

THE HERO OF A BLIZZARD.

Joe Patterson rose very early on a certain January morning, "roared up the fire"—as he called it—drew a pail of water, filled the tea kettle, and then went out to the barn. He worked briskly despite the cold, for he was a man of business today. His father had been ailing for some time, but had hitherto rode to town and consulted a doctor in person. Now, however, he was too ill, and, after some persuasion on the boy's part, he had consented to let twelve-year-old Joe undertake the fourteen mile trip across the bleak plains alone.

"I know the way perfectly well, pa; haven't I been there dozens of times with you?" the lad had urged, and finally his mother had said that she could see no other way. Medicine and groceries they must have.

"I tell you, Diamond, you and I have business on hand today," Joe said to the handsome iron-gray he was grooming. "Oh, yes, you think we are good for it, and so we are, old fellow."

The sun was barely risen when Diamond and his young master passed out of the yard, the latter smiling back at his mother as she stood on the steps, repeating her injunctions to "hurry around and get home for fear of storm or something."

It was a fine morning and Diamond, who had been comparatively idle for many days, made little of the fourteen miles.

If the doctor had been at home this story might never have been written; but history would be quite another thing but for the "ifs."

"I am looking for him now, every minute," the doctor's wife said, and so Joe made his grocery purchases and then invested in a few luxuries for his father. These last were to be a surprise and were purchased with some of his own money, earned the summer before.

Again and again he sought the doctor's office before that gentleman appeared, and by the time the medicine was ready it was almost two o'clock, and there had come over the face of nature one of the changes familiar to residents of Eastern Montana.

"Looks some like storm, my lad; better let that horse of yours out all that you can and still control him," the physician said, looking from the fast clouding sky to the handsome iron-gray.

"We can make it in little over an hour, I reckon," Joe answered, patting Diamond's neck, and away they went.

The wind was rising and came in angry little puffs now, and the sun was nowhere to be seen. A good many people noticed a small boy, with a flour sack nearly filled with packages in front of him, on a fine gray horse, heading east as the storm came on, but they were busy with their own affairs and would never have recalled the circumstance again but for after events.

Mrs. Patterson watched the clock and the sky all that forenoon, a strange apprehension tugging at her heart strings; but she smiled and talked cheerfully in her husband's presence. Probably her eye was the first in all the track of the threatening storm to notice its approach, but she drew the curtains that the sick man might not see. One o'clock, the sky was darkening; two, the wind was rising, and poor Mr. Patterson anxiously pacing the floor, too nervous to sit or lie down. Vain his wife sought to comfort and reassure

him, her own heart was too heavy. Three o'clock, and the storm was on in its fury. Not a foot before one's face could they see, and as the distracted mother opened the door, in the hope of hearing or seeing something of her boy, the sharp particles cut her face like stinging knife blades. The father, now completely exhausted, lay white and quivering on the lounge, while the younger children huddled in terror by his side.

"May be he has got to the barn and can't find his way to the house," Mrs. Patterson suggested at last; and taking down a large coil of clothes line she tied one end to the door knob and gradually unwound the rest as she attempted to find the barn, but when a few feet from the house she saw that she must return or perish. A moment she paused when once more on the steps, straining eye and ear. Then there came to her that supreme moment of agony that every soul knows when it gives up an idol. She still had much to suffer, but that crisis had not to be passed through again. It is a something to the soul like the sensation to the body when a stinging blade enters the

flesh; after that there is only dull pain and torturing soreness. Another hour passed over the stricken household, the demon of the tempest shrieking without and the demon of despair within.

"Hark!" The mother was on her feet in an instant, straining every sense. There it was again—a faint sound, the low neigh of a spent horse. Mr. Patterson roused from a state closely akin to a swoon and listened, too.

"'Tis Diamond! Praise God!" and the poor mother once more caught hold of the clothes line and braved the tempest. Presently, in response to her gasping calls, the neighing drew nearer, and Diamond staggered to her side—riderless. With a great cry she grasped the animal's mane and kept herself from falling.

"Where is Joe? Oh, Diamond, where is my boy?" But the noble beast could only lay his tired head on her shoulder, as if to say, "I'd tell if I could talk."

"Oh, God!, if only he could speak!" and then she led the exhausted beast straight into the spotless kitchen.

"Joe!"

And that was all the father said as he sank on the couch and hid his face in the pillow.

The bag with its freight of groceries, "luxuries" and medicine

was safe, just as boyish hands had securely strapped it there with their owner's suspenders.

It was not till weeks after that the heroic boy's body was found wrapped in its ermine winding sheet. Perhaps half a mile farther on the remains of an aged woman was discovered, holding a dead child in her arms. How Joe came to fall from the horse could only be answered by the theory of his having become benumbed; but in time a man living some miles west of town testified to having met, in the midst of the tempest, a horse with what he took to be an aged woman on his back, while hanging to the halter strap was a boy plodding and stumbling along. The heroic boy had given his life in the vain attempt to succor an infirm stranger and her helpless charge; but his first care had been to secure the things for the dear ones at home by tying them to the saddle with his suspenders.

All heroes are not proven in the same way any more than all gold is tried in the same furnace.

VELMA CALDWELL MELVILLE.



PILLARS OF HERCULES—ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER, REAR PORTLAND.