

Granulated sugar became so common for canning fruit and putting in the tea—even for cooking cakes—that Dad Smiles predicted that a lot of folk would come to a premature end from diabetes. Whenever a funeral was held at Ebenezer there was a mile of rigs on the road and half of them were top buggies, some with red wheels. Some of the neighbours whose bush had got down to a thin neck of firewood timber stopped trying to split black-ash rails. When they wanted a new fence they bought some sort of wire rigamajig; and the whole vicinity of Tomtown became an experimental station for at least seven sorts of wire fence, none of which seemed able to keep animals from getting into the wrong fields.

Dad Smiles tile-drained his front fields; which so improved his crops that the neighbours began to do likewise. They all got rid of chess in the wheat and began to keep down the deadly Canada thistles. Some of the young lads took a course at the Ontario Agricultural College and came back with shrewd devices for killing wild mustard, spraying the San Jose scale out of the orchards, and preventing cholera among the hogs.

Which was about the time that Ebenezer became so prosperous an offshoot of Tomtown that the circuit could afford a smart young college man for preacher with a B.A. following his name. And they began to lose faith in the howling revival that had done time with the old-fashioned country hoe-down enlivening the long winters.

Tomtown itself got a lot of new features. The old blacksmith shop grew into a carriage factory. The corner store was rebuilt and another went up on the south-east corner. Somebody started a hardware store, where the farmers could buy hay-forks and castings and plows and binder-twines and washing machines. Somebody else put up a modern grist-mill along the track with rollers instead of stones; and Dad Smiles predicted that everybody would have dyspepsia now because the flour was too fine. Nevertheless Ma Smiles made whiter and better bread than ever she had done. And to keep things evened up a smart young coon from college started a drugstore at Tomtown; afterwards marrying the young milliner who had flirted a good bit with the butcher that sent his rig twice a week with fresh beef out Ebenezer way.

In fact Tomtown land had come to eating beef. Pork was too expensive. The farmers had quit raising the kind of hog that used to eat their heads off. They took to the lean red Tamworths, selling them at seven and eight cents a pound on foot. The Durnans went in for swift, classy horses, worth two hundred dollars apiece. And from end to end of that prosperous neighbourhood there had begun to be the inauguration of a tremendous change in the manner and the cost of living.

CHRISTMAS, 1911, Joe Smiles decided to spend a few days visiting round Tomtown. In the some years since he had been there the folk at home—Tom and Sophie were both married now—had come to think him a pretty successful man in business. They knew he was paying sixty dollars a month rent for a house, getting a couple of thousand a year, and with his small family able to take an occasional summer holiday at the seaside or somewhere in the mountains.

He knew that the home folk were well off; modern farmers who took a couple of daily papers and kept track of what was going on in the world, counting themselves part of the procession. But his city wife Emily was not well posted on the economics and social development of Tomtown. She had never been there and none of Joe's folk had ever been down to the city.

"Oh, I suppose they'll meet us at the station with one of those old-fashioned sleighs you read about," she said, wearily. "Haven't you better write them a letter a couple of days in advance?"

"Oh, I don't think I'll bother."

"Mails are awfully slow in the country, you know."

"Yes, that's a fact, Emily—they are pretty slow."

"I wish we weren't going."

"Oh, you'll get over that."

"Besides, we're going to miss one of the biggest concerts of the season—"

Joe's wife had a mild mania for grand music.

"Yes, I'm sorry about that. But you know, dear, you've never seen the old farm and they've never seen you except in a photograph. Great Scott! I think it's about time we gave the folk on the old homestead a mild sort of jolt."

"Oh, that's all very well, Joe. But I'm no missionary. Why don't they come to the city and see a few things once in a while instead of poking up there in that Slabtown?"

"Well, farm folk are very peculiar."

"Besides, I can't pack a lot of dresses into a suit-

case, and it would look silly to be taking a trunk."

"My dear, they'd think you a dream if you had only one dress to your name. Don't worry."

Joe was smiling to himself at the eye-openings that would happen to his young wife—considerably younger than himself. But he reckoned it would be more fun to keep her in the dark till she got to Tomtown.

"Yes, but don't you know it's frightfully stupid for a town woman to visit the country? I won't have a thing to show them. Can't take them to a concert or a play or down to a cafe for supper—"

"Yes, but think of the joy of sitting round the old kitchen stove cracking hickory nuts on the end of a fire-wood stick. And the pan of Northern Spies on the table; bread and milk before going to bed; up at daylight to see the cows milked in the stack-yard—by George! it'll be such a change you'll think you're the wife of a stock-broker."

"Oh, well, we won't stay more than a day, Joe. We must get back for that concert. You must get the seats before we go, too, or we'll never get good ones."

Joe sniggered to himself when he bought the railway tickets; and he chuckled at the children half the way up on the train. It was a four-hours ride on a grey day; to Mrs. Smiles rather wearisome, wishing they were on the way to New York.

"Now, I do hope they'll be on hand at the station," she said. "It will be just horrid to sit and wait."

"Oh, well," he said, "we can probably get a chance out with a sleigh, or hire a livery rig or stay all night at the little hotel."

"Oh, horrors! I'll take the first train back."

"Now, don't be foolish."

"Are you sure you sent the letter?"

"Sh! Here we are. Here's Tomtown"—he grabbed the luggage and Mrs. Smiles bundled the children into their wraps.

THE train stopped. Several folk got off. The Tomtown platform was alive with people; almost as much handshaking and kissing to the square inch as one might see in a city station. Mrs. Smiles was very much excited to see a motor-car whizz away from the station.

"Oh, Joe! doesn't it look—just lovely?"

