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TERMS :- \$1,25 Per Year, } IN ADVANCE.

AN INDEPENDENT FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

(75 Cents for 6 Months; 40 Cts. for 3 months.

Vol. VIII.

New Bloomfield, Pa., Tuesday, January 6, 1874.

No. 1.

The Bloomfield Cimes.

IS PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY MORNING, BY

FRANK MORTIMER & CO., At New Bloomfield, Perry Co., Pa.

Being provided with Steam Power, and large Cylinder and Job-Presses, we are prepared to do all kinds of Job-Printing in good style and at Low Prices.

ADVERTISING RATES: Transient-8 Cents per line for one insertion 19 " two insertions
15 " "three insertions

Business Notices in Local Column 10 Cents on For longer yearly adv'ts terms will be given upon application.

For the Bioomfield Times,

MYSTERIOUS FRIEND. THE

A Story of Old Virginia

THE incidents recorded in our story take us back to the period when Virginia was a presperous colony, and when the vicinity of the now thriving town of Jamestown was surrounded by a dense forest. It was on a pretty morning in the month of May, that a young hunter was seen standing on the northern bank of the James river, carclessly leaning on his rifle, as he waited for any game that might come

As he thus stood, his ears caught the sound of oars some distance above him, and caused him quickly to prepare himself to guard against danger from the Indians; which at that time occasionally gave the settlers some trouble.

Ere many minutes had elapsed, the youth caught sight of a small boat pulled by four stout negroes, and in the stern of which were seated a young girl and her black female attendant. The negroes were pulling at their oars with all the strength they could command, while the girl, with frantic gestures, was urging them to increase their speed if possible. The boat was now nearly a quarter of a mile distant from where the hunter stood, but yet he could plainly see the anguish that dwelt in the features of the fair pleader-not that he could make out those features in formbut the attitude, the streaming hair, and the agonized movements conveyed them to his mind, and he knew that the vindictive red man was upon their watery trail. Of course young Chester's first and only impulse upon coming to this conclusion, was to give his aid; but a moment's reflection showed him that his best course was to wait till he could see the exact position and number of the enemy.

Five minutes passed away and the hunter could not only see the features of those in the boat, but he could plainly hear the entreaties the girl put forth to her almost exhausted oarsmen. The boat was in the middle of the river, and three miuntes more would bring it opposite to where he stood; and just as he was beginning to wonder that the enemy had not come in sight, the sharp crack of a rifle struck upon his ears, and on the next instant, one of the negroes dropped his oar and fell forward at the feet of his mistress. On the next moment another report, almost an echo of the first, rang through the air, and a second negro dropped his oar. Quickly throwing his rifle across his arm, the hunter sprang down the river's bank, and on casting his eyes up the stream he saw, not more than forty rods distant, a large cance containing four Indians, which had come down under cover of the bank, in order to avoid the current which the boat had buffeted. With a presence of mind that never forsook him the young man cast a hasty glance over the canoe, and his hearer. A light smile flitted across the face quick eye told him in an instant who were the two that had fired, for their rifles lay carelessly by their sides, while the remaining two held theirs ready for use in their arms while they paddled.

The young hunter saw that he had not been detected by those in the canoe, but a glance at the boat told him that the girl had seen him. Not twenty seconds had elapsed after he sprang down the bank before he was back in his place, and with to term it, I take it most kindly, though his cap in his hand he beckoned carnestly the being does not live who can say that for the girl to have her boat turned towards the shore. The hunter could see that she of Ada Wimple, and she refused it," she understood his signal, and also that she trusted him, for he saw that she was urging the terror stricken negroes to pull for the bank where he stood. The canoe had turned its head towards the middle of the river, now that the boat was brought so

the Indians, two of whom were paddling, while the other two stood up with their rifles in their hands. The hunter raised his rifle, and was upon the point of firing at one of the red men, when a sudden idea flashed through his mind, and, loosing his finger from the trigger, he waited with his weapon still against his shoulder. The canoe had just begun to turn its head in shore again, as the beat changed its course, and, if it rounded-to enough, the two standing Indians would be brought within range of his rifle! Anxiously the hunter awaited the result. Slowly came the canoe about in her angle, and gradually the space between the two Indians grew less. At length the moment came-the line of the hunter's never-failing aim passed through the neck of the nearest, and struck upon the head of the furthest Indian. With a a steady hand he pulled the trigger, and while yet the sharp report was ringing through the forest the two red men fell!

