

BOYS AND GIRLS

Christ in the School

A LEAP FROM MEMORY.

(Mrs. J. M. Johnston, Chicago, Ill., in 'National Sabbath Alliance Leaflet.')

A TRUE STORY.

Among my early recollections is a canvas-covered waggon in which my father and his family journeyed from 'York State' into the wilds of Michigan. Log houses, acres of girdled trees, yellow stacks of unhoused grain, stables roofed with weathen-beaten straw, were in evidence as the beginnings of citizenship and future thrift in our new Western home. One of the first public enterprises of our community was a school-house. Most of the cabin homes were vocal with child life—whistling, barefooted boys, and blithe, bashful, girls, who bore their share of toil on the farm and in the home. These fathers and mothers from Eastern States knew the value of the school-house, and meant to give their children a chance in life.

In due course of time a school-house, the only frame building for miles, marked the Four Corners. To our childish eyes it was fine, with its three bright windows on either side, its 'entry-way' built out in front, with shelves for dinner baskets and water pail. The white paint, the new board fence about it, all set against the massive forest trees in its rear, made a pretty picture. Its very presence preached a little sermon. The few Christian families began to say, 'Now we can have a Sunday service when a preacher comes our way.'

But religious families were in the minority. Only a few observed the Sabbath, and fewer longed for the sanctuary. A strong infidel sentiment was in the air, scattering noxious seeds broadcast. The house was completed in mid-summer, but stood closed until winter, when a teacher was hired and school opened. He was a man in middle life, had mastered the three R's, read Voltaire and Paine's writings, and knew something of the tricks of 'spiritualism,' just then gaining notoriety. The latter was an assurance that he was an up-to-date man. Besides, he had muscular brawn sufficient to manage the big boys of the district. The winter passed with little of interest. It came to be understood that the school-house was closed to all religious services except funerals, should death dare trespass on such pre-occupied territory.

Spring came. The busy 'men folks' thought of little except aggressive farm work and breaking up new ground, planting broader acres, and perhaps the building of a barn here and there. A ripple of interest was created in our home by the coming of a neighbor to spend the afternoon with my mother. She announced that a Miss Rex, from the East, had come to visit a sister who lived over on the town line; that she had applied for the school, and the director had offered her two dollars and a half a week, with 'board around.' If she passed examination she was to open school the first Monday in May.

Examinations passed successfully, and one bright morning, arrayed in our clean,

best aprons, with dinner baskets and books in hand, we gathered at the school-house. The new teacher was there—a tall, fair girl, with large, gentle eyes, and winning manners. She was simply dressed in a light print, with a ribbon at her throat. Her face, but for its luminous eyes and serenity, was not beautiful, but as she stood in timid, yet self-controlled attitude before us, my heart opened in a great love to her.

One by one the little bare feet pattering over the cool floor, slipped into place, and silence fell over all. Then the teacher said, as I recall it: 'Good morning, little folks. I am glad to see you, and hope soon to know all your names. As we come to be good friends, there are many things we can learn from each other. When we just do our best I shall learn from you and you also from me. So we shall all be scholars and all teachers. Don't you think that will be pleasant?'

All the hands went up in an instant. She had won her first victory. Continuing, she said: 'I have a dear Friend. He has taken care of me ever since I can remember—yes, always. Since he is so good to me and helps me when I need, do you wonder that I like to ask him for help? Wouldn't you?'

Every hand went up again. Picking up a little Testament from her desk, she said: 'This is a letter from him; I will read you a few things he says.' In a low, sweet voice she read selected verses from John's First Epistle. Closing the book, she appealed to us again: 'Shall we thank this dear Friend, yours and mine, for what he tells us about love, and for the good things he gives us every day? Shall we ask him to help us to be good and faithful to him and to each other?'

Again the little vote was unanimous. Quietly dropping on her knees, she breathed a simple, trustful prayer. A great power for good seemed to have fallen upon us. The brief petitions finished, she went methodically about the duties of the day. She had made an impression upon my heart that never faded.

Of course, I told my mother about the new teacher, the letter and the prayer. When mother said to father with a little smile: 'The first religious service was held in our school-house this morning,' 'What!' said father. 'Bravo for Miss Rex. She must be ignorant of her surroundings or a heroine.'

'She is a brave Christian, I trust, and may be a great blessing to this neighborhood,' was the quiet response.

From conversation that followed, I inferred that it was not unlikely she might be dismissed from her situation or requested to discontinue morning devotions. To my great joy, neither occurred. She seemed not to be conscious of evil about her, but walked before us as though God's hand led her. There was a timid sympathy in many of the homes. The indifferent jested coarsely, while occasionally was heard a muttered threat to the effect that if a man were to introduce such ardent nonsense it would not be tolerated, but as she was only a girl, her influence was of no account anyway—better not notice it.

The mothers soon began to plan for their older daughters to attend school.

Realizing the refining influence of the teacher, they made personal sacrifices, and soon a class of older girls was entered for certain days each week. The last to enter was Lucy Denver, the director's daughter, a girl of fifteen. She was a dark-eyed brunette, as tropical in disposition as in features, quick, impulsive, self-willed, quite in contrast to her younger brother, a fair-faced, gentle boy, who had been a pupil from the opening day. The first morning of Lucy's attendance she brought a note from her father which stated that his daughter was not obliged to listen to any 'pious nonsense' at the opening of school. Miss Rex read it respectfully, while Lucy waited by her side. Then, laying her hand gently on Lucy's arm, she said with her winning smile:

'Miss Lucy, I am glad to have you here. I am sure you will be a great help to the arithmetic class. I hear you are quick in numbers, and were a real inspiration to the class last winter. I will give you the farthest seat next the door, the seat of honor, we will call it, as you are probably the oldest pupil here. But another reason is that your father requests that you shall not be obliged to attend the first exercise in the morning. As that is the last ten minutes before nine o'clock, the time for beginning school proper, you can time your coming so as to enter then, and can slip in without disturbance. You will like that seat, no doubt. The morning air comes in so cool and fresh there. Now, as it is just time to strike the bell, you can withdraw if you wish.'

Lucy nodded assent, sauntered back to her seat, deposited her books, but instead of withdrawing, with a shade of embarrassment and a do-as-I-please look in her eye settled into her seat. Evidently as she was not obliged to listen, her curiosity was prompting her to do so this once.

The oldest boy in school was Conger Butler, a tall, slender lad, with an expansive brow and pale face. He lived alone with a bachelor brother. Conger kept the house while Richard worked the farm. They were the remnants of a family out of which had died the parents, two sisters and a brother, all smitten by consumption. These two, the eldest and the youngest, were devotedly attached to each other. Conger loved books and study, and Richard gratified every wish so far as possible, shielding him with the tenderness of a mother. This is how he, a boy of thirteen, came to be a pupil in our summer school. Conger had never had religious training. This side of his nature was a garden of weeds. He had entered school but a few days before Lucy, and the two new scholars sat directly opposite. The impressive moments of devotion passed with their usual quiet and attention.

The heat of summer was growing more intense, and our teacher's duties more arduous with the advent of the older pupils. But the patient sweetness of her nature rose above the weariness and anxiety that sometimes pressed upon her.

After the first morning Lucy remained outside. A week or more had passed since she came, when one morning, in the midst of prayer, a ball bounded over the floor, and a titter of suppressed laughter was heard near the door. Attention was distracted, and there was a general stir and