

The Storm of October 2nd, 1898.
Saint Simons Island,
Georgia.

My dear Sister:—

You will be surprised to hear that we have had a veritable flood on the coast and that for the first time anyone now living knows of, this Island has been almost submerged by a high tide. I will begin, however, and give you a detailed account of my experience and what I have learned was the experience of others during that very trying day.

The wind had been blowing from the North East for two or three days, resulting in the usual high tides that it always brings. I went over from Brunswick Saturday afternoon. The next morning there was much rain and while at breakfast the wind began rising. There was nothing, however, to cause alarm.

I took the opportunity between the showers to run down to the landing and secure the boat, putting the anchor among some of the large roots of the big cedar tree growing on the bank. We were sometime at the breakfast table and when we came out the water was in the lower parts of the peafield. I went out there to see how much the peas would be damaged, thinking as it was about time for the tide to turn, the worst was over. Coming to the ditch on the other side of the field, what was my surprise in seeing the water running up the ditch as fast as it comes out after a hard rain.

For the first time I felt uneasy and hurried back to the house. When I reached it the water was over most of the yard and still rising. I consulted the clock and, feeling reassured, when the hands pointed the hour for high water had arrived, I went out to help Herbert get the chickens. We put them in the passage of the dining room; then drove the pig on the kitchen porch. Considering all that we came into the house, Herbert to put on dry clothes and I only waiting to see the water falling to do the same.

At this time, though blowing a brisk gale, the wind was not causing any uneasiness, but the puffs became more frequent and each puff seemed stronger than the one preceding it and the tide had not turned. I watched little patches

and marks on the front fence and was surprised to see how very soon the water would cover them.

Helen had once or twice suggested that I bring up stairs the bread and other cooked food from the dining room and I had as often told her it was past the time for high water and the tide would surely turn now. Realizing that I might be too late, I ran down into the store room, found the water coming in fast and smaller articles beginning to float about. I hurriedly put on shelves such things as would be injured, then turned my attention to the flour barrel. With much trouble I got it upon a table. All this time a kitten in the kitchen was making the most ear splitting cries you ever heard and the most distressing. I went in there and taking it from a box where it had gone for protection and which was floating backward and forward, I put it upon the window sill. Herbert had put some chickens under the stove. I took them and placed them on top for safety. How safe the sequel will show.

The water was now to my knees and still rising. Going into the dining room I put the chairs on the table, took the linen, etc. from the sideboard drawers and put them on top, thinking all was now secure and that I would run up stairs, when there came a succession of crashes, the dining room windows all burst in and the water up to my waist.

I caught a tin can Helen used for bread and into it I put everything eatable out of the safe, meantime holding the safe with one hand. I saw the sideboard with its load go over, the table and its load floating around, dashing against the wall, first on one side and then on the other, bringing up each time with a crash that would topple over a chair or two and as each fell it would join the mad dance of the waves; this side, then that side, back and forth, now together, then alone with such a grinding and crashing as you never heard.

Grasping my tin with food, I made my way to the hall door as best I could, the water up to my arm pits. The door was jammed and for some time I could not open it. I succeeded at last and standing on the sill, was in a quandry. To

step down would mean loss of my tin, as I would have to swim. To stay there with the water still rising, not to be thought of. I was about to make the plunge when Helen coming to the window in my room opposite, saw me and raising the sash I could reach her the tin. Then getting upon some floating debris, I climbed in the same window.

I was hardly in when Mother called to us to come in her room as the shed rooms were going with the east piazza. It did seem so. The piazza was going up and down like a bucking horse and the waves were striking the sides of that room like a battering ram.

We quickly cleared what was of value of the room, then retreated to the parlor. Just as we entered, Herbert gave a shout and running to the window we saw the south piazza with the roof, separate from the main body of the house and disappear. At this time the wind was blowing a hurricane, the yard as well as we could see, looked like the ocean, great waves chasing each other across from East to West and striking the trees, the spray was thrown high in the air. We could only see to the West, on all other sides the air was filled with flying spray. The drops of rain striking your face and hands felt like so much shot hurled against you.

I saw something then I have often read of, but never saw before. I frequently saw the crest of a wave taken off clean, as though cut with a knife and the mass of water sent flying through the air, like a great sheet.

The boat I had secured so well went bobbing across the yard, still attached to the tree. I don't know whether the tree was carrying the boat or the boat the tree. It seemed to be "nip and tuck" with them. First the tree would be in front, then the boat. The pig, still clinging to its perch, passed out of sight on the crest of a wave. For a time we could see fowls and turkeys in all stages of drowning, but poor things, it was soon all over with them. Mama caught two hens as they were passing and saved them.

When the water began to thump against the floor of the parlor I feared

we would have to get on the roof, as the safest place in case the walls fell. Much to our relief the water began falling about three o'clock and in an hour after the danger was passed.

Helen then gave us dinner from the tin can. The indefatigable girl had even heated water and made tea.

The water fell rapidly and before night it was possible to walk out, the wind having moderated to a gentle breeze. It's hard to convey an idea of the destruction wrought by this storm. Every house on this place, except the dwelling, is either washed from its foundations, or down, and the yard one scene of devastation and ruin. Old oaks were prominent in my childhood's recollection are flat. Indiscriminately they lie, their limbs crossed and recrossed in every direction, while mingled with them are the remnants of chairs, tables, linen, crockery; everything broken into bits.

Mother's safe is in bits scattered in the woods, sideboard in pieces among the debris with which the yard is strewn, in some places several feet deep. The boat we found hard and fast in the limbs of a tree on the edge of the myrtle hammock. The dead animals, both wild and domestic, lie plentifully around. Many birds came in from the ocean during the storm. Pelicans by the score sheltered themselves about the house and after the storm waddled feebly to the river, unable to fly. Fruits from the tropics, quite fresh, were found in the yard showing evidently that vessels were lost near the coast.

The storm was very destructive on the sea shore. The hotel was flooded and verandas washed away; the parlor furniture, including the fine piano, strewn over the beach. All the pretty cottages, bath houses, etc., are piled in one inextricable mass next to the woods. There can be seen houses on their sides; houses with the entire front gone, roof gone, in fact you can find houses in every imaginable condition, except their proper; and not standing alone but piled together in one great mass and mixed in among them are the fragments of their furniture that was so recently in active use.

It seemed that nothing was too heavy, or too strong, to withstand the action

of the waves. Mr. Arnold's three story house was washed from its foundations and stoves, pumps, pots, etc. tossed about like veritable foot balls. Large vessels were carried inland and left high and dry. It will be necessary to dig them out.

Other families on the Island fared even worse than we did. Some took refuge in trees and were exposed for hours -- women and young children -- to the dreadful tempest of wind and rain.

One man, with his wife, who lived on Egg Island, took refuge on his roof when his house blew down, but soon was washed off. With desperate effort he reached a tree, with his wife in his arms. Unable to get into it he clung to a limb, holding fast to his wife until she died; then giving up hope he let go of her and the limb. Soon a wave threw him in a mass of drift where he clung, more dead than alive, until for three days, when he was seen and picked up by the crew of a steamer. He had drifted sixty miles! The exact loss of life among the negroes will never be known. The rice fields were swept and they must have been drowned by scores. We are now very busy gathering from the yard and woods the fragments that remain and I can assure you they are many more than twelve baskets full.

Your affectionate

Brother

October 10th, 1893