

HOME CIRCLE.

HARD TIMES CONQUERED.

BY MRS. HENRY WARD BEECHER.

About seventy years ago, a physician with a young family springing up around him, consulting his wife, as all good husbands find it prudent to do, bought a large farm in one of our New England States, where every farmer truly earns his living by the sweat of his brow. Both felt that nowhere could their children be trained to industry and frugality so thoroughly as on a good farm.

Of course the Doctor was obliged to "run in debt" for this property and give a mortgage on the place. The payments were to be made quarterly, and promptly, or the whole would be forfeited and revert back to the original owner. In those days physicians were not likely to become millionaires in a hurry, and though his practice was large, the pay was small and not always sure. He therefore looked to the farm to bring forth the means to release him from the bondage of debt; and the children, even to the youngest, were taught to labour for, and look forward eagerly to, the time "when we have paid for the farm!"

The creditor was the doctor's father-in-law, through his first wife, and while the good old gentleman lived, if by any mishap or over press of business the quarterly payment had been delayed, it would have been kindly excused. But for the ten or fifteen years that he lived after the sale of the farm, there had not been one delay in payment, though now and then there would come a time when it was very hard work to secure the needed sum in time, for even in the olden days "hard times" were often found prowling about, to the great terror of our hard-working New England farmers. But little by little the heavy debt was diminishing, and they were looking forward, hopefully, to the year of Jubilee, when they could sit under their own vine and fig tree with none to molest and make them afraid.

At this period the father-in-law died. He had but two children—daughters. The younger, the doctor's wife, died childless. The elder married a hard, close, scheming man, who, knowing that his wife and children would inherit this property in case the payments were not promptly met, lost no opportunity of remarking that Dr. Mason's farm would doubtless soon come into his hands, as with his large family he must fail by-and-by.

The financial troubles which the war of 1812 had caused, as all wars are sure to do, were not yet adjusted. Money was scarce and payments very difficult. Ten children now filled the old house with merriment and gladness; but they were to be clothed and educated.

Let us see how successfully they had been taught to make their high spirits and resolute wills cheerful auxiliaries in lifting the burden which, since their grandfather's death, was pressing heavily upon their parents.

At the time of which we write, among other crops, rye was extensively raised. It was used for food among the farmers quite as much as wheat, but was also valuable for other purposes. When fall-grown, but still in the milk, large quantities were cut to be used for "braiding." The heads were used for "fodder;" the stocks, after being soaked in strong, hot soap-suds, were spread on the grass for the sun to whiten. When sufficiently bleached and ready for use, they were cut at each joint, the husk stripped off, and the straw thus prepared tied in pound bundles for sale.

Bonnets then meant something more than a small bit of silk or velvet with a flower attached, and the "straw braid" for making them was in great demand. Boys and girls were alike taught to braid, and the long winter evenings were not spent idly. Dr. Mason raised large crops of rye, and each child, almost as soon as weaned, was taught to braid, and was soon able to do much toward clothing himself. At six years of age, a dollar a week was easily earned; at eight, three dollars; and in something of that proportion up to the eldest.

Does anyone think such a life, with such an object in view, was hard or cruel? Never was there a greater mistake. It was of immense value to these young spirits. They had something real, that they could understand, to labour for. There was life and courage and true heroism in it. An education—with here and there, to be sure, some rough places to pass

over—which was worth more to them than all the money millionaires bequeath their sons and daughters—an education which prepared them in after-life to be courageous and self-helpful.

It is this kind of training that has made New England's sons and daughters strong and self-reliant, and the lack of it which makes these *hard times* such a horror, that we hear of so many who seek death by their own hands as preferable to the struggle for better times.

In the long winter evenings, when the labour of the day was over, the children home from school, and the "chores" all finished, the candles were lighted and the evening work began. The mother in her corner was busy making and mending for her large family. The doctor, if not with the sick, smoked and read opposite her. The children gathered round the long table in the middle of the room, where lay the school-books and straw all ready machined for braiding, while the old fireplace, heaped with blazing logs of hickory, oak, and fragrant birch, made the room warm and cheerful. Here, with their books fastened open before them to the next day's lessons, the children with nimble fingers plaited the straw and studied their lessons at the same time. For children taught to be industrious usually carry the principles thus developed into the school-room, and are ambitious to keep as near the head of the class as possible.

Such a family as this was well equipped to meet and conquer adversity. For several days Dr. Mason had been unusually grave and silent. All noticed it, but no remarks were made until evening, when he came to supper, so unmistakably worried and despondent that his wife inquired if he was not well.

"Yes, well enough. But, Lucy, I have so far been unable to collect money for our quarterly payment. So much is due me that I had no fears but that enough would be promptly paid to save me any trouble."

"How much is lacking?"

"Not quite a hundred dollars; but it might as well be thousands for any chance I now see of getting it in season. There is now so much sickness about, that, as you know, I have had no rest, and little time to collect money. If not ready before midnight tomorrow we are ruined. I have kept it from you as long as I dared, still hoping that those who ought to pay me would do so."

"Have you told them how very important it is that you have the money?"

"No; I did not wish to speak of it. Mr. H. is watching greedily for a 'slip,' and we need expect no mercy at his hands. Under our hard labour and good care this farm has risen greatly in value—too much so for him to spare us an hour, if he can once get hold of it. I am almost discouraged. It is the darkest time we have seen yet. But I must be off, and shall probably be out all night. To think there are not forty-eight hours between us and ruin! And my hands so tied by several bad cases that I may not find one hour to try and make up the little that is needed."

For a few minutes after the doctor left, the children stood silent and sad, watching their mother. At last she said—

"Children, we can help father through this, and save our home, if you are willing to submit to some little self-denial. No; I should have said to great self-denial. Each of you has worked diligently to buy new garments for winter. You need them, and deserve them, and I should be so happy and proud to see you all neat and comfortable. But to help father, are you willing to let me try to clean, mend, and make over your old clothes, and use what you have earned to help brighten this dark day? The braid you have on hand, and what is now due at the store, is all your own, or to be expended for your own clothes, and if each one of you is not perfectly willing, I don't wish you to give it up."

It was a beautiful sight to see those eager faces watching their mother, ready to answer the moment she had finished; for in the olden time children were taught that it was disrespectful to interrupt anyone when speaking, even when, as in this case, it was difficult to keep silent. But the reply when given was prompt, enthusiastic, and what she had confidently looked for.

"Thanks, dear children! Now, then, hasten. First bring me all your braid, and let us see how much it will come to."

The braid, in ten-yard rolls, was brought, and its value estimated.

"With that which is now due us at the store we have nearly sixty dollars! Well done for all these little fingers! But now we must devise a way to make up the remainder. Your father spoke last night of a large quantity of straw, which, if cut, would bring in something. He will be away all night. If you work well we can cut many pounds before midnight. Now, girls, help me wash the dishes, while your brothers bring, before dark, the straw we can cut to-night."

By the time the candles were lighted all was ready to begin.

The younger children were excused at their usual bed-time, but the others worked with their mother till the tall clock in the corner struck one. Then all retired for a few hours' rest.

Dr. Mason returned home in season for breakfast, and his wife inquired if the eldest son could drive her over to the neighbouring town to dispose of some braid for the children. He replied that he must be gone again all day, and neither son nor team could well be spared from important work at home. But a strange thing followed this implied refusal. Mrs. Mason, who never allowed her plans or wishes to interfere with her husband's, now repeated her request, and urged it till he yielded, from sheer surprise, apparently, that his wife could be so persistent.

The doctor went his usual round, and the mother and son departed on their mysterious errand. Their business accomplished, they returned well satisfied, and ready for supper when the father arrived.

A deeper gloom was on his face when he entered; but no word was spoken till all were seated at the table. Too much absorbed in his troubled thoughts to notice the suppressed excitement plainly visible on every face, he was startled as Mrs. Mason placed before him the amount required.

"It is our children's offering, and sufficient to make up the needed sum. I persisted in going away this morning against your wishes, because I saw no other escape. We cut the straw last night—many willing hands make quick work; I sold it, and their braid added to it, with what was already due them, completed the sum."

Those who witnessed the scene will never forget it: Dr. Mason with his arm around his wife, and both in tears, calling her all happy names; the children clinging about their parents, so joyful that home was saved, and they had helped to save it.

"Put Charlie into the waggon, quick. If he fails me not, the six miles between here and M— will be the shortest I ever rode. I shall be home before bed-time to thank you all. I cannot now. I hope we shall never come so near ruin again."

And they never did. In two years the last dollar was paid, and then Dr. Mason vowed he would never owe anyone a cent. He kept his vow.—*Chris. Union.*

THREE SCENES.

BY MISS C. W. RAEBER.

SCENE THE FIRST.

It was a balmy night in June. The stars were out in the deep azure above, shedding over the wide, green earth quiet beauty, and the streets, in town and country, were filled with loiterers, who, won by the beauty of the night, had come out from hot offices and pent-up workshops to enjoy the hour.

In a stately country house, scarcely an hour's walk from the goodly city of G—, there were brilliant eyes, flashing mirrors, rose-wreathed vases, and a party of young and happy revellers. Young girls, clad in white, with artificial flowers twined among their braided hair, or sunny curls stayed here and there, leaning upon the arms of their gallants, or chatting merrily upon the sofas and cushioned chairs, which were strewed plentifully through the rooms.

It was one of those scenes which make the young forget, for a brief time at least, that earth has cares and trials; that it is not what it seems—the residence of truthful and happy hearts. Beside a centre table two persons stood leaning gracefully over the leaves of a richly-bound album, admiring the engravings and sentiments which they found there. Howard Greenleaf and Edith Hastings were pronounced, by all, the stars of the evening. There was something that proclaimed him to be "one of nature's nobility."