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MALCOM KIRK. A Tale of Moral Heroism in Overcoming the World.

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON, Author of "In His Steps," "Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days."

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CHAPTER IX. KIRK PREVENTS A LYNCHING.

As Malcom Kirk and Carver ran on directly in the face of that wild line of fire and smoke there was only one supreme thought in the mind of Malcom. He saw the boy's mother, and while he ran he heard her voice as she had appealed to him in his study.

Instinctively the two men bore off from the road over which the horses had entered the town toward a swale where the grass and rosin weeds grew deep, and it was but a few feet from the beaten track of the prairie road that they saw the body of Philip Barton...

Dorothy came to the door of the parsonage, stood there a moment and then ran, with other women, her neighbors, down to the main street.

Bucket lines were being formed from all the wells and cisterns that were available. Instantly joined with the others in handling the water.

"Have you seen Mr. Kirk?" Dorothy asked as she first joined the others. And they told her. Her face blanched and her lips breathed a prayer as she worked on silently.



They ran with their unconscious burden between them.

him at that moment was in the line of duty, and she would not have called him back from it. But her heart cried out for help, and she agonized for him whom her soul dearly loved.

They had been talking excitedly together. "Mr. Kirk, we are of the opinion that this fire was incendiary."

"How is that?" asked Malcom, rousing up a little. "The first seen of it was in the tower. Now, the fire from the prairie could not possibly have caught up there. Some one must have set it."

Then different ones began to whisper their suspicions. The next day, while Malcom and Dorothy were staying with one of the church members who took them into his home, the rumor grew that the fire was the work of the whisky men.

Down on the street excited groups of men gathered that evening, discussing the matter. Every one knew that Malcom Kirk had fought the saloons from the first day of his entrance into Conrad.

So there was reason in the suspicion held by the citizens. As the evening wore on proof of a certain saloon man's guilt seemed almost sure. Two or three persons had seen him coming out of the parsonage yard that afternoon of the fire.

It was now 10 o'clock. The crowd at the corner by the postoffice grew every minute larger and more threatening. Groups of men stood surrounding some speaker who urged lynching as the only satisfactory punishment for such a crime.

"Mr. Kirk, we've proof that 'Big Jake' set fire to your church." Malcom looked over the crowd a moment in silence. He had not been thinking so much about the loss of his church and parsonage as he came down town as about Dorothy and his future prospects.

He had more than one Sunday evening held outdoor services at the very corner where the crowd now gathered. Dorothy had often helped him at such times by playing and singing.

There was an empty dry goods box near one of the stores, and Malcom Kirk asked some of the men to drag it out to the corner of the sidewalk. The minute he had mounted it the crowd became silent.

It is a rare gift to be able to speak to a great crowd of men out of doors and hold them. Kirk possessed that gift. His voice was a splendid instrument, and he knew how to use it.

And he used it now in a godlike manner. He began by calling attention to the fact that the people of the state were trying to abolish the saloon by legislative amendment to the constitution.

"I am perhaps," continued Malcom, "the most interested person in this whole matter. It is my church that has been burned and my home that has been destroyed."

"After all," said Malcom when it was all over, as he sat down by Dorothy on a trunk while a little group of neighbors stood by discussing the incidents of the fire.

He got down off the box after he had spoken and appealed in a quiet but powerful manner to some of the more influential men in the crowd not to let the men act lawlessly.

Malcom Kirk sat there gazing at the ruins of his home and his church, and deep down in his heart there was a mighty conflict going on. He had lost his books, nearly all that were of value, and the other losses were great.

For a moment he hardly heard what some of his parishioners were saying.

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Ethel—No doubt you'd make a good one. You've well used to powder, you know.—Black and White.

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