The two remaining negroes heard the report, and, each believing himself to be the object of its deathly intent, they both dropped their oars; but the girl who had comprehended the whole, and who had seen two of her enemies fall, soon managed to convince the poor creatures of their safety, and once more they took up their oars and pulled for the shore, while the two surviving Indians, completely terrorstruck at this unexpected catastrophe, had sprung to their feet, and were gazing earnestly at the spot where the smoke of the hunter's rifle was curling up above the bushes. With that sagacity which ever characterizes the red man, they seemed at once to understand that there could be but one man on the shore, for had there been more there would certainly have been another shot, and instantly springing forward, one of them selzed the only remaing loaded rifle-one had fallen into the river when its owner fell-and turned its muzzle towards the spot where his eagle eye had caught the outlines of the hunter's form through the shrubbery. But the Indian was too late. Nearly a minute had elapsed since Chester had fired, and his rifle was again loaded. The white man caught his enemy's movement just as he picked up his fallen brother's weapon, and as quick as thought his own trusty rifle was on the aim, and another Indian fell to rise no

The single surviving savage saw his companion drop, and on the instant he resorted to the only means for his salvation. He seized a paddle and quickly bending himself to the task he shot the pliable canoe up the river. The tide was in his favor, and as he shaped his course obliquely towards the opposite bank, he was out of danger ere his dreaded foe could reload his rifle.

Just as Orlando Chester had finished reloading his rifle, the bows of the boat touched upon the shore, and as he hastened down to meet it, the girl sprang out upon the sand, and fell upon her knees at the hunter's feet.

"O, kind sir, whoever you be," she uttered as she clasped her hands in gratitude, "how shall I repay you for this."

"Lady, you can easily pay me for what I have done. I have but performed a duty I owe the world ; go you and do the same. When you can assist a fellow-mortal, do lt, and I shall be amply repaid."

The girl had expected to have seen the rough hunter, and to have heard the harsh tones of a voice that only naswered to the howl of the wild beast and the yell of the red savage; but, instead, she saw a countenance of rare beauty and youth, varying with a hundred shades of noble generosity and kindness, and the voice struck upon her ear in tones of a rich, melting cadence, tinged with the plaintive cast which ever excites sympathy in the bosom of the of the young hunter as he noticed the maiden's passing emotions, and letting go the hand which he seemed to have forgotten he held, he continued :

"I know your thoughts, lady. You wonder that a poor hunter should have asked no boon in return for his services, but should rather have given only a piece of seeming advice."

"And as for your advice, as you please assistance within her power was ever asked replied.

"Ada Wimple !" uttered the hunter. "Then you are the daughter of Sir Ol-

iver, whose plantation is below here."

"I am, sir." A moment young Chester seemed puzzled near, and Chester could see the heads of by the manner of the being he had rescued, I have been busy since you were gone. I put it in here yesterday, I am sure."

for he had not the assurance to think that have plucked fresh flowers, and to-day I fail to see that in her eyes there shone a frail !" light which must have emanated from some other cause than that of mere wonder. Her | the youth. father Oliver Wimple, he had often seen, and he knew him as one of the most wealthy and influential men in the colony. It may be that the hunter experienced a momentary regret that the maiden was not poor like himself; but be that as it may, he soon banished all thoughts to that effect, and resuming his wonted composure, he said : "You were venturesome to go so far up

the river, lady." "But I thought not that the Indians

were so near us, sir." "O, yes, the red-skin ventures even

below here; and if I mistake not, they have lately paid your father's plantation a

"Yes sir, they have; and he had some of them, whom he caught, severely whipped, and I think those who chased my boat were the ones."

"No doubt of it, lady. The red man has keen eyes, and if he has once seen your father's boat he will never forget it. If they had cause of enmity against him, they would venture far to be revenged; and had they overtaken you, you would doubtless have been a corpse ere this. Be more careful in the future."

"But come, you should be on your way home for the day is far advanced, and your parents will be anxious,"

"And will you not go with me and receive the thanks of my father?" asked the girl, casting an earnest look on her com-

Only for a moment the young man hesitated, and then replied, "No I cannot

"There is no danger for you on the river below here, and your two remaining negroes can easily row you down. There is one not far from here whom I must protect and comfort; but yet I trust this will not be our last meeting. Something tells me we shall meet again."

"If we both live we shall," uttered Ada, with more earnestness than she was aware of. " But before I go, I would know the name of him who saved me."

