

FIGS OF THISTLES.

As laborers set in a vineyard,
Are we set in life's field,
To plant and to garner the harvest
Our future shall yield.

And never since harvests were ripened,
Or laborers born,
Did men gather figs of the thistle,
Or grapes of the thorn.

Even he who has faithfully scattered
Clean seed in the ground,
Has found, where the green blade was growing,
Tares of evil abound.

For labor ends not with the planting—
Sure watch must we keep,
Since the enemy sows in the night-time,
While husbandmen sleep.

And sins all unsought and unbidden
Take root in the mind;
Vile seeds are they, choking the blossoms,
Chance-sown by the wind.

But no good crop our hands have not planted
Doth Providence send,
Nor doth that which we planted have increase
Till we water and tend.

By our fruits, whether good, whether evil,
At the last are we shown;
And he who has nothing to gather,
By his lack shall be known.

And no useless creature escapeth
His righteous reward;
For the tree or the soul that is barren,
Is cur'd of the Lord.

—Phoebe Cary.

CAUGHT IN A PRAIRIE STORM.

Prairies! The very name can make me shiver. When covered with snow they are as trackless as is the ocean to an unskilled navigator. I would about as soon cross the Sahara without a guide as to try to get over the snowy plains of the west and northwest. The real fright I once had in one of these tracks, sir, was bad enough to serve me for a lifetime.

Tell us about it, Captain.

Well, I don't mind. My uncle Dan and his family were staying at D. settlement; for he had taken the western fever, and they went out there. Uncle Dan was always a speculator—though he did manage to line his pockets well. He purchased a vast tract of land at D. with an eye, it must have been, to some such promises as were held out to Abraham of old; for acres and acres of his land he could never personally utilize, though later he might sell it again to advantage. I was out helping him. The family consisted of his wife, two grown-up daughters, and two young sons; and there was a niece, Cordelia. From the first moment I saw Cordelia Barwell I thought a great deal of her. Perhaps that's why I stayed in the uncivilized place.

"Rolf," said uncle Dan one morning in the latter part of the winter, "it looks like a fine day, does it not?"

"Clear and bright, sir," I replied.

"Ay, likely to last. What say you, then, to taking Brown Bess and going to Bingley's Mills for me?"

"I will go with pleasure, Uncle Dan."

"The weather may break up any week, now, Rolf, and I must have the lumber ready to come down the river as far as the Forks with the freshets. There's a master lot to be got down next season, and we shall have a vast deal of teaming to bring it over from the Forks. But Rolf, I know it will be a good speculation. By erecting a number of cheap substantial buildings on sections of my land, I can advertise and sell first rate."

"Well, sir, I am ready to go over to Bingley's Mills for you, and make what arrangements you please about the timber."

"So, Hector, boy, go out and get the mare harnessed."

"Uncle Dan, may I go to Bingley's Mills too?" cried a pleading, pretty voice, as Hector leaped off on his errand.

"I could hardly believe my ears. The voice was Cordelia's."

"The child must be crazy!" called out aunt. "Do you know the length of the journey, Delia?"

"It's a lovely day, aunt. It won't hurt me."

"Yes, it is a lovely day, mother; so clear and calm," cried one of the other girls—Myra, I think—with quite an eager tone. "And poor Delia never goes anywhere."

That was true; but still I felt astonished. Later, I knew that it was a kind of conspiracy. The girls all wanted to get some trustworthy person to go to the postoffice at Bingley's Mills, to post letters and get some that were lying there, not intended for papa and mamma to read.

"I really don't see why Delia should not go," said the unsuspicious, good-natured uncle. "You will be sure to take care of her, Rolf."

"I will try to, sir."

So in less than half an hour from the time it was first mentioned, I was gathering up the reins, and Brown Bess was tossing her head until the bells jingled merrily.

"It's royal traveling," called out Uncle Dan, as we started. "Don't be out late, Rolf, for it has been a severe snap of weather lately, and—"

The rest was lost in the crunching of the crusty snow, and the ping, ping, ping of the cup-shaped bells.

"This is an unexpected honor, Miss Cordelia," I began, as the sleigh went smoothly along.

"Susan and Almira voted me their minister plenipotentiary," she responded coldly.

I and Cordelia—who was no blood relation of mine—had had a falling out of recent date, which made it all the more surprising she should have cared to go with me that day. She was one of those high-spirited girls who never strike their colors.

It had happened one evening about a week before. My aunt had had a gathering—for there were settlers enough in the vicinity to give us social evenings—and about a dozen people were present. You may fancy, perhaps, that we have no intelligent spirits in the prairies, but this is a mistake.

Cordelia and I had disputed about the relative characteristics of men and women. She claimed the sweet attributes of patience, purity, and constancy, claimed them entirely for her sex. I gave genius, persistency, and strength of character to mine. To vex her still further, I averred my opinion that women were a mass of sentimentality, impromptu shrieks and vacillations.

