
A KANSAS TORNADO.

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The 13th, of May, 1892, is a day long to be remembered in that part of Butler, the largest and fairest of Kansas counties, which lies near the junction of the Whitewater and

Walmet rivers. At this time I was engaged in work on my father's farm a little below this junction. Our house is situated on a mound rising gradually from the adjacent bottoms to a height of twenty-five or thirty feet, thus affording us quite a good view of the surrounding country in all directions in which the neighboring timber does not obstruct our vision. Immediately east of the house rises this timber like a dark green wall. Westward the lowlands or bottoms stretch for nearly a mile, rising rather abruptly into a high and rocky hill, beyond which lie two or three miles of upland.

On the day of which I speak the morning dawned as brightly and as beautifully as only May mornings can. But as the day wore on the temperature rapidly increased from that of Kansas morning toward that of a tropical noon. A light layer of clouds became visible along the southern and southwestern horizon. Soon thunder-heads, or white-caps, reared their beautiful white crests toward the sun. The rumble of distant thunder was heard. Louder and louder rolled that thunder. Higher and higher rose those crests. And ere the sun reached its zenith the foremost crest obscured it. But when my father and I began our afternoon's work near the house, the thunder was less violent than at noon. The sun was visible through a thin film and the clouds were much broken. Yet the air was close and the heat oppressive. At about three o'clock we were driven in by a light shower. At four we were out again and noticed that, distinct from the rumbling of the thunder a constant, steady roar was audible directly overhead. Our interest in the clouds was at once doubled by this unusual sound, for but six weeks before a tornado, leaving death and destruction in its track, had passed but two miles from us. Carefully we scanned the clouds as we proceeded with our work. Nearly an hour passed and still the roar continued. Various small showers were apparent in the distance.

What a narrow one in the far west! And how nearly stationary it is! It moves not at all! Yes it moves a little toward the north, growing smaller as it goes. But see! its course changes! Southward it hastens with rapid speed. And do you see that quickly varying half coil about midway between the earth and the main body of the cloud? What we took for the falling rain must be whirling. Yes, it is whirling. It is a tornado! How like a huge snake suspended in the sky and lashing the earth with its tail! Southward, still southward, whirling, writhing, twisting; smaller, still smaller until it is a mere line reaching down to the earth. And now it leaps back into the dark cloud above and disappears entirely.

But see what a black cloud still hangs over that expanse of upland beyond the hill to our west! And see how it is whirling in the sky! Look afar to the northwest! As far as you can see, cloud after cloud is hastening toward this cloud and each one joins in the whirl as quickly as it reaches it. Look far to the southwest. There also cloud follows cloud to this common center. Inky black has now become that mass, whirling every moment more rapidly. And now a small whirling point darts down toward the earth, then leaps back into the cloud above, as much as to say, who dares go farther. Another follows it darting a little lower, then fleeing also to its mother. Another and another follow from different portions of the cloud, each darting lower than its predecessor, and each returning whence it came. Now one more daring strikes the earth, sweeps along it for a moment like an immense whirlwind, then rises like the others. Now another, yes two, three, four follow in its track. And see, they travel in a circle, for this one which at first swept north now sweeps west, and now, sweeping southward, passing these others sweeping northward on the east of it. And now it sweeps to the east, and now again to the north.

How slowly the whole mass moves in comparison with these smaller whirls. How large these whirls are becoming. *Oh! it is moving directly toward us!* A moment more and it will sweep over that hill. Yes already its dust is on the summit. Closely it follows its dust. And now it descends the slope and now moves over the level lowland. What a sight it is! A score of whirls chasing each other in a great circle with lightning speed. Within this circle a hundred other whirls chasing each other in smaller circles. The whole mass moving steadily toward us, licking up dust, stalks, fence posts; whatever chances to be in its way, hurling it aloft into a great cloud of debris of every kind, bearing it along for a moment, then strewing it over the adjacent fields. See that large barn just before it! Will it destroy that? It flings the great roof high into the air like a feather. It tears apart the hugh timber like twigs. Onward it sweeps, its fierce greed only increasing, onward toward the adjoining house. Surely it will destroy that and then—ah then sweep down upon us. Let us flee for our lives! To the cellar! To the cellar! Quickly we fled thither where my mother and my sister-in-law had already taken refuge. There, crouched against the wall, we waited in almost breathless silence to hear the roar of the storm and the crash of timbers over our heads. But such was not our fate. Either we had miscalculated the direction of the storm or it had changed its course. After waiting until we were sure that it was past we came out just in time to catch a last glimpse of the cloud and to hear the roar of the tornado in the timber as it crossed the Whitewater river a little more than a mile to the northeast of us. When it had traveled about two miles farther, destroying in the meantime the southern portion of the town of Augusta, it rose into the cloud and was seen no more.

The entire course of the storm was only six or seven miles but in that distance its

destruction was terrible. Yet not a single human life was lost, for its approach was known several minutes before its arrival and nearly all who were in its course (and it might be added a great many who were not) took refuge in caves or cellars.