

IN HASTE.—A STORY OF THE FLOOD.

BY L. L. ROBINSON.

It was when postage stamps were three cents apiece, and eggs twelve and a half cents a dozen that Mr. Huggins, the proprietor of the little country store at Elkton, sat at his high desk, one dreary afternoon, with his head studiously bent over his book, making out an account of sales.

"Please, sir," suddenly interrupted a thin, small voice proceeding from the space in front of the desk, "will you give me a stamp for these three eggs, and you needn't mind the change."

Mr. Huggins slowly lifted his eyes from the big book, to look for the small speaker below them.

It was a mite of a girl, not more than six years old, who held a letter in one hand and with the other tightly grasped her apron gathered together for the safe keeping of three eggs lying within.

Mr. Huggins' senses had been so absorbed in the difficulties of his long sum in addition, that it was several moments before he could recall them and bring them down to a level with the little head lifting itself eagerly up to him; but reaching out his hand mechanically, he took the letter, and supposing he would immediately take the eggs also, the little girl incautiously opened her apron, when, alas, with a pip! pip! pip! a though they were kissing each other a hasty good-bye, out rolled the eggs, and with a smash! smash! smash! lay on the floor, a medley of gold and silver, and ivory shells!

For one moment the poor little messenger stood silent with dismay, and then lifting her distressed face to that of Mr. Huggins, she burst into a wail so pitiful that the heart of the storekeeper was touched with compassion.

"Why, what on earth did you open your apron for, little gal?" said he by way of soothing her.

"To—let—you—get—the—eggs," sobbed the child. "I thought you were going to take them."

"And so I was," he answered, "but you ought not to have let go your grip till I had hold of them. Well, well, they won't hatch now, that's certain," he continued with a touch of philosophy in his tone, "but there's no more use in crying over smashed eggs than over spilt milk; you ought to be glad there were so few of them; and what were you asking me to do with them?"

"To give me a stamp, please, sir. But oh, what will mother do now! Her letter can't go, and she said it was to start at once, and in haste!"

The sobs grew louder as the little girl seemed to realize more and more the extent of the disaster.

"To go in haste," repeated Mr. Huggins with a smile of superior knowledge. "Yes, I see, she has written on it 'in haste, in haste.' Well, that might have done some good, perhaps, fifty years ago, when letters were carried about the country on horseback; I doubt if it will hurry up the steam cars very much. But for mercy sake, little gal, do stop crying!" he ejaculated suddenly as the deepening sobs smote his heart anew, and brought him back to the business on hand. "Didn't I tell you there's no use crying over smashed eggs! So, look up now, and tell me where is the great haste about this particular letter?"

"Oh, I don't know 'zackly, sir," answered the child tearfully. "But I know it is something very particular indeed, and it will break mother's heart 'most to know it hasn't come. You see, she had been over to Miss Riley's and she come back with the tears all running down her cheeks, and she hunted around till she found this paper and a pencil, and wrote the letter with her hand all in a tremble. But after it was all done up, she just remembered that she hadn't a stamp, and I ran as fast as I could to Miss Riley's, but she hadn't one, nor any money either and mother just sank down and cried as if her heart would break, and then, sir—wasn't it lucky—I knew a stamp cost three cents, and I just thought of my old hen, Buff who was laying eggs that I wanted so to hatch, and there was just three in the nest, but I couldn't see mother cry so, and I ran out and brought them to her, and she was so glad—well I wish you could have seen her—and she said thank God for the eggs, Jess, and run as fast as you can, for this letter must go in haste," in haste, that's just what she said—but oh, the eggs

are all broken now, and what will mother do!"

The long story came to an abrupt end with a fresh wail of grief.

"Well, don't take it so to heart, child," said Mr. Huggins with a gruff kindness. "There's no great harm done; the letter can't go till to-morrow any how, for the mail has been gone these three hours."

"To-morrow!" repeated the little girl, in dismay. "Oh, sir, mother won't sleep a wink to-night if she knows that; she said a day might make it too late, and that if you would read it, you would know it must go in haste."

"But that's all nonsense, child," said Mr. Huggins, beginning to lose patience. "There's no such thing these days; letters now go one way and in one time, and that's a deal quicker than they once did. But you run home now, and if you like you needn't tell your mother anything about the waiting, nor the eggs either; I'll put a stamp on for you and send it as soon as I can."

The little eyes beamed like stars through the falling tears. "Oh, sir, if you would!" she cried, "and when my hen lays three more eggs I will be sure to bring them to you."

She turned quickly to the door, but pausing there, as if with an unconquerable impulse, she looked back, saying "and if you please, sir, do make it go fast, for that's what she said—in haste."