I had gone too far. She took it seriously. With a flash of scorn from her brilliant eyes and a high color, she arose, went to the other side of the room, and busied herself with some old ladies.

The storm had not blown over. Cordelia retained her anger. More hurt at it than I would confess, I would gladly have apologized; but her manner repulsed all overtures of reconciliation. Once, when I had accidentally caught hold of her hand, she twisted her own away, and gave a scornful fling at mine.

Now you know just what our social atmosphere was, when fate, that winter morning, decided that we should start together on that long ride.

The bells danced merrily, the air was clear, the sky blue; all things were pleasant except Delia. Say what I would, she was ungracious and hardly answered me. I suppose she wanted me to understand she had not come with me for pleasure, but to get the letters. We had gone miles beyond the last settler's cabin that we should see until we came into the vicinity of Bingley's Mills, when she apparently thought better of her behavior, and spoke of her own accord cheerfully.

"How natural it is for the greater part of people to attach themselves to home, let it be where it may!"

"True."

"Two years ago I could not have believed that I should have followed my aunt's family West, and been content to live on the outmost bounds of civilization. I'm sure I wonder that you stay, Mr. Rolf."

"Do you! How well Brown Bess goes to-day!"

"She always does. There's not her equal in Uncle Dan's stables."

We arrived at Bingley's Mills—the largest settlement thereabouts, and the post town—a little after noon. Brown Bess had tossed her nimble heels well. Appointing three hours for the mare to rest, I went about my business, leaving Cordelia to do hers at the post house, and to remain at the inn in the middle of the village.

Chatting with this one, and chatting with that, and getting through Uncle Dan's commissions, the short winter day flew away like magic. Meanwhile, the cloudless, clear sky had become covered with a gray thickness, that suggested the idea of another snow-storm, and ought to have warned me to get done quicker, but it did not. When Brown Bess and the sleigh came around to the inn door, the sun, wading for hours through snow-clouds, had sunk into a bank of leaden blue, and could not be more than an hour high.

"A little risk," said the man, glancing at the cardinal points of the compass and shaking his head slightly.

Cordelia, her glowing cheeks nearly as bright as her scarlet hood, came forward with an animated manner. As I drew the buffaloes around her, I thought how, a week ago, I should have esteemed the privilege of this close companionship as invaluable. But I did not seem

to appreciate it now. She had treated me too cavalierly, and I had grown somewhat resentful.

We dashed away. The air was damp and cutting, and as we came upon the open prairie it stung our cheeks like needles. Half an hour after I said to her—"If the snow only stays off, we shall get along nicely." Cordelia glanced up from her scarlet hood! She did not seem to think much about it one way or the other.

"Did you accomplish your postal commission, Miss Cordelia?"

"Oh, yes, thank you."

At the very moment a particle of icy snow fell on my glove. I would not believe but that the mare had flung the particles from her flying heels. In a moment more a handful of fine particles sifted over us both. Cordelia gave me a half-startled glance. I spoke out cheerfully to the mare, and tucked the blankets in around my companion. A half-hour longer found the northeast wind steadily and perceptibly rising, while the icy flakes tinkled on the crusty surface around our way. Quite soon there were small whirlwinds driving the dry, powdery stuff around and around, and then spinning it up in a little column. Darkness came down rapidly, but not before the wind had fearfully increased, and the atmosphere was white with tiny flakes that drifted by us in loose bulging folds.

Cordelia did not speak, she only tightened the fur scarf around her neck, and sat perfectly quiet. At that moment I would have given a fortune if the girl had been safely at my uncle's, and I breasting the storm alone. We came to a belt of woodland, just ten miles of our journey through; nearly twenty more before us. Heaven! it seemed like a voyage across the world. And a most awful fear was tugging at my heart.

A white gloom was let down around us. On and on we went. I did not speak to the mare nor whip her; there was no need. She was trotting like a race horse, her tail streaming in over the dashboard of the sleigh.

Another hour passed. The light snow was mounting above the runners, and driving obliquely across our laps in blinding, smothering thickness. Still we were getting on well, I hoped were nearing home.

"Are you cold?" I asked, drawing Cordelia closer to me.

"Nothing to speak of," she cheerfully replied. But I felt a strong shudder shake her from head to foot.

Presently the sleigh pitched considerably, although I held a tight rein.

"Rolf," she began, and I thought I again felt her frame tremble, though her voice was cool and steady, "the wind does not strike us just as it did; neither did we pitch this morning as we are doing now. Have we lost the road?"

"By Heaven, you have spoken my thoughts, Cordelia!" I ejaculated, while a damp, icy coldness broke out from every pore of my skin. She shuddered again, but said nothing.

I knotted the reins and dropped them over the dashboard. This was why the mare had held hardy—she knew better than I. I must trust to her instinct. In twenty minutes she had swung around so as to bring the wind on the old quarter with us. It was blowing heavy. I put my arms around my companion to hold the blankets in place.

