

The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,
Editor and Proprietor.

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Miss Foster's Lovers.

A Story of Circumstantial Evidence.

ALTHOUGH still young, I had already followed the occupation of a seagoing engineer for several years, when in 18—, I joined the Charles Edward as "chief." She was a new screw clipper, and had been chartered by a party of merchants who were going to make the experiment of bringing in the early teas by steam. We were bound for Hong Kong with a general cargo; on discharging which we were to trade in the Chinese waters till the new teas were ready, when we were to take in a full cargo and make the run home with all possible speed. As we carried four engineers, I had no watch to take; but as engineers, like men, have their individual peculiarities—peculiarities with which it behooves a "chief" to be acquainted—I was fully engaged in the engine-room for the first three or four days after we left Liverpool. By the fifth day, I had got everything "shipshape," and in the afternoon was taking a leisurely turn on deck with the captain, who was an old shipmate. Our conversation at first turned upon matters relating to the navigation of the ship and the probable duration of the voyage; and from these, by an easy transition, we came to the crew.

"And who is that young swell?" I asked, nodding towards a young fellow I had occasionally seen chatting with the sailors, and who, as he was dressed as a landsman I supposed was a friend of the owners, or making the run out with us as a passenger. "Our supercargo," answered the captain. "Supercargo!" I echoed in surprise, as I glanced at his fine clothes and soft white hands. "Well, I should think that at some time he had a much better berth."

"Well, I believe this is the first berth he has ever had in the way of work," said the captain. "He was brought up to spend money, not to earn it, and considering that such was the case, he takes to the work very kindly. It's a common story enough now a-days," he continued, seeing that I was interested. "His father commenced life as a shop boy, got on, turned speculator on a large scale, made a great deal of money, and was supposed to have made still more. Having made a fortune, he attempted to make a social position by sheer dint of ostentatious expenditure, and announced that he was determined to make a gentleman of his son. Finally, in his old age, he over-speculated, and died within a month of the time when the fact of his being a bankrupt could no longer have been concealed. When his affairs were overhauled, some small pittance was saved from the wreck, and in order that it might the better support his mother and sister, this young fellow—more honor to him for it!—determined to look out for employment. As he wished first to clear right away from his old associates, he applied to one of our charter party for his present berth; and so, here he is, and all things considered, a fine young fellow. I promised to keep a friendly eye on him," concluded the captain, as I was about to return to the engine-room; "but, you know, I cannot very well be hobnobbing with him on board, and as he knows no one else in the ship, I should be glad if you'd make friends with him. You will find him a capital fellow."

As Harry Wallworth—for that I found was our supercargo's name—was of a frank cheery disposition, there was no difficulty in making friends with him; and during the run he and I became quite intimate, while his pleasant manner and good-humored conversation made him a favorite with all on board.

We reached Hong Kong in eighty-five days; and having discharged our cargo, commenced running in the Chinese waters till the new teas were ready, when we put into Foo-Chow-Foo, and having taken in a full shipment started on our homeward voyage.

We were under steam during a great part

of the run home, and much of my time was consequently passed in the engine room. But though I had now few opportunities of conversation with Wallworth for any length of time together, I noticed that he appeared to be gloomy and anxious, and that his uneasiness of mind seemed to increase as we approached home.

One evening, when we were within a few days' sail of the English coast, I went upon deck and found him walking about in the abstracted mood that had now become habitual to him. After watching him a few minutes, I joined him in his promenade, and began to rally him about his absent manner; but, as was always the case when spoken to on the subject, he by an effort threw off all appearance of uneasiness, and rapt away in his former lively style. Despite his efforts, however, to appear at ease, he soon relapsed into silence, and seemed to be scarcely conscious that I was accompanying him. Finding that his silent fit was likely to last, I left him. Early on the following morning he came into my berth, saying that he had come thus early to apologize for his apparent want of courtesy on the preceding evening.

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow," I said; "it is I who ought to apologize for intruding upon you when your mind was so evidently preoccupied."

"Well, at the time you spoke to me, Will," he answered, "I was thinking deeply upon a subject that, though a very ordinary one in itself, is at present, owing to attendant circumstances, a very painful one to me."

"Well, Harry, I have no wish to pry into your secrets," I said, "but may I ask if it is anything that has occurred on board that has caused you to be so thoughtful of late, for during the run out you were happy and light-hearted enough?"

"O no," he replied; "the subject on which I was thinking has not the remotest connection with the ship or any one on board of her. The fact of the matter is," continued Wallworth after a pause, and speaking abruptly, "it's the old, old story. I'm in love, and as I can see no prospect of the course of my love ever running smooth I'm miserable. If it won't be a bore to you to listen to my private affairs," he resumed before I could speak. "I'll explain my position to you. I feel that it would be a relief to my mind to tell it to some friend, and besides, you will perhaps be able to give me some advice."

I replied that if I could assist him by advice, or any other means in my power, I should be happy to do so. In a low hurried tone, he commenced to tell the story of his love. Briefly put, it was to the effect that he was engaged to a Miss Foster the only daughter of a Liverpool merchant. At the time the engagement was made he was considered a good match for her but his altered circumstances making a material difference, he had offered to release her from the engagement. To this she replied, that he did her an injustice if he supposed that the change in his fortunes could make her desirous of being freed from her engagement, and that she would wait for him until he could make such a position for himself as to justify him in marrying a girl, who, though undomesticated and rather extravagantly brought up, would, for his sake, do all in her power to amend her faults.

"Well, Wallworth," I said, when he had got thus far, "I see nothing in this to be miserable about. I think the young lady spoke in a manner honorable to herself and encouraging to you."

"It is not what she said that makes me miserable," he answered. "She spoke like the noble-hearted girl she is. It's what I said myself that causes my anxiety. I spoke as if I was quite certain of realizing a fortune in a few years, and that may have had the effect in inducing her to speak as she did. But you know that, practically speaking, the making of a fortune is an extremely difficult affair; and even if it is accomplished, it generally requires many years of patient toil to do it. I can hardly expect a beautiful girl—one who is constantly sought after by men of wealth and position—to waste the best years of her life in waiting a contingency that must at the best be distant, and is at present a very doubtful one. In short, Will," he said, rising from the box on which he had been seated, and speaking more passionately than he had hitherto done, "I think that I shall lose her, and the thought of it makes me wretched and unhappy."

In this frame of mind he continued to the end of the voyage, all my efforts to show him that he took an unnecessarily despondent view of his position proving in vain.

and were scarcely docked, when the agent of the owners came on board and informed the ship's company that, as soon as our cargo was discharged and another, then ready for shipping, taken in, the Charles Edward would start on a trip to Bermuda and back, and those of the crew who would like to do so could "take on" again. Wallworth, who, in common with the rest of us, had supposed that we should be paid off and the ship laid up for an indefinite period, had already determined to look out for something on shore, but on hearing this he was irresolute as to whether or not he should make the second run with us. Finally, however, it was arranged that his berth should be kept open for his acceptance to within two or three days of the time for sailing.

We had got into port on a Monday morning, and during the whole of that day Wallworth was engaged in the offices of the firm to whom our cargo was consigned; so that, till the next day, he had no opportunity of calling on the Fosters, who resided in a handsome villa a short distance from the town. On the Tuesday morning he left the ship in the best of spirits, at the prospect of seeing "Bella," about whom he had been talking most rapturously the previous evening, having effectually banished the melancholy and gloom which had affected him during the latter part of our homeward voyage. But alas for human happiness! In the evening he came on board again a disappointed man. Coming straight to the engine-room, in which I happened to be alone at the time, he abruptly exclaimed:

"The old story, Will—
"Gold thrives more in a single hour
Than love in seven long years."

There's a fellow there, a flourishing bill-discounter, who, if he is not already the accepted lover of my true love, has evidently only to speak to be so."

"I should hardly think that things had come to that pass during the short time you have been away," I said, soothingly; "perhaps you have misunderstood or taken a wrong view of something you have seen or heard."

"No I haven't," he replied testily.—"When I was shown in, this fellow was seated beside her. After rising for a minute to receive me in a stately manner, she returned to his side; and as my presence was almost entirely ignored, I soon came away."

Nothing further was said respecting his reception by Bella; but after his first indignant outburst he seemed anxious to change the conversation to other subjects, while he spoke with an affectation of gaiety greatly at variance with the real state of his feelings. While we were talking, the captain entered the engine-room, and Wallworth at once informed him that he would go with us on our next voyage.