"That child has more heart than head," thought Mr. Huggins to himself, as he silently watched her depart without making further efforts to explain the mail regulations. He knew the little customer quite well as the child of Widow Carson, who had come to the neighborhood just after the first of those terrible floods that had sent so many homeless ones back from the banks of the treacherous Ohio. It was said that her husband had perished in the waves after placing his wife and child in safety, and here she had lived ever since in a little log cabin not far from the store, where with her small patch of corn and potatoes she supported, as best she could, herself and Jess and the little yellow dog. But only a few days previous to this, Mr. Huggins had felt compelled to refuse her any further credit, till the bill, slowly lengthening on his big book, was paid up, and it was doubtless because of this that she had not sent to him at once to ask the advance of a stamp for this all important letter.

Meditatively he looked at the envelope, with the address scrawled in so tremulous and unpractised a hand that he doubted much whether it would ever reach its destination, and the word of Jesse returned to his mind—"She said if you would read it, you would know it must go in haste."

It seemed a sufficient permission to the kind thought in his heart, and opening the awkwardly sealed covering, Mr. Huggins with difficulty made out the words, written evidently by a hand tremulous with emotion:

"I have just heard you were seen in Rockport yesterday, looking for Jess and me; it seems too good and wonderful to be true, but I write at once to say that we are here, and God grant my letter may reach you in time. I will write 'in haste' on it, and I will pray day and night that He will make it go quickly, for Jess and I are in such need that unless you come to us soon, I do not know what will become of us. We have mourned for you so long as dead that I can scarcely write now for the beating of my heart at the thought of seeing you again."

Though Mr. Huggins was often called a rough, cold man, yet there was certainly a strange moisture in his eyes as he closed the letter. In a moment he had taken in the whole situation. Jessie's father, then, was not dead as supposed, but had been separated from his wife and child on that terrible night, and had lost sight of them. The sorrowing woman had just heard that he had been seeking those who mourned him; but it was evident that he was not long to remain at Rockport. What if this chance of reunion should be lost. These words, "I will pray day and night that God will make my letter go quickly," and the wan, anxious face of little Jess rose together before Mr. Huggins' mind, and with a sudden movement he rose abruptly, saying half aloud: "And my name is not Huggins if it don't go quick, quicker even than she thought!"

Striding from the store and locking the door behind him, Mr. Huggins was seen a little later riding rapidly to the nearest railway station.

"I want this telegram sent at once," he said, handing a slip of paper to the clerk, on which was written:

To John Carson, Boatman's Tavern, Rockport:

"Jess and I are here; come at once, and inquire at the Elkton store for the house."

"MARY CARSON."

Rockport was only a hundred miles away, and Mr. Huggins cast many an expectant glance next day along the road leading from the station. And sure enough, about half an hour after the three o'clock train had whistled, a sun-burnt stranger with eager, anxious face came down the road, and hurriedly entered the store.

"Can any one tell me where Mary Carson lives?" he said nervously of Mr. Huggins.

"Yes, my friend, and I will lead you a part of the way myself," answered the proprietor, promptly, and without losing a moment the two were soon in sight of the little log cabin.

"That's the house," said Mr. Huggins, "you can easily find the rest of the way alone," and with these words he turned back, leaving the stranger to hasten onward.

He heard the little dog give its quick yelping bark, and a backward glance showed him Jessie already at the gate, and the mother standing with clasped hands motionless in the doorway; but this was all, and you and Mr. Huggins both will have to imagine the rest of the story.—N. Y. Observer.

SOWING AND REAPING.

BY FLORENCE B. HALLOWELL.

"Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Never were truer words spoken than those, Lambert, and I am afraid you will realize it if you persist in this project."

"You take too gloomy a view of it, Heckles, too gloomy, entirely."

"There's nothing but gloom to view, Lambert. You surely don't pretend to think that you are to make our little village better or the lives of its inhabitants brighter by opening a saloon here?"

Lambert was silent a moment. Then he said slowly: "I don't suppose the village will be any the worse for it. Men who want liquor will get it if they have to go fifty miles after it. I will simply make the matter of getting it a little easier."

"There's just where the harm lies. Half the people in this world are upright merely because they are not exposed to temptation. Sin isn't made easy to them. We haven't a drunkard in this village now, and a man even slightly under the influence of liquor is a rare sight. A street brawl has never taken place here. There are no disturbances of the peace. Open your saloon, and all this will be changed. You have young sons, Lambert, you ought to think of them."

"I don't think they will be in any danger. Of course I shall not let them go near the saloon."

"But you will welcome gladly the sons of other men. Is that doing as you would be done by?"