Just then a faint sound reached my startled ear. A swift shudder shook me, and I came near crying aloud. Another melancholy cry. I would have drawn the blankets about Cordelia's head.

"I hear it," she softly whispered. And in my terror and agony I drew her closer in a covetous clasp.

The sound came again. The mare heard it also, I knew, for she gave a sudden leap, and then the jingling of the bells was changed to even stroke. She had broken from a hard trot into a gallop. My thoughts flew to the utmost bounds of earth in a moment, and from earth to heaven. I prayed for the safety of my companion more than for my own.

The short cry and the long wail. Wolves were calling each other to the banquet. The moments fled; the storm suddenly abated; but the deadly sounds grew each moment more distinct. The wind swept by us and died away at the right; no snow was falling; but nearer and nearer came those fearful sounds. Every moment we were in danger of striking some obstacle, and of being hurled out.

We were actually flying over the ground. We could not be far from home; but in the universal whiteness there there was no landmark, and alas! every yelp was now distinct and audible. The dreadful animals must soon leap upon us. I looked from side to side, expect-

ing a gaunt form to spring against the sleigh. Brown Bess, true to herself and to us, bore on steadily and fleetly. She knew the way.

I tried to draw Cordelia down to the bottom of the sleigh. But she resisted. "Don't, Rolf. I would rather meet my death with my eyes open," she said, pushing away the furs from her face.

The darkness was as intense as it can be in winter, and—Heaven have mercy! are they surrounding us? Hear the yelps ahead, the hungry cries! The air seemed rent with demoniac yells, snarls, and shrieking howls.

Remembering the short-handled ax in the bottom of the sleigh, I threw off my gloves, and seized it with a grip of desperation.

With my foot braced upon the iron of the sleigh outside, I half knelt, ax in hand, expecting one of the dusky fiends to leap each instant upon us. The mare wavered a moment as the sounds grew fiercer, and then with a shrill neigh, leaped again. Somehow the wolves did not come nearer—and Brown Bess flew along as though she knew our lives were in her power. The awful sounds grew less distinct, and with a fervent "God be praised," I strove to be calm.

"Cordelia, look! Cordelia we are saved!" I shouted, breaking into something between a laugh and a cry. "O, Cordelia, look!"

The foaming mare was dashing through a line of torches, and the settlers sent up a joyous shout, and the yelping dogs dashed about with a chorus of delight.

Brown Bess, good lady, would not pause; she thought the wolves were after her still, and dashed on, reeking with foam, to her own stable. My weeping aunt and excited cousins bore Cordelia in, while I felt more thankful to God than I had ever before had cause to feel.

"But that terrible fighting of wolves close upon us—what did it mean?" I asked later, when before the blazing fire I in vain essayed to quiet my shivering nerves. "And why did they not come on to the attack? Was it a miracle?"

"It was one of my stags," exclaimed Uncle Dan. "Anderson came in and said the late unusually cold weather had made the cowardly creatures bold and ravenous; and he and I heard them signaling the pack soon after sunset. We knew they might overtake you if you delayed your return until after dark; so we slew the stag and drove out with him as far as we deemed advisable, hoping that they might find and fight over it while you were dashing past. We grew wild with fright as time passed on, Rolf; arming ourselves with torches, rushed to meet you."

His plan had succeeded in saving us. Good old Uncle Dan! But I don't like the word prairie at all.

"What became of Cordelia, Captain?"

"Cordelia? Ah! I thought that I told you my aunt and cousins bore her into the house in their arms."

"No evasion. Did you humbly beg her pardon later, for vexing her in opposing her pet theories?"

"I did that, sir. I begged her pardon on my knees. I told her that she had proved, in herself, by her own bravery, every good thing which she had said of her sex."

"Did she forgive you?"

"Not exactly."

"She was right, Captain. She should have punished you severely."

"She did. Oh! she did. She—married me! ow-w! ow-w! Cordelia, leave me my ears! leave me my ears!"

Incombustible Coatings for Cloths.—Tungstate of soda has been successfully used for rendering cotton cloth and other fabrics fireproof. Pester recommends a cheaper mixture for the same purpose. It consists of four parts of borax and three parts of sulphate of magnesia, to be mixed first before being needed, and dissolved in 20 to 30 parts of boiling water. The goods are to be immersed in this solution immediately, then wrung out and dried. Another efficient mixture for rendering fabrics non-inflammable, recently patented in England, consists of equal weights of acetate of lime and chloride of calcium, dissolved in twice their weight of hot water.

Little Boy—"Be you the drug man?"

Druggist—"Yes, sonny; what can I do for you?"

Little Boy—"Dad has got 'em again! His boots is full of 'em, and he's a howling like thunder, and mother sent me over to get 'em for him quick."

Druggist—"What does he want?"

Little Boy—"Don't know, but he's yelling for anything to beat Grant."