

LITTLE FOLKS

'I Didn't Think.'

If all the troubles in the world,
Were traced back to their start,
We'd find not one in ten begun
From want of willing heart.
But there's a sly woe-working elf
Who lurks about youth's brink,
And sure dismay he brings always—
The elf 'I didn't think.'

He seems so sorry when he's caught,
His mien is all contrite,
He so regrets the woe he's wrought,
And wants to make things right,
But wishes do not heal a wound,
Or weld a broken link,
The heart aches on, the link is gone—
All through 'I didn't think.'

I half believe that ugly sprite,
Bold, wicked, 'I don't care,'
In life's long run less harm has done
Because he is so rare.
And one can be so stern with him,
Can make the monster shrink;
But, lack-a-day, what can we say,
To whining 'Didn't think?'

This most unpleasant imp of strife
Pursues us everywhere,
There's scarcely one whole day of life
He does not cause us care;
Small woes and great he brings the world,
Strong ships are forced to sink,
And trains from iron tracks are hurle,
By stupid 'Didn't think.'

When brain is comrade to the heart,
And heart from soul draws grace,
'I didn't think' will quick depart
For lack of resting place.
If from that great unselfish stream,
The Golden Rule, we drink,
We'll keep God's laws and have no cause
To say: 'I didn't think.'

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

How the Crossroads Schools Discovered a Hero.

(Kathryn Mortimer, in the 'Epworth Herald'.)

In two more days school would be over for three long months. A group of boys of all ages and sizes stood in front of the weather-beaten country schoolhouse, discussing the prospects for vacation fun.

'I'm going to the city for a month,' said Ted Baldwin, 'and then my cousins are coming home with me to spend the other two months. Their school doesn't close as early as ours. Hello! There's Duncan's Pietro. I suppose he's going to spend his vacation building a hospital for toads and stray cats. 'Fore I'd be such a Nancy as he is!'

'Oh, say, now, Ted! He's not such a bad sort. I wish somebody would tell why we fellows are forever tormenting him.' It was Rex Norton who took the little Italian's part, Rex was 'small for his age,' the neighbors said; but his ready smile made up for his lack of height, and he carried perpetual sunshine with him.

Ted did not attempt to answer for himself or his mates, but stood watching the short but sturdy figure as it climbed up the long hill.

'Hurry up, Petey,' called one of the boys. 'You'll be late. Teacher's clock won't wait for Italy.'

Pietro gave him a glance that was half-smiling, half-distrustful, and hurried on toward the door, as if he feared a trick of some sort were about to be played upon him.

But the boys were again absorbed in their planning. In fact, they became so interested

that they were in danger of being late themselves, and Miss Glidden finally had to ring the desk-bell outside the door to attract their attention.

When the children were all in their places, Miss Glidden read the morning lesson and led them in a song. Then she requested them to take out their 'history readers.' The lesson for to-day was about Abraham Lincoln, and when it was finished their teacher asked them to tell what quality they admired most in the man of whom they all loved to read.

The boys gave many reasons—all but Pietro. He sat staring straight ahead with his great black eyes, and was as silent as if he were voiceless. At last Miss Glidden spoke to him. 'Pietro,' she said, 'tell us why you admire Mr. Lincoln.'

Pietro fidgeted uncomfortably—he was sure the boys would laugh at him. Then looking straight into Miss Glidden's face, he answered: 'Because he didn't like to fight.'

Yes, it was just as he thought. The boys were all laughing now; and Patrick Kelly whispered to his neighbor, Ward Elkins: 'He wouldn't fight! What do you think of that! But it's just like the little Eye talian. He's a regular coward. Do you mind how he ran away when we killed that snake the other day?' Then he saw Miss Glidden's eye upon him, and he straightened up.

'Yes, Pietro,' said their teacher, 'Mr. Lincoln, although President during a long and terrible war, was a man of peace, and would have been very glad indeed if the country could have settled her dispute without those terrible years of suffering and bloodshed. Now, will you not tell us why it is nobler sometimes not to fight?'

But Pietro was overcome with confusion, and sat silently staring at her with his solemn big eyes; so she gave them an answer of her own.

'There is often a better way of gaining a victory than by the use of weapons of warfare, or with fists,' she said. 'The boy who is constantly seeking a fight is more often a bully than brave.'

