

# THE HOMESTEADERS

## PRELUDE

**S**IX little slates clattered into place, and six little figures stood erect between their benches.

"Right! Turn!" said the master. "March! School is dismissed"; and six pairs of bare little legs twinkled along the aisle, across the well-worn threshold, down the big stone step, and into the dusty road, warm with the rays of the Indian summer sun.

The master watched them from the open window until they vanished behind a ridge of beech trees that cut his vision from the concession. While they remained within sight a smile played upon the features of his strong, sun-burned face, but as the last little calico dress was swallowed by the wood the smile died down, and for a moment he stood, a grave and thoughtful statue framed within the white pine casings of the sash. His sober grey eyes stared unseeing into the forest, while the light wind that stirred the golden maple leaves toyed gently with his unruly locks.