"For you see," he said, when the captain had gone, "so far as I am concerned, I like a seafaring life, and I have now no motive for staying on shore, not being in any particular hurry for a better position than my present one."

On the following afternoon, Wallworth was informed that a gentleman was on board inquiring for him, and on going on deck he found it was the fair but faithless Bella's father, to whom he introduced me. Mr. Foster, a fine-looking middle-aged man, with a pleasant countenance and a cheery manner, had evidently a warm personal regard for Wallworth, whatever he might think of the engagement with his daughter. Wallworth was at first inclined to be sulky; but Mr. Foster, who probably guessed how things had gone on the previous day, would not notice his ill-humor, and Harry was soon restored to good-temper.—Mr. Foster having laughingly told us of the difficulties he had experienced in getting on board the Charles Edward, Wallworth and I accompanied him on shore. As we were parting from him outside the docks, he said:

"By the way, Harry, we have a little party at our place on Friday; you'll come, of course, and if Mr. Johnstone has no other engagement I shall be happy to see him with you."

The invitation having been accepted after a little hesitation, we returned to the ship.

Mr. Foster's little party turned out to be a ball. We arrived just as the first dance was finished, and found a tolerably large number assembled, among whom were several young ladies; but with the glowing description of Miss Foster's beauty, which Wallworth had given me during his love-fit on the previous Monday night, I had no difficulty in singleing her out. On seeing

Wallworth she advanced toward him, and as I had no wish to appear in the character of the proverbial third person who makes three no company, I turned off to speak to Mr. Foster, who was standing near. Notwithstanding my charitable design to leave the lovers in such privacy as the circumstances would admit of, I was compelled, owing to the comparatively loud tone in which they spoke, to overhear much of their conversation.

"Well, Harry, how are you this evening?" said the young lady, offering him her hand as she spoke.

"I am quite well, thank you," he replied coldly, and affecting not to see her proffered hand. "I trust you are well."

"Perfectly well," answered she, speaking with a contemptuous coldness that contrasted harshly with the sweet cheery tone in which she had first addressed him.

At this point the conversation seemed likely to terminate; but after a somewhat lengthy pause, Wallworth, in a low, sneering tone, asked, "How is Mr. Marlow?"

"He was quite well when I parted from him last night," she answered; "by the way, here is Mr. Marlow," she added, indicating by a glance a lumbering, coarse-featured, and heavy-bejewelled young man who at that moment entered the room, "and as I want to speak to him particularly, I must leave you."

Whereupon, with a supremely indifferent air, she did leave him, and joining the gold and gem-bedecked Mr. Marlow, was presently engaged in a conversation which, to judge from her frequent smile and animated manner, appeared to be of a lively character.

While they were still together, Mr. Foster introduced me to his daughter, adding to the usual form of introduction, that I had been Harry's guide, philosopher and friend during his maiden voyage. This piece of information, though given with a kind intention, had by no means the "desired effect." The manner of my reception was so execrably civil as to be decidedly unpleasant; but as I had a great desire to learn something concerning the disposition of the girl about whom I had heard so much during the last few days, I affected not to notice the coolness with which I had been received. Finding that I did not leave her, as she had probably anticipated I should do when the ordinary civilities of an introduction had passed between us, she motioned me to a vacant chair beside the couch on which she was seated, and after making the necessary introduction between Mr. Marlow and myself, entered into conversation with the former. I had expected to find Mr. Marlow possessed of conversational powers the brilliancy of which would make a young lady indifferent to his rather repellent personal appearance; but I was astonished to find he was insufferably dull and stupid, and that either he could not or would not converse upon any topic but business. Out of the domain of the "money article," I found it impossible to lead him, though I made several attempts to do so, in order to relieve the visible embarrassment of Miss Foster, who saw that I had done her the justice of concluding that her apparent gaiety had been put on for the purpose of annoying Wallworth. The haughty reserve with which she had received me soon gave way to the natural amiability of her disposition, more especially as I appeared to be endeavoring to save her from the disagreeable necessity of favoring Mr. Marlow with her views regarding the failure of Broker & Co., the rise in gold, and other stock exchange matters.