"Now, dear," said Joe, "we'd better step into the station for a few minutes."

The train pulled out. The people drifted away into the village.

"I just knew they wouldn't be here to meet us," she pouted. "Joe, I think this is perfectly dreadful!"

"Oh, well, accidents will happen, you know. Maybe the folk had a busy day in the bush. They'll be along soon."

As soon as he got them settled down by the station stove Joe smuggled himself away to a telephone. He rang up the exchange and got Henry Smiles at Ebenezer on the rural line.

"Hullo, Dad! Say, I've got the family at the station. Can you send a rig out—in ten minutes?"

Mrs. Smiles didn't hear him; in fact she wanted to know what in the world he had been doing.

"Oh, just having a little confab with the agent. He says the folks will be here very shortly."

"But how does he know?"

"Oh, well," as he lighted a cigar, "there are a few things about country life that even city folk don't quite understand, you know."

Joe dug out some oranges for the children while

his wife fussed about the station, peering out of the windows, scolding and fretting and fuming—delightfully. He had trouble keeping his face straight; especially when the children wanted to know all sorts of things about Grandpa, the kind of boots he would have, and would he have long, white whiskers, with hayseeds in them?

"Surely that isn't motor lights on the road?" she said, quickly.

"Oh, perhaps," said Joe. "Likely one of the store-keepers getting home."

But he knew better.

"COME and look after the children, dear," he said. "I'll run out and ask the man in the motor if he saw anything of a bob-sleigh crawling along the road with a hayseedy old man on the seat."

He stepped out. Sure enough in from the road came the lights of a motor-car. He knew whose car it was. It stopped. Joe saw his wife and children at the window. But they couldn't see under the top of the car, Dad Smiles and his son Tom that owned the car—and suddenly the door opened.

"Come on!" shouted Joe. "The sleigh's here!"

He grabbed the baggage and hustled them out. "Here, Dad," he said, in a loud voice. "Here she is—the woman you never saw except in a photograph. Here are the grandchildren you've never seen. Emily, this is my father. Children, kiss your grandpa. Kiss Uncle Tom, too. Climb in, now"—and he heaved the grips into the tonneau.

Such a racket of shouting and gasping and exclaiming and excitement of the engine, that the whole family of the junior Smiles were just beginning to arrange themselves in the car when it turned and shot away to the road, while the station-agent stood grinning at the door and yelling—"Merry Christmas!"

"Well, upon my word, Joe Smiles!" laughed his wife, as they shot out to the road and went full speed ahead along the smooth, snow-hard track of the town line towards Ebenezer. "What in the world—?"

"Ha-ha-ha!" roared Joe. "This is one on you, Emily. This is—rich!"

Dad Smiles turned his white whiskers back into the tonneau.

"Yah," he said, big bushwhacker voice as ever he had, "I guess this is a noo kind'v a bobsleigh all right. Let 'er out, Tom. Gosh! we got a git supper over in time to hev an hour'v grand op'ry on the phonograph. By gum; we got a hull sh'bang'v Caruso an' Melba an'—what's the rest'v'm, Tom?"

"Oh—Gorgonzola and Scotti and Sousay and Paderewski and Koobelik—lord! I furgit the rest. I got'm all mixed up with the records on my pianola."

Tom twiddled the steering-wheel.

Joe just sat back and laughed and pinched his wife and hugged the children, and generally acted like a big tomfool out for a shindig.

And before Mrs. Smiles had come to herself the car was in sight of the vast, red barn of the Smiles clan, with a cement silo like a Martello tower behind, a windmill on top; two huge brick houses out in front with lights glaring in every window from kitchen to parlour. And Joe Smiles said to himself that all day Christmas when Dad's \$300 phonograph or Tom's \$800 pianola wasn't playing, he would tell his wife all about the way the old farm used to be at Christmas time only twenty-three years ago.

Who Pays the Fire Tax?

CANADA and the United States burn up a \$5,000 house every ten minutes every day in the year—is the graphic way Franklin H. Wentworth, of Boston, has of telling the people of Canada and the United States that the annual fire loss is \$250,000,000 a year. This figures out at \$500 a minute.

Who pays this fire tax?

The consumer pays for it in the price of every article he purchases. It makes cottons and woollens more expensive. It adds something to the price of everything we wear, everything we eat, and everything we use.

Few people realize that when they see a fire or read about one, that the cost of that fire comes out of their pockets. The public must pay for this awful waste. The fire insurance companies do not pay it; they simply collect from the public to pay the losers.

The average per capita cost of fires in Europe is 33 cents. In the United States it is \$3.00, and in Canada \$3.07. In Berlin, Germany, the annual fire loss is \$175,000; in Chicago it is \$5,000,000. The fire department in Berlin costs \$300,000 a year; in Chicago it costs \$3,000,000. What is true of the United States is equally true of Canada: "We are

a nation of spenders." We get our wealth easy and it goes easy.

In the United States they are grappling with this problem by teaching fire prevention in the schools. They have a special day in many states known as Fire Protection Day. In some cities they have an officer known as a Fire Marshal, whose business it is to investigate fires and place the blame where it belongs. Canada should make some move in this matter. An unnecessary and useless fire should be made a penal offence.

One of the first reforms should be the absolute prohibition of all matches except those which light on the box. This would save the lives of many children and also millions of dollars annually. No factory should be permitted to exist in a town or city with waterworks which is not equipped with the sprinkler system. The height of buildings should be regulated—as yet this is not done in a single city in Canada. Tall buildings are looked upon with pride; in reality they are a menace.

"Above all," says Mr. Wentworth, "we must begin to place individual responsibility for fires. The man who has a fire in his place must be regarded as an offender and a pickpocket."