Freddy Brown glanced slyly across at Patrick on the next bench, and Patrick, for some reason which the boys seemed to understand, looked foolish and uncomfortable.

'Now,' continued Miss Glidden, 'we must go on with the regular lessons. But to-morrow I am going to ask you to tell me about some heroes who showed their bravery in another way than by fighting. I wonder how many we can think of.'

When school was dismissed that afternoon, Ray Cullen called the boys together and proposed that they should go swimming down in the 'big basin.' The 'big basin' was an oddly-shaped bayou, which had been hollowed out by the river when it changed its course once upon a time. The water in the basin was nearly always warm, and there was just enough of sunshine and shadow to make it an ideal place for swimming.

Pietro had started off alone toward home. Rex caught sight of him, and was seized with one of his sudden generous impulses. 'Come along, Pietro,' he called through his hands, 'down to the river.'

'Oh, let him alone!' exclaimed Pat. 'We don't want him.'

'Yes, we do,' retorted Rex, quickly. For once he had forgotten to be afraid of the big boy. 'Any way, I do. Come on, Pietro,' he called again, and Pietro turned and went with them, wondering what had happened to make them so friendly.

It was a perfect day, and the boys were soon shouting and splashing about in great glee. In the midst of their fun Rex made a discovery.

A cow had escaped from the pasture near by, and was wandering along the edge of the river toward a place which the boys called the 'danger hole.' The water had an unsettled look there, and people said that if anyone were to enter it he would be sucked down, never to rise again.

'That's one of Comstock's cows,' Rex exclaimed. 'I'm going to head her off. If she gets into that hole she'll be drowned.'

'Oh, Rex,' protested his brother, 'you're forever hunting some uncomfortable duty. Stay up here where it's pleasant.'

But Rex did not heed. He was already gliding down the 'basin,' with long, steady strokes. Pietro was close behind him. Mr. Duncan was an excellent swimmer, and he had taught the little adopted waif so well that the Italian boy had few equals, though not many of the older boys had found it out.

Rex stopped down-stream, just ahead of the navigating cow, and started her back up the bank. But suddenly she took a perverse notion into her cowish brain, and struck out, straight for the middle of the stream, with Rex in close pursuit. When she felt the strong force of the current, however, instinct told her it was time to turn back. With a struggling leap she veered around and started toward the shore.

Poor Rex was directly in the way of Bossy's hoofs, and a moment later he was striving to get his breath and wondering what made his right arm feel so queer. He tried to swim out of the current, but that arm refused to work, and while he managed to keep himself afloat he felt that he was drifting aside, and straight toward the dreaded danger-hole.

But he had forgotten Pietro. The Italian boy had gone in toward the shore when the chase began. Now he saw that something was the matter, and he began swimming out and down the stream as fast as his swift, sure strokes would carry him.

Rex was at the very edge of the dreadful hole: in another moment he would be drawn into it. The boys in the basin were shouting vehement calls, but they seemed afraid to come to his rescue. Pietro was very near now. Swiftly he shot ahead, and throwing his left arm about Rex, he began slowly to work his way out, while Rex helped as best he could with his uninjured arm. He was a plucky lad and did not hinder his rescuer by becoming panic-stricken, as many boys would have done.

In a few minutes the boys were safe. They allowed themselves to float along with the current until they were past the danger-point, and then worked gradually across to the shore. Their comrades had come to their senses by this time, and were hastening to meet them.

The boys gathered about the two adventurers and escorted them back to the bank of the 'big basin.' Because they were boys, and not girls, they said little about Pietro's share in the affair; but they called him 'old fellow,' and Pietro knew what that meant.

The next morning Miss Glidden, true to her promise, asked for names for her hero list. Little Dick Warren's hand went up like a flash, but before she had time to call upon him twenty lusty voices shouted 'Pietro Beltrami!'

Miss Glidden looked very much surprised; so when the uproar was over they had to tell her all about it. And Ted put the finishing touch to the story by exclaiming: 'Yes, and if that red cow had been in there he would have gone back and dragged her out, too!'

Of course they all laughed then; but it was a jolly, friendly laugh, and Pietro was glad, because it made Miss Glidden forget to praise him before the school. He knew the boys never would call him a coward again, even though he would not fight nor kill snakes, and that was sufficient.