

**EVERYDAY LIFE
IN THE
COLONIES**



STONE · FICKETT

HEATH SUPPLEMENTARY READERS

SOAP-MAKING AT THE HOWLANDS'

I

THE snowdrifts were disappearing fast. Each day the sun drank up a great many little ones and devoured huge pieces of the larger ones. Great patches of brown earth were uncovered in every direction, and the "caw, caw" of the crows could be heard each morning.

"Spring has really come, and we must make the soap at once," sighed Goodwife Howland. "The grease will be softening and the meat scraps are thawing. We shall not want to have them about the house any longer. Jonathan, you and William may as well make the lye to-morrow."

"Make the lye!" Little Richard heard it with a start. He was only five and he knew of just one kind of lye,—and that kind, he had been taught, people ought not to make.

"You will need to use two barrels," added Goodwife Howland.

"What can she mean?" puzzled Richard, be-

ginning to watch very carefully to see what his big brothers would do.

They did nothing about the soap-making that day, for they were busy chopping wood to burn in the great fireplace the coming winter; but the next day they started the soap-making as their mother had suggested.

It was all new to Richard. He had been sick with measles at soap-making time the year before. And before that,—well, he could not remember. But they must have made soap, because people had always been telling him to wash his hands.

As children were taught in those days that they should be seen and not heard, Richard kept his bright blue eyes wide open, but asked very few questions.

When Jonathan and William were ready to make the lye, Jonathan rolled out two barrels, each with a hole bored in the bottom. Into each barrel he put a layer of clean, fresh straw, and with William's help filled each with wood ashes. Then they lifted the barrels to a high bench that stood by the shed door, taking care that the holes were just above two large empty buckets.

"The ashes cannot get into the buckets on

account of the straw," thought Richard. Still he asked no questions.

When the barrels and buckets were in place, Jonathan brought two pails of water. These and many more he and William poured over the ashes, until at last the water began to drip into the buckets below.

"Pretty dirty looking stuff!" thought Richard, as he stepped up to have a better view of the water in the buckets.

"Look out, child!" called Jonathan. "Do not touch the lye unless you want to lose the skin from your fingers."

So it was lye which the buckets held! Nothing but water that had run through wood ashes! Well, he was glad to learn.

"Surely you do not think it is strong enough yet to eat the skin," said William.

"Very likely it is," replied Jonathan. "As soon as it is through dripping we will test it; I hope it will not be necessary to pour it through again."

"Will Jonathan test it by dipping in his finger?" Richard asked himself. He did not like to think of the result if the lye was strong. But he need not have troubled himself about Jonathan's finger; for late in the afternoon

Jonathan brought out a hen's egg and placed it in one of the buckets. Wonder of wonders! It did not sink. He put the egg in the other bucket: it floated there also.

"Good! both buckets of lye are all ready for use," he said, with relief. "We will have the soap-making out of the way soon."

II

NOTHING more was done about the soap until the next morning. Then Jonathan began the work by building a fire under the huge set kettle in the back kitchen and by pouring the lye into the kettle.

His mother brought the frozen meat scraps and the waste grease that had been saved during the winter. These she put into the lye.

Such a dirty kettleful as it was! Richard fairly laughed to himself. That make soap? The idea! Why, he would not have to use any soap all next year for scrubbing his hands!

Much as he disliked to bother about clean hands, he was almost sorry that he would not be able to get clean if he should want to.

"The skimmer, Richard," directed his mother, in the midst of his worriment. The kettleful of

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lye and grease was bubbling briskly. When Richard brought the skimmer, Goodwife Howland began to take off all the refuse which rose to the top. Out came bones, skin, and pieces of candle wicking.

After a time, when all the waste had been skimmed, the liquid grew thick as molasses. Richard thought, as he watched it boil, that perhaps after all he would have to wash his hands. The thick ropy mixture was coming to look very much like the soap he had used all the last year.

Pff! pff! pff! Blob! blob! It boiled as you have seen molasses candy boil when it is almost ready to take off the stove. At last his mother said, "The soap is made!"

When Jonathan and William came in for dinner they ladled the hot soap into pails, and carried it down cellar to fill the soap barrel. Most people to-day keep their soap in boxes, but the Howland family always kept theirs in a barrel; and when they needed more soap upstairs they brought it up in a bowl.

When the soap was cold it was still a thick brown jelly, but that was just what Goodwife Howland expected, for the only kind of soap she ever made for her family was what is called

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soft soap. It was not a bit like the hard white soap you like to use when you wash your hands, but it was very good soap; and Richard Howland could get his busy little hands just as clean as if he had used the prettiest, sweetest-smelling cake of hard soap that ever was made.

LEARN :—

Cleanliness is next to Godliness.

—*John Wesley.*