

BOYS AND GIRLS

In a Prairie Freshet

A TRUE STORY.

(Sidney Dayre, in the 'Presbyterian Journal'.)

'Surely you're not going out, when it looks so stormy?' asked father.

'Why, of course, father, I must.'

'I don't believe anybody else will be there,' said mother, with an uneasy glance at the clouds.

'Oh, yes, there will be. Not many, but some of my little chicks are too brave to stay at home.'

'The creek will be high. Up to the bridge, likely. It poured and rained all night,' her father added.

'That will not keep them at home, though,' replied the daughter, and then the cheery, hard-working school-mistress said good-bye, and set out on her muddy walk along the prairie road. The cheeriness faded a little from her eyes as she went on, for in her heart lay a small shadow, cast by unfulfilled longings and ambitions. She was unconscious of the mud, and of the picking of her way from one side to the other, in the absorption of her mind in one prevailing thought.

'Oh, dear, I should like to go East.'

'East!' meant so much in the way of opportunity for growing, widening, improving. As often before she sighed it to herself for want of someone else to whom she could sigh it. Never to father or mother, for they were growing old, and needed her. Not to the neighbors, for the dwellers on the prairie farms, far away from town or railway, did not sympathize with any such ambition, and probably would have been shocked at her indulging it.

Janet Wells had formed a warm friendship with the lady who for two or three years had taught the township school, making the Well's home her own. Since then Janet had read all she could find to read, had subscribed for a magazine, and besides, had been sent away for a year or two to a school in the nearest town, where she had made enthusiastic use of all the privileges within her reach.

Returning home, she had herself been appointed teacher for the district. A great rise, so the neighbors said, and so, with pride and delight, thought her parents. For a time Janet was satisfied, but the longing revived for something beyond—something greater and better.

Her mind was swiftly recalled from day-dreams to stern realities as she reached the creek. The first sight of its swift, turbid waters brought back her mother's foreboding.

'It's really not so bad as I thought. If I had time, and it was not so muddy, I'd run back and tell mother. But I must not keep the children waiting. If the weather looks threatening I believe I'll dismiss them early.'

Her way led for a little distance along the stream, as she came near the school-house, set close to the bank on a bend, around which the water hurried with a babbling and boiling delightful to a dozen or so children who played on its brink. The boys were bare-legged, wading into the shallow water, which, in one low place, had already overflowed the bank, while the

girls threw in sticks to watch them toss and whirl until they disappeared under the bridge.

'You here, Kitty! Why, I thought such a little one would stay at home to-day. Come out of the water, boys.'

'Well, there are not many of us here,' gazing with a smile on the gathering on the benches, 'but more, I believe, than I thought would come. Thirteen of you. A brave baker's dozen. Now for lessons.'

The school work went busily on, notwithstanding an occasional anxious glance of the young teacher's eyes at the clouds, as an increasing shadow darkened the room, so slowly as to be at first scarcely noticeable. She went at length to the door to take a glance outside.

The rains farther up the creek, which wound through an undulating country, must have been more severe, for even during the time in which they had been in the schoolhouse a change had taken place in their surroundings. A little above the slightly built school-house was a place in the bank somewhat lower than the ground on which the little building stood. As the young girl considered this, the oldest of the small boys, two or three of whom, recognizing the fact that this was a day of lax discipline had followed her pointed up stream.

'The water's spilling out there.'

'See—makin' a little bit of a creek this side.'

Janet saw the slight ripple over the bank taking a direction behind the house, which, in time, would cut off the building from the surrounding ground and inwardly determined to have no afternoon session.

'Run in, run in,' she called, as rain began to fall, and the laughing youngsters scampered to shelter.

The rain continued, but not so heavy as to cause alarm. Quiet again fell on the small students, to be followed by a rush and a roar which brought all to their feet with scared, wondering faces.

'Back, back, all of you,' cried Janet, as a frightened little group crowded near her at the door. The small porch on which some of them would have set heedless feet was breaking away, partly with a crash and a splash. And all about them was water, rushing, foaming, raging with all the violence created by a cloud-burst a few miles higher up. The bank above had given way, and a new torrent whirled and foamed along the back of the house. Under them, too, the strong current was busy with the foundations, and already the frail building rocked and trembled.

'What shall I do?' was the cry in Janet's heart. Thirteen little ones crowded about her with wide-open eyes and lips quivering with fear. Were these innocent little lives indeed in peril? There was no help near. Either she must be equal to this most-undreamed of occasion, or they would be helpless in the threatened catastrophe.

With hasty, reassuring words she put them from her. 'Polly, Jack, all of you—you must do exactly what I say, so that I can get you out of this. For I'm going to, mind. Polly and Tom, you are the oldest; you show the others how to wait while I take Kitty first—'

Seizing the smallest child, she stepped

out of the door—to find the water up to her waist. Land was twenty feet away—twenty feet of boiling, rushing water, but not for one moment did the young teacher give up the determination to bring to safety those entrusted to her care.

But she had miscalculated her strength and that of the foe against whom she strove. Whirled about, swept along, buffeted, she fought her way, sometimes nearly off her feet, her heart straining in wild supplication for the help which did not fail, so that, with what seemed her last possible effort, she grasped the limb of a tree and found her footing.

'Now, Kitty,' she gasped, setting the dripping child on firm ground, 'run, run as fast as you can to Mr. Wade's, and tell him to come and help us. Run, Kitty!'

Janet's idea had been to bring each of her charges to safety in the same way. But now with a despairing heart she realized the impossibility of it. Her strength seemed gone. It would be all she could do to get back to them. This she must do—share their peril, to die with them if need be.

The straining eyes swept the horizon in search of help, of which there was slight hope. The sodden earth and pouring rain kept within doors the few neighbors in the thinly settled country.

But—was here an unlooked-for chance of help? New hope sprang to her heart at the sight of an old horse at some little distance along the bank, patiently awaiting the movements of two of her young pupils whom he had brought to school.

Quickly making her way to the horse she seized the stout rope by which he was tied to a tree, loosed him and led him to the bank of the now rapidly deepening water. Calculating her point nearest the school-house, she again plunged into the torrent, leading the horse.

'Courage now—good old Sawdust. Get up—in with you,' she called, peremptorily shouting her orders, as the frightened animal at first resisted a little.

'Come on, good old fellow—no, boys, stay where you are—.' She was distracted between her efforts with the horse and her fear that some of the excited and clamoring children might venture into the water.

Higher and swifter it rose, sweeping on with a force which the girl desperately strove to stem, a creaking and rending, mingled with the roar of the angry flood, sending a new terror to her heart. She dragged the horse to the corner of the building, and tied the rope to one of the foundation timbers. Loosened from its foundations, the school was already rocking and whirling before the new onset.

'Now, Sawdust—get up—get up.'

Heading the horse a little down stream until the rope was drawn taut, Janet rejoiced to see that the building readily moved after him. But the creaking and splintering behind her told of the impending collapse, and still with loud cries she urged him on.

It was short work. The moment in which the tottering building touched the opposite bank there came a scramble of scared morsels of children, some in Janet's own brave arms, some leaping to the ground. None too soon, for, as the school-house swayed and was again driven on the