonds for supper! Gracious! you may guess I jumped out of my bed pretty quick, midnight though it was, when the idea popped into my head. Then I sewed 'em into an old stocking, and put 'em in my linen-chest, and I couldn't rest night nor day, for fear of fire."

"Upon my word, Aunt Hetty," said James Montclair, laughing, "those bonds will be the death of you yet!"

"Then," pursued Aunt Hetty, "I put 'em under my pillow every night, and I just dreamed—dreamed o' burglars and robbers, and men with black crape masks over their faces, and woke up, all in a cold sweat, forty times in the course of the night!"—"That would make four times an hour, regularly," said James, in a *sotto voce* to Mabel—"sartin sure that the muzzle of a pistol was close to my head," went on Miss Agnew. "Well, that wouldn't do of course."

"I should think not, Aunt Hetty," gravely commented Mr. Montclair.

"Well, what should I do next, but put 'em in the tail pocket of Abijah's old coat that was hangin' back o' the store room door, and, says I to myself, 'They're safe now; no burglar will ever think of that old dud.' And, don't you believe, that very self-same evenin' I read a long account, in the paper, of how a man hid away money in his wife's old flannel skirt, and how she went without knowin' a t'ing about it, and sold the flannel in a pile o' paper rags to a ragman, and who was drivin' through town with a wagon and bells, and that was just the last they ever heard of their money. So there was an end of the old coat business."

"Well, Aunt Hetty, and what next?" asked her amused nephew.

"What next? I've got 'em in an old coffee-pot now, with a broken spout, hid away in the onlikeliest spot I could any ways think of."

"You won't tell us where?"

"No, I won't," nodded Miss Agnew. "I don't tell nobody my secrets. But I don't feel a bit easy about 'em, they won't stay there long, I guess. There, Mabel, we've got about enough now—just you put 'em in the butery for to-night. To-morrow Deacon Salisbury's sister's goin' to lend me her porcelain preservin' kettle, and if we don't have nice pears next winter, I'm out in my calculations, that's all. None o' your canned trash for me—pound for pound, and a good boil up with plenty of skimm'n', is my rule."

As the fluttering blue chambray dress vanished through the portals of the buttery door, James Montclair looked admiringly after its slender little wearer.

"Aunt Hetty!" said he, abruptly, "do you know that Mabel Martin is growing very pretty?"

"James!" ejaculated Miss Agnew.

"Well? why that horrified tone of voice?" demanded her nephew, half defiantly.

"James, I thought for certain you and Mary Cornell was takin' a fancy to each other!"

"My dear Aunt Hetty, do you give me credit for no taste at all?"

"To be sure, Mary Cornell isn't pretty," said Aunt Hetty; "but a person soon gets accustomed to a sallow complexion, and eyes that don't look quite straight; and her hair ain't a real, fiery red, you know, but auburn; and then she'll have all Squire Cornell's land!"

"She's welcome to it, for all of me," observed the young man, indifferently.

"And then, James—"

"Yes, Aunt Hetty."

"Mabel Martin's a nice, handy little thing enough, and I don't deny but that she's what the world calls pretty; but her folks are dreadful shiftless, and old Martin drinks terribly, and they do say that the eldest boy ain't over and above honest!"

"Granted, Aunt Hetty," said Montclair, with a slight contraction of his dark brows; "but is Mabel in any way to blame for that?"

"No; but one can't help settin' store by family, James, and—"

"I really don't s'pose we ought to blame her for the bad name her folks have got!" she thought washing off the pear stains that clung to her fingers in a bowl of tart-smelling vinegar. "But, after all's come and

gone, Obadiah Martin's daughter isn't just the wife for our James, with his book learning, and his college education, and the money his father 'll leave him!"

The old clock behind the kitchen-door had just struck ten, a solitary cricket chirped shrilly under the hearthstone, and the moonlight lay like a shivered rain of pearl on the kitchen-floor.

"Come, child, it is time to lock up and go to bed," said Miss Agnew, rousing Mabel Martin from a reverie, into which she had unconsciously fallen, with her head against the cool morning-glory leaves. And Mabel obeyed, glad that the moonlight was scarcely bright enough to disclose the deep crimson of her cheeks, and the smile that hovered around her lips.

"Mabel!"

She was sitting in the semi-luminous gloom by her casement windows, half an hour afterward, when the voice rose up to her ears from the garden below.

"Is it you, James?"

"Yes. Come down a minute the moonlight is so delicious here under the trees! It's a shame not to enjoy it!"