For a time we conversed upon a variety of common-place topics, on which, however, as they had no special bearing upon trade, Mr. Marlow was unable to say anything. After one or two attempts on his part to re-introduce business as a subject of conversation had been "put down" by Miss Foster, he relapsed into a sullen silence, and shortly after left us to go into an adjoining apartment, which had been laid out as a card-room.

Our conversation now turned on the subject of my late voyage, and the friendship contracted between Harry Wallworth and myself, and though nothing pointed was said in reference to Harry's conduct since his return from sea, I discovered that he had, as lovers occasionally will do, "made a fool of himself," by entertaining a jealousy which had no real cause.

After supper, not noticing Wallworth among the dancers, I presently went into the card-room, and to my surprise found him playing in the same set as Marlow.—They were playing for some trifling stakes, "merely by way of giving interest to the game;" and Harry, who had lost several

times in succession, was evidently irritated by the swaggering manner in which Marlow swept his winnings to a small pile of silver that lay at his elbow. At the conclusion of the first hand that I saw played, one of the by-standers, pointing to a half-crown in Marlow's heap, observed:

"There are some figures on that which will only show when you are looking at it in a particular direction."

This led to an examination of the coin, and it was then found that when looked at closely it was almost impossible to perceive any marks upon it, but when placed in a certain light a number of minute lines, apparently making up some regular design, became visible, and on a magnifying glass being brought, those lines were found to be a microscopic engraving of a hand holding a pen, and surrounded by the motto, "I perpetuate."

"I'll give you another half-crown for it," said Wallworth, who was highly pleased with this specimen of the graver's art, and who during the interruption to the card-playing, had been restored to something like his usual good-humor.

"No you won't," said Marlow, placing the coin in his pocket.

Wallworth made no reply; but seeing that he was greatly enraged by Marlow's insulting tone, and as they were about to resume their play, I whispered:

"Be a good fellow, Harry, and keep your temper."

"I'll try," he whispered back; "but I should like to give him a good thrashing for all that."

"I've no doubt you would," I said in the same low tone; "but as you cannot, in your present circumstances, indulge in your liking, try to curb yourself, and don't give him the satisfaction of seeing that he can annoy you."

Harry was about to say something in reply when we were startled by Marlow throwing his cards on the table and in a fierce tone exclaiming:

"Come, we are not going to have any confederates or cheating here."

For a moment Wallworth gazed at the speaker in speechless indignation, and then, slowly rising and putting back his chair, answered, in a tone the lowness of which only intensified its concentrated passion:

"That'll do; but mark me, you cur, if it were not for violating the hospitality of the roof under which you are, I would chastise you in such a manner that you should remember your insolence the longest day you live."

Though evidently frightened by Wallworth's threatening tone and attitude, Marlow affected to treat the matter lightly, and—doubtless emboldened by the allusion to his being the guest of Mr. Foster and the presence of other visitors—even continued his insulting language.

"It's all very fine to talk about chastising people," he said, "but cheats are generally bullies, and bullies are always cowards."

If he relied on the checks spoken of to restrain Wallworth from resenting this last insult by violence, he miscalculated their strength; for almost before he had finished speaking, Wallworth sprang at him and layelled him by a crushing blow. When the gentleman in the room had recovered from the inaction of surprise, they stepped in to prevent further violence. But restraint was no longer necessary, Wallworth's superabundant passion having found vent in the fierce though brief physical exertion he had undergone.

"I require no watching now, gentlemen," he said. "I shall take no further notice of that fellow at present. I am very much ashamed of myself for having allowed his taunts to cause me to so far forget the respect due to our host and yourselves as to have acted in the manner I have done; but," he added, an angry flush again suffusing his countenance, "the first time I meet him where I may give him the thrashing he deserves, I will make him repent his insults."

An appearance of order was soon restored; but real enjoyment was at an end, and as it was past midnight, I was just about to ask Wallworth to at once accompany me to our lodgings, when Mr. Foster came to tell me that a man from the Charles Edward wished to see me immediately.

On going into the hall I found one of the firemen, who had been sent by our third engineer to inform me that the men engaged in making some alterations in our engines, and who were working at them night and day, would be ready at four o'clock that morning to put in a certain