Lambert moved uneasily.

"It is no use to argue the matter, Heckles," he said. "I've got to make money somehow. My farm doesn't begin to pay me for the labor I put on it, and it is heavily mortgaged. And besides I've given my word to Butler, and I can't go back on it."

"A bad promise is better broken than kept," said Heckles. "You'll rue the day you ever saw that Butler. He's a man that I wouldn't trust out of my sight."

"He'll make a good bar-keeper. He thoroughly understands his business," said Lambert. "He has assured me that I can clear off my debts in less than two years, and make enough to live on besides."

"A fine way to make it," said Heckles, ironically. "You'll send fifty souls to ruin for every debt."

"Come, come, Heckles, that's going too far."

"Not a bit of it. If anything it isn't going far enough. But I see it is of no use to argue with you, so I'll be off. I've always wanted sons, but I'm thankful now that I have only daughters. Your saloon won't trouble them, unless they happen to marry men who call upon Butler too often. And I think there is little likelihood of that. They have had a horror of intemperance instilled into them from babyhood. I'm sorry you're in debt, Lambert, and sorry

your farm pays you so poorly, but I am sorrier still that your new business is one that can have neither the blessing of God, nor the approval of any good man."

He touched his old grey horse with his whip and rode away, leaving Lambert with a very troubled look on his face.

"He's an old friend, and I suppose on that account he felt that he could talk pretty freely," he muttered, "but he goes too far—he's almost foolish on the subject."

He walked up the neat box-bordered path that led to the house. His little daughter, a child of nine years of age, ran out to meet him.

"Supper's ready, papa," she said.

Lambert bent and kissed her tenderly. She was his favorite child, and he petted and spoiled her to the last degree. In the kitchen his wife and eldest daughter were moving briskly about from the stove and pantry to the table.

"Mr. Butler called while you were talking to Mr. Heckles, father," Susan said. "He's down at the barn with the boys."

"What is he doing down there?" exclaimed Mr. Lambert, irritably. "He's not the man I care to have the boys intimate with."

"You had better tell him not to come here so often, then," said Mrs. Lambert, "for Arthur was saying only yesterday that Butler had more fun in him than any other man he had ever met. And Joe follows him around like his shadow."

The father's brow grew dark.

"He won't have time to come round here after to-morrow," he said. "There'll be enough to keep him busy at the saloon. Blow the horn, Cora."

The little girl took the horn down from the wall, where it hung by a cord, and blew a shrill blast, which brought the boys in at once. Arthur and Joe were fine, naively looking young fellows of seventeen and nineteen, and their father was justly proud of them. But as he looked at them now, he remembered Heckles' prophecy, and was silent and gloomy throughout the meal.

There were others besides Mr. Heckles who disapproved of Lambert's project, and he was urged and advised on every side to give it up. But neither argument nor persuasion had any effect upon his determination, and the saloon opened with a fine array of bottles, glasses and liquors.

It was the first venture of the kind in Coldbrook, and consequently excited a great deal of curiosity and comment. The saloon was crowded the first evening it opened. Men who did not take a glass of liquor once a year came to "see how the place looked," and they found it so cheerful, and met so many acquaintances, that they dropped in again and again, and Butler was well satisfied with the contents of the money-drawer at the end of the first week. As Mr. Lambert had said the bar-tender understood his business thoroughly, and his fund of wit and humor, coarse as it often was, lured many a young man within the charmed circle about the bar.

Among these was Arthur Lambert, who had been very much attracted to Butler from the first, and who frequented the saloon unknown to his father. He was encouraged in this course by Butler, who thought Mr. Lambert too strict, and who saw no harm in a social glass. He always met Arthur with a smile, and with a friendly slap on the back would tell him that "the old man would learn after awhile that his boy was out of long clothes."

Arthur was not the only son whose father was unaware of his visits to the saloon. There was a very convenient back door to the place, and a cosy little back parlor, and here from sixty to ten young men, none of them over twenty years of age, met nearly every evening to play cards. And, as a matter of course, liquor was freely passed around. At the end of a year it was no unusual thing for the village to be disturbed by a street brawl, and the sight of a man under the influence of liquor was so frequent as not to excite comment.

But Mr. Lambert refused to listen to the voice of conscience. He had paid off all his small debts, and expected to be able very soon to lift the mortgage on his farm. The idea of giving up the saloon was clearly out of the question.

During the second year of the existence of the saloon, a paper-mill was started in the village, and this brought many new residents to the place. The business at Lambert's increased perceptibly, and in a short time he had not only paid off the mortgage on his farm, but began the erection of a house in the village, which was to be handsomer than

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