"Orlando Chester is the name I bear; but few know it, however."

"There is one who knows it now, and who will ever hold it in grateful remembrance," said the fair girl, and as she spoke, she extended her hand. Orlando took it, and raised it to his lips, and on the next moment he assisted Ada into her bont.

Until the departing boat was lost to his sight did the young hunter stand upon the river's bank and gaze upon the form of its fair occupant. His eyes were moistened with a new and strange emotion as the frail bark disappeared, and after gazing a moment upon the vacant spot where last be had seen it, he threw his trusty rifle across his shoulder, and whistling to his dogs, he turned away and struck into a narrow path that led off through the deep forest.

The hunter's way lay towards the Chickahominy branch, and at the end of nearly a mile and a half he came to a small clearing in the centre of which stood a well built log-cabin. A single oaken door, formed of heavy plank securely pinned together, with a small square window on each side, ornamented the front of the humble dwelling, while the narrow walk which led to the entrance was flanked on either side by several flower beds, which beds betrayed taste and refinement. Close by the cabin ran a murmuring brook, upon the mossy banks of which, unaided and uncultivated, grew a thousand wild flowers, and the waters of which lent a soothing, cooling influence to the surrounding atmosphere.

The interior of this cabin presented the same peculiar tastes that were apparent without. The walls were neatly plastered with a cement made from the red clay that formed the lower stratum of some of the uplands; and all about, in strange, fantastic wreaths, were hung evergreens and wild flowers. The floor was white and clear, and every arrangement spoke of the strange genius that presided over the place.

The young hunter went to a small shed that extended from the back of the house, and having deposited a deer he had shot, and cut off several slices of the venison for the dogs, he turned towards the door. "I have returned, my mother, and

Orlando, as he entered the dwelling "So you are a good boy, Orlando; but I shall have no need of meat to-day. See !

brought with me some venison," said

anything in his own form or features had shall live upon their fragrance. Alas! that mother?" so moved her; and yet her words were not flowers should die! That the only faithwithout a turn to that effect, nor could be ful things that God has made should be so

"And am not I faithful, mother?" asked

"Yes, my son, you are faithful; and though you are your father's child, and cruel! Why, why, should they have stothough that father was my husband, yet I love you. But he! Ah! why did he desert me? When he went away he told me that I should see him again; but years have rolled by since then, and still he comes not. O, how cruel for him to desert me thus ! But you will not leave me, my dear boy."

"Never," uttered the youth; and as he spoke he threw his arms about his mother's neck and kissed ber.

The poor woman drew her son to her bosom, and after returning his kiss, she said:

"There, Orlando, go you now and bid Elpsey prepare you some food, for you cannot live upon these flowers, as I can."

Morgiana Chester was what the reader must have already suppose—insane! She could not yet have seen forty years, and though there was no bloom upon her cheek, yet there was a transcendent beauty in her features. Her eyes were large and dark, and into their brilliant depths one might have gazed for hours and not guess that reason had flown from the mind that looked through them.

Orlando could remember nothing back of his mother's strange mania; and the first thing plainly fixed in his memory was of having lived somewhere in Massachusetts colony, and of having come from there to Virginia in a vessel, accompanied by his mother and a negro woman named Elpsey. Yet he knew that his mother was grown to womanhood before she left England, though he could not ascertain from her whether he was born there or in Massachusetts.

The old negress said that her lady had much money when she first lived with her; but as it had been long since gone, Orlando supposed that the amount could not have been very considerable, though it might have appeared so to the eyes of Elpsey. In fact, the only thing that Orlando could gain with definiteness from his mother was, that his father had deserted her; and he reasonably supposed that circumstance caused her mental derangement; and yet Morgiana never breathed a word against her husband in anger-she only mourned his faithlessness and sometimes wept over her loneliness.

The old negress was not long in predown to the repast he urged his mother to partake with him, but she persisted in the in a voice of much power, but yet far from assertion that she needed no food and so the youth ate alone.

The young man had finished his repast, and already had the sun sunk behind the tree-tops as he arose from the table. As he turned towards his mother he was somewhat surprised to find her in a seeming meditation. The vacant look that usually rested upon her features when she assumed a musing attitude was not there, but the same strange, sparkling light that shone upon her more active movements was still in her eyes, though its beams were more steady and intense.

"Yes, yes, I did put it in there," she murmured, as she rose from her seat a moment after her son had commenced watching her. "Yes, 'twas yesterday I put it there, for I remember it well. How could I have forgotten it ?"