She was about to obey his summons, when the whisper once more sounded close beneath the window:

"Not yet, Mabel. Wait a few minutes. Aunt Hetty is going her usual round among the lilac bushes and quince-trees, in search of burglars, I suppose; and she would overwhelm us with all sorts of unearthly stories about the evil effects of night-air, and dew and moonlight. Wait!"

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed away, and Mabel stood by the window still listening, with her little scarf around her shoulders, and the roses yet glowing softly in her cheeks.

Then there was a rustle in the dewy honey-suckles beneath, and James Montclair called out, in a low tone:

"The coast is clear at last, little Mabel. Come down."

The moonlight shone full on his face, as she joined him in the garden-path, under the spreading bows of the old trees.

"James," she exclaimed, "what are you laughing at?"

"Was I laughing, little wild-flower? Nonsense! it's all your imagination!"

"But, James, you are shaking all over!"

"Ague and fever, perhaps. It's the damp night-air, light of my soul? Come, sit down here on the old gray stone, and tell me once more the sweetest story that you love me, Mabel!" The fair head drooped, the hand trembled on his arm.

"I am so unworthy of you, James!"

"Is the star unworthy of the dim human lamp upon which its clear light fall? Is the sunshine unworthy of the earth which pines for its sweet influences? Mabel you must not talk so! Now, listen to me, Pet and I will convince you that you are wrong from beginning to end, in all this morbid humility!"

It was nearly midnight, when James Montclair bade Mabel adieu at the garden-gate, and strode across the fields to the village, half a mile or so distant. And Mabel, returning up the box-bordered path softly turned the handle of the door.

It was locked! Miss Agnew had evidently made the tour of the house after Mabel's exit, and, unconscious of her absence, had locked and bolted the premises as securely as bolt, chain and bar could do the business. Little Mabel's heart stood still. Her cheeks paled as she stood there. What was she to do? What would Miss Agnew say to her, if she knew she had been out "sweethearting" in the moonlight, contrary to all rules and regulations duly enacted and enforced in the spinsters' little kingdom? Mabel was no Joan of Arc, no maid of Saragossa—she dared not face Miss Agnew, as long as there was any other loophole of escape open to her.

"I'll just run home to father's," she thought. "It's not so far, and I can get back in the morning before Miss Agnew misses me."

But, alas! "*La femme propose, et Dieu*

*dispose*," and it was nearly seven next morning when Mable Martin, with a scarf tied over her head, came into the kitchen, where, Miss Agnew was frying ham and eggs for breakfast.

"Child! where were you last night?" severely demanded the elderly maiden, brandishing her gridiron as a Knight of old might have poised his lance. "What is the meaning of this unaccustomed absence?"

Mabel hung down her head.

"I—I went home last night!"

"Went home! Four miles all by yourself, after ten o'clock at night?" severely echoed Miss Mabel.

"It wasn't so very far, Miss Agnew!"

"And how did it happen? I insist upon knowing all about it, Mabel Martin!" sternly went on the catechist.

Mabel grew scarlet and white in a breath.

"I went down into the garden, after I had gone to my room."

"What for?"

"The moonlight was soft and—"

"Well!"

"When I came back, the door was fastened, and—"

"Why didn't you knock for me to come down stairs and let you in?"

"I—I didn't wish to disturb you, so I went home to my father's!"

Alas, poor Mabel! she might have known that from one mustard-seed would rise the fatal tier of falsehood; but she had not paused to think that it would have been better to tell Miss Agnew all about James and herself, and the innocent love-gleams that were beginning to brighten her life.

Miss Agnew listened with set lips, and a brow which betokened no very favorable state of mind.

"Very good," she said coldly, as Mabel's hesitating voice died into silence. "You may go to your work."

And as soon as Mabel was fairly esconced in the buttery skimming pans of lather-wrinkled cream, with hands scarcely as steady as usual, Miss Agnew eclipsed her head in a huge green sun bonnet, stiffened with paste-board, and rushed down the garden path to a huge pear-tree, whose gnarled trunk concealed a deep hollow, curving obliquely downward to its roots. Into this hollow she thrust her arm groping eagerly in the soft black mold and slippery moss that lined this casket of nature's own fashioning.

"I thought it was so! I feared it was so!" she muttered to herself, pale and agitated. "I would rather have put them into the fire with my own hands, than be compelled to believe that Mabel Martin was—a thief!"

For the Government bonds that Miss Agnew had hidden away the night before, were gone!

"Are you sure there's no mistake, Miss Agnew?"

Justice Cornell, a soft-hearted old man, looked kindly down upon the girl, who was kneeling on the floor with her face buried in the window curtains, her low voice breaking the ominous silence with piteous iterations of sobbing sound.

