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Our Story.

The Curse Of Greed.

Continued.

'Yes. I saw Squire Lawton in town today and he says he is instructed to sell it, but must have cash down. And, as I said before, we have just the sum required for its purchase.'

'Oh, Joe!' cried the wife in alarm. 'When can we get the new house, if we let this money go?'

'Why, 'twill take but just a little while with such an 'eighty' as we shall then have in our hands. We have done well with this '40', and of course, we could do twice as much with 80 acres. The land is offered at a big bargain. And I certainly think it will pay us to wait a while longer for the new house, and then to build a larger and finer one than we have planned. The fact is we haven't the means now for building such a house as we shall need, and can well afford a few years later.'

'But we could build one so much more comfortable than this,' responded the wife with a deep-drawn sigh, as she glanced about the narrow room with its walls of rough logs, whose unsightly shape, despite all her efforts, could not be concealed. 'And you know, Joe, our plan was to add more rooms to the house as soon as we are able.'

'Yes, Nettie, I know that was our plan. But there is another reason why we ought to secure this land, if possible. Squire Lawton says that Dick Barlow wants it, and stands ready to take it any day. If he buys he will build some sort of a hut on it, and come here to live. You know what a low, drinking, thieving sort of a man he has the name of being. We wouldn't have him for so close a neighbor for the world. Instead of building I should feel like selling out at once, if he should buy that. Squire Lawton has been kind enough to hold Barlow off until he could see me and give me the chance of buying if I wished. He told me so today.'

The outcome was that the forty acres were bought and the new house postponed. Then came another long period of planning and toiling. Mrs. Grasper, though discouraged at first, soon took up her share of the work with all her former zeal, though with hopes not altogether as free from doubt.

As the years rolled on another time came when there was ready money for building the house. Just then 80 acres adjoining Grasper's, long coveted by him for a pasture and a wood lot, was sold at public sale. The land went for two-thirds of its value, and Grasper could never let such a bargain slip. And the long planned new house was pushed off into the dim future—dimmer and further it now seemed than ever before.

Soon after this a quarter section near by was for sale, and Joe Grasper bought it, going in debt for the entire amount, and covering all his property with a mortgage for security.

After that there was a debt constantly hanging over his head. True, he prospered; but his prosperity neither built the house nor removed his indebtedness. It only added to his acres, increased his burden of care, and made him more grasping and covetous in his nature.

At length he was seized with a mania to possess a 1,000 acre farm, and everything else, was pushed into the back ground to make room for the accomplishment of this.

Thus we find him at the opening of our sketch, past 40 years of age, with a family of five, (two sons and a daughter) with 600 acres of land in his own name, and still living in the log house, which he built nearly 20 years before.

The wife's hope of a new house, which at first burned so brightly, was now completely extinguished. She mechanically listened to plans of enlarging the farm, in which plans she could take no interest. Life was losing its charms and its tasks becoming burdens.

To the husband, his cherished hope was an inspiration lending strength and endurance to mind and muscle. It made him so strong for his tasks that he never realized how great the hardships he imposed on the other members of the family.

No pleasures were indulged in, luxuries were never thought of and actual necessities were squeezed to the last notch of endurance.

To Mrs. Grasper, her husband's greed for land was but a grim mountain of despair. It stood between her and nearly every earthly longing of her soul.

A better home, conveniences to aid about her work, plans for improving and beautifying the place, for educating the children, and a thousand other needs that crowded her mind, were no sooner thought of than this monster was thrust squarely in the way. To surmount it was impossible; to remove it all her arts had been exhausted in vain. It stood there an invincible fact; and as time wore on she saw its dark shadow creeping between herself and husband, destroying an affection strong and true for many years. And her husband,

in his foolish blindness, really wondered why she did not join with him and take some interest in his plans, as of old; and he even blamed her and scolded because she did not.

As the farm increased in size extra workmen were employed. There was constant rush from early Spring till Winter. But the increased burden of work within the house was little thought of, and no extra help could be afforded there. Little Mary, the youngest child, was pressed into work at an early age, but was not strong enough to do much. One of the boys might have saved the mother many a step, but neither of them could be spared from the field.

The strong physical frame that Mrs. Grasper had brought to that log cabin had done an incredible amount of work during her early womanhood, when living in an atmosphere of affection and buoyed up by a hope that made toil a pleasure. Her housework was a light task for her then. And she did much work with her husband on the farm, until he learned to expect a great deal of her. But even her strong constitution was forced to give way under the manifold burdens of later years, when the affection had waned and the hope been wrecked.

The weakest and most uncertain of human frames are the wrecks of those that have once been strong. The one that has stood the strain until there seems no end to its power of endurance, is often the one to fail the fastest when the final decline has begun.

So it was with Mrs. Grasper. Her hands scarcely halted in their labor until they dropped forever. One bright morning in midsummer she found and entered her new home—one that made no draft on any greedily hoarded earthly wealth. Whose-ever the loss, it was gain to her.

The wife was missed; the mother deeply mourned; the absorbing scheme was checked. But soon the old threads of life were again picked up and the cherished plan entered into with all the former zeal.

The children's education and moral training were neglected and their bodies dwarfed by hard labor. With their best friend gone, there was little to bind them to the place called home. The elder son strayed away and was never heard from. The younger one became dissipated and died from injuries received in a drunken row.

Mary, the only daughter, a frail creature, was married at the age of eighteen to a man almost a stranger to her. Her attraction to him lay in the fact that she was likely to fall heir to a large farm. Her object in marrying him was solely for the purpose of getting into a different home, feeling sure that there were but few chances of the change being for the worse. In doing this, however, she became the wife of a dissipated wretch and gambler.

When Joe Grasper died he held a free title to 1,000 acres of land. Not a square inch of it could he take with him. After all the sacrifices made in getting so large a tract, a small lot, 3x6 feet, on the sandy hillside cemetery was all he could use. Even the title of ownership to the big farm was now wrenched from him, and by a decree of the court transferred to Mary as the only surviving heir.

It was fated to do her no good. She was induced by her husband to sell it for cash and turn the money over to him. Providence was kind enough to remove her soon after.

Today a drunken wretch is squandering the proceeds of the farm just as fast as his besotted brain can conceive disgraceful ways of doing so. At the present rate it will not take long. The last vestige of this property accumulated through years of drudgery, of pinching economy and terrible sacrifices, will soon disappear.

The story of Joe Grasper is by no means an overdrawn or an isolated one. It is a common occurrence for the hand of reckless extravagance to scatter to the winds the pile which it has been the life-work of the miser to rake together.

Such an ending is not the curse of gold nor the curse of gain. These, when not abused, are blessings; but 'tis the curse of a foolish ambition coupled with a selfish greed.—Farmers' Review.

END.

Polly's Religion.

Life to the Demmings was like a long Summer day until Joe brought his wife home. None of the family had ever seen her. They knew she was one of the Austruthers of Kentucky.

'There are Austruthers in the United Presbyterian church,' said Grace. 'I hope Mary belongs to our membership.'

'Oh, yes, certainly,' said Joe, eagerly. He was just starting to be married and he was very anxious that they should all love Polly in advance.

'Does she sing in the choir?' asked Isabella.

'I think not. But she has one of the sweetest voices—a low contralto. And you ought to hear her laugh, Belle. The merriest ring—oh, she'll bring new life into this house.'

(Concluded in our next.)

212.

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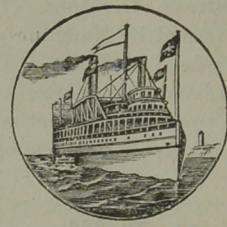
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