

THE OLD PREACHER'S STORY.

It was commencement week at Matthew College, in one of the central western states; there I was a junior. On the evening of alumni day I sat on the porch of my rooming place, talking with Dr. Henry Rowland, a graduate of the school many years before. A ministerial student, he had, immediately after receiving his diploma, left for the spacious prairies of one of the far western states, where, ever since, he had faithfully fulfilled the duties of a pioneer preacher of the gospel.

I had met him the preceding summer as I was laboring in the harvest fields of the region where he was then presiding elder. Our connections with Matthew College made us good friends immediately. That acquaintance was being delightfully renewed on the porch, as we sat in the lilac-fragrance of that June night.

Our conversation had turned on the land where he had spent the years of his pastoral service. Fascinating and instructive were the experiences he related, narratives of hardship and adventure, of warfare and triumph that stirred one's heart like the sounding of bugles. One story was particularly appealing. I will let him tell it to you as he gave it to me.

"I began my pioneer ministry in the late eighties of the last century, itinerating in a land of magnificent distances. The Government had recently opened it up for settlement, and few of the quarter-sections had been filed on. But settlers were beginning to pour in.

"One of my preaching places was Black Grouse. It consisted only of a post-office and general store and two or three dwellings, with barns. The nearest railroad town was forty-five miles away.

"On a Saturday morning I left this town for Black Grouse, where I was to preach the next day. My horses were fresh, the road was good, and I expected to reach my destination late that evening. Though the weather was fine at starting, unusually mild for the middle of January, it had become much cooler by six o'clock. An hour later a gale of sleet was blowing, and shortly after I reached Black Grouse at ten, an old-fashioned blizzard burst in all its fury. Had I been delayed half an hour, I would have perished on the prairie, a victim of Boreal rage.

"I was a guest in the home of the man who had the post office and conducted the general store. There I found that cordial hospitality which made my sojournings with him and his family a comfort and delight.

"Being told the news of the region, I learned that, among other happenings, two young women had arrived that week to take up homesteads about four miles from Black Grouse. They were school teachers from Iowa, where they had taught for some years. As a rest from the taxing work of the classroom it was their plan to take a 'sabbatical year' and spend it living on a claim.

"Their quarter-sections joined each other. Since the government required that they erect a dwelling-place on the land they had filed on and live in it, these young ladies had their one-room frame 'shacks' just a few feet apart. Bosom friends, they purposed that on the primeval prairies they would not be divided.

"The buildings had been put up some weeks previously. Their owners had already forwarded the necessary equipment for these tiny, fragile homes, which was awaiting them when they reached Black Grouse on the mail stage the Wednesday before I arrived.

"The three intervening days had been spent

in fixing up their abodes. They spent the nights of these three days at Black Grouse. The weather was more like April than January, a condition which facilitated their getting settled.

"By Saturday noon they felt that everything was arranged, and they came to Black Grouse to get their groceries, intending to spend that night for the first time on their claims. They had been driven to and from them by the sixteen-year-old son of the postmaster.

"A jolly pair they were that afternoon, so my host told me, as they were buying their food supplies in the store. They were looking forward to their homesteading as a prolonged picnic. Released from the strain of teaching, they felt as joyous and care free as their pupils had been on being dismissed from school.

"A list of things needed for their house-keeping had been made by them, and the names of the various articles were checked off when purchased. The last item on this list was finally reached, and the buyers were ready to depart for their 'estates,' as they gleefully referred to their claims.

"Just before starting, after they were in the buggy, the storekeeper called out and asked if they were sure they had everything they needed. He was told that everything was surely gotten, that nothing had been overlooked.

"The storekeeper said they made a lovely picture as, seated in the back seat of the buggy, surrounded by parcels, they waved him a good-bye. Joy and health were written on their handsome, cultured faces.

"About the middle of the afternoon the young man who had driven them out returned. He remarked to his father that he, also, just before leaving them, asked them if they were absolutely certain that they were supplied with everything they required. He was assured that they had enough equipment for a trip to Alaska and back.

"That evening as I told you a few minutes ago, the blizzard came upon us. We spoke often of the school teachers' spending their first night on the claims, but did not worry about them, resting assured that they lacked nothing.

"All night long the storm roared on. Its fury increased with the passing of the hours. By morning it was indescribable. The weather seemed to have gone on an awful spree. In its uproarious debauch it appeared to be near delirium tremens. The noise was like the shrieking of a legion of demons.

"A person venturing out of doors must have the end of a rope tied around his body, with the other end fastened to the house, if he expected to get back alive. An object six feet away could not be seen. The cold had become intense, the thermometer registering thirty-five degrees below zero.

"Frequently during that wild Sunday we would say to one another, 'Well, I wonder how the school ma'ams are getting along.' We were sure they were snug and comfortable.

"The bitterness of the cold and the fury of the storm continued during Monday, though by evening it had considerably abated. During the night the wind died down. Tuesday morning dawned clear, but still intensely cold.

"As soon as breakfast was over the postmaster's son hitched up the team preparatory to going out where the young women were located. His father was just a bit anxious about them, and was sending to find how

they fared. I decided to go along and make a pastoral call.

"Sunny but chilly was that morning. The sunlight seemed to have no more warmth than the aurora borealis.

"After the young man and I had travelled three miles we came in sight of the small houses where the girls were to live. On account of the drifted snow but little more than the chimneys and roofs were to be seen. As we drew near a vague uneasiness took possession of us, for we saw no smoke ascending, and a nameless foreboding sent a chill to our hearts, colder than the icy air on our faces.

"Coming up to the two buildings we alighted from the vehicle and called to the inmates. There was no word of response. Frantic with anxiety we knocked. Still nothing but silence. Then we threw ourselves against the door of one of the houses. It yielded, and, entering, we stood in a room, 'silken, hushed and chaste,' daintily adorned, but containing no human being. It was colder than out of doors.

"We then rushed to the other house, and pushing against its door, went in. The sight we saw I shall remember forever. There, under the bed-coverings, in each other's arms, were the two young ladies, frozen to death.

"They had forgotten to buy matches, and though abundantly supplied with fuel, found it useless."

For a minute the old preacher stopped. Then he went on, "I have been in churches that reminded me of that little room of death on the white prairie. They were supplied with everything necessary for carrying on their work successfully, with everything except the one thing needful. Lacking the Holy Ghost and fire, the members were, spiritually, frozen corpses."—Prof. E. W. Stahl, in Evangelical Messenger.

THE IVORY CARVER

A party of travellers journeying through Japan, a few years ago, came upon an old artist in ivories. Among the carvings which he showed was one most exquisite piece for which he asked a hundred dollars. The price was not at all high for the work, and one of the party at once agreed to take it. Before surrendering it, however, the artist examined it minutely and the result of the examination was the discovery of a tiny imperfection which he pointed out to his customer.

"That will make no difference," the traveller answered. "No one but you would ever have discovered it; it need make no difference in the price."

"It is not a matter of price," the artist replied. "No imperfect work ever goes from me at any price. I cannot sell you this."

The traveller, incredulous, urged again his plea that none but the artist's eye could ever see the blemish; he even offered a higher price still, but to all his arguments the old artist had but the one reply—he could not give his name to imperfect work; it was impossible. And from this decision nothing could move him.

How the spirit of the heathen artist rebukes us! Nothing was allowed to go from his shop that was not the best that he and those working with him could do, but we—what poor, half-hearted shabby work we allow to bear the Master's name!—Well-spring.