"I am innocent! indeed, I am innocent!"

"How can there be any mistake, Mr. Cornell?" demanded the inexorable spinster.

"I put the papers there after ten o'clock at night. By her own confession she was in the garden after that time, and, of course, she must have seen me conceal them."

"A queer place to put Government bonds in," said the justice wrinkling his eyebrows.

"Bother the bonds! I wish that they were in the Red Sea, so I do!" ejaculated Miss Agnew so sharply and suddenly that the fat justice involuntarily started back.

"If you'd had half the trouble with them as I have, you wouldn't wonder at my wanting to hide 'em. However, that's neither here nor there. She's absent all night long, and comes back next day with

a lame excuse that won't bear the light of day, and my money is minus. What do you make of that, sir, Justice Cornell?"

The old man shook his gray head sadly. "You may as well make out a warrant for her arrest, Mr. Justice," said Miss Agnew, resolutely, "also a paper to enable us to search her father's house thoroughly."

"I hate to do it if the worst way," said the kind old man; "but if I must I must, and—why, hallo! she's fainted away!"

She had, indeed—falling on the floor as pale and motionless as if death itself had kindly come to her relief to cut the Gordian knot of her perplexities.

"I declare!" said the justice, whisking away sundry suspicious drops with the corner of his huge yellow silk pocket handkerchief, "I feel just as I did the day I butchered the children's pet lamb! It's a cruel thing to do, Miss Hetty, justice or no justice."

"I'll send over to my brother Montclair's for James," said Miss Agnew. "I didn't mean he should be mixed up in the affair; but he's a lawyer, and maybe I'd better consult him. Patrick!" to the stout charioteer who had driven her over to Justice Cornell's "go for Mr. James, immediately!" And Patrick, obeyed.

"I'll go bail for Miss Mabel, anyhow," he muttered to himself, as he urged old Dobbin to his highest rate of speed. "I'd as soon suspect a saint in glory of being a thafe, the Blessed Virgin be good to me!"

Half an hour could scarcely have elapsed when he returned, flushed and dusty, with old Dobbin's mouse-colored coat reeking with sweat.

"Where is Mr. James?" eagerly demanded his mistress.

"Sure Mr. James got a telegraph at day-break to go on to Boston, where his brother's to sail for Europe in a hurry, unexpected; and he left this letter for ye, to be delivered immediate, and the servants, bad luck to 'em entirely, never thought about it; and here it is."

Miss Agnew broke the seal of the large, official-looking envelope, and from it fell six rustic Government bonds, with a little white note folded around them.

"DEAR AUNT HETTY (it read), I expect nothing less than one of the lectures I use to get for my mad pranks, half a dozen years ago; but when I saw you stealing through the garden-walks, and hiding your precious treasures away like a magnified magpie, I couldn't resist the temptation of playing burglar, positively for one night only, as the playbills say, and abstracting your bonds just to enjoy your perplexity the next day. I expected to bring them back myself this forenoon, but circumstances decree otherwise, and here they are. I only wish I could have seen your horrified face when you missed them. Love to little Mabel, and tell her when I come back it will be to openly proclaim our engagement to the world. Don't scold the child; it isn't her fault that I fell in love with her. No time to write more, so, good-by for a week. J. M.

Miss Agnew burst into tears. The drops that had not moistened her withered cheeks for years shone brightly on them now. She threw her arms around Mabel.

"My poor child, read this note!"

And Mabel read it, while Justice Cornell slowly gathered up the bonds that lay on the floor, utterly unheeded by Miss Mabel Agnew.

"It is all right; it is!" said the old man chuckling. "Well, I thought all along there must be some mistake. Here are your bonds, Miss Agnew, and I guess we won't say anything more about the search-warrant."

It was some time before Mabel Martin gathered courage to tell Miss Agnew of the moonlight stroll. James had told her nothing of the abstracted bonds, and when the weight of the unexpected accusation came upon her, the grief and shame were almost too hard for endurance. But Miss Agnew kissed away the sound of the half-uttered words.

"It's all right and natural, child," she said; "and I believe you'll make our James a good wife."

Which was a great concession for Miss Agnew, considering her preconceived opinions.

The January sunsets were reddening the western sky when James and Mabel were married; and up to that time Miss Agnew's Government bonds had found no rest for the soles of their parchment feet.

"Take 'em, James, for a wedding present," said the old lady, on the morning of the eventful day thrusting the envelope into the nephew's hand. "There! now I can breathe freely."

And that was the way in which Miss Agnew disposed of her troublesome moneys at last.