As she spoke she went to a large oaken chest that stood in one corner and commenced taking out the contents and placing them upon the floor. Orlando gazed a moment upon his mother's movements, and then a bright tear-drop stole down his cheek. A thousand times had he seen the poor woman do this, and he knew that she suffered extremely whenever the strange delusion came over her. Slowly and care fully Morgiana Chester took article after article from the chest; each one she would unfold and examine, then lay it aside for the next. And so she went on till every article in the chest had been examined. after which she diligently searched every nook and corner of the inside. The chest was perfectly plain, with not even a till to break the sameness of its interior, and after a moment's examination she turned to her son and asked :

"Orlando, have you been here since

yesterday ?" "No, mother, I have not."

"Some one has been here and stolen my money. O, how could they be so cruel! I

"Was it money that you put there

"Yes, 'twas money. 'Twas money to me, 'twas money to you; for 'twas my life that I put there, 'Twas a simple thing; yet I would not wish to lose it, and so I put it in here and locked it up, and the key I have worn about my neck. O, cruel,

"Perhaps you may find it yet, my dear mother," urged the youth, in as hopeful a tone as he could command. "Surely no one could have taken it, and besides, per-

haps you have mislaid it." "No, no," returned his mother, while the big tears began to gather in her eyes, "I shall never, never find it again. Yesterday I placed it there, and now it is gone! Was it not wicked, Orlando, for them to steal my only treasure? My husband gave it to me the night he went away," and as she said this the poor woman covered her face and sobbed aloud.

Though the son had often seen his mother go through the same fruitless search, yet he could not help wondering what could be the nature of the lost secret, and what. treasure had thus been concealed. That it. was some paper of value he felt assured, while he was equally confident that its. recovery would have a powerful influence on the mental disease of his mother, and perhaps on his own condition in life. Whether his impressions were correct or not, our readers will learn in due time.

CHAPTER II. THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER APPEARS.

About a week after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, as Orlando was one morning arranging his furs near the house preparatory to a trip to Jamestown, he was startled by the approach of a hunter whose appearance was not calculated to produce a pleasing impression.

The gigantic form of the stranger was clothed in a rough hunter's garb, and the skins of which it was formed plainly told that he must have procured them far north of Virginia. A long, heavy rifle, ponderous but comely in its proportions, a huntingknife, shot-pouch and horn, completed the the new comer's outward attire, and, take him all in all, he was one whom few would dare to excite to anger.

"Good morning, stranger," said Orlando, as the man came up, at the same time advancing to offer his hand.

The new comer started at the tones of the young man's voice, and ere he spoke, he gazed for a moment eagerly into young Chester's face. A shade of some strong emotion passed quickly over his bronzed paring a meal for Orlando; and as he sat | features; but it was gone on the instant, and taking the proffered hand, he said, unpleasant :

> "A pleasant morning to you, sir. In faith, but you've a paradise of a spot here in the wilderness,"

> "It's a pleasant spot, sir," returned Orlando, seeming grateful for the encomium thus passed upon his home.

> "Tis such a one as I could almost fancy," the stranger said, as he cast his eyes around upon the blooming flowers; "but I fear me these pretty things would soon run to ruin under my care. 'Tis a woman's hand, though, that tends them now. Your wife, I suppose."

> "No, sir," replied Orlando, while a shade of sadness swept across his features, "'tis the hand of my mother."

The stranger cast a searching look into the eyes of the youth, and once more he glanced over the garden. Then he said:

"She's a strange being ; but," he coutinued, suddenly changing his tone and manner, " are you not fearful of danger in so remote a place? The Indians sometimes venture here, do they not?"

"Yes; but I harm them not, and they harm not me."

"How was it on the river, a week

"Ha! how learned you of that?" "How could such a deed remain unknown ?"

"But why think you it was me?" The stranger gazed into the young man's face for a moment, and while a peculiar meaning played over his countenance, he

answered: "Could you have heard Ada Wimple

"Could you have heard Ada Wimple describe the fair youth who saved hereven to the tones of his voice, the sparkle of his eyes, the coler of his hair, not the kind fealings of his seul, you would not ask me such a question."

The rich blood mounted to the brow of the young hunter, and his eyes fell to a downcast turn, for the stranger's words had sent a strange thrill to his soul; but soon recovering his composure, he said:

(CONTINUED ON SECOND PAGE.)