

A Day of New Thought

By MABEL CHASE ENGLAND

SAM BINNEY, raised his eyes from the "new-thought" magazine which he was perusing, and fixed them critically on the wife of his bosom, where she sat stolidly darning an endless pile of diminutive stockings by the light of a smoking lamp.

"Maria," he said, "you're gettin' a awful expression! Long-faced an' sour, I'd call it. An' it's all"—with a glance at the page—"from your mental habits. You should think happy thoughts."

Maria had finished an enormous wash, besides the usual mountain of daily tasks. She had tucked her five small hopefuls, ranging from one year to eight, into the two beds which they shared among them, and had been half nodding with weariness over her nightly task of mending and darning. Now, however, this uncalculated criticism from her lord and master roused her senses to their full activity. She glared across at him indignantly.

"Happy thoughts!" she snorted. "What about?"

"Oh, about—how do I know what about. Jest think them." He glanced at the magazine for support. "Say to yourself, 'I am happy,' every chanst you get, an' soon you'll feel it comin'. Cultivate serenity of spirit an' your face will get likewise. Keep smiling. It seems to me, Maria, you don't never smile much nowadays. My, when I think of what you was when I married you!"

He plunged once more into the printed page and read on. Maria remained motionless, staring at him as if hypnotized.

"These success thoughts is great, too," he broke out again presently. "It says to never worry. Jest think success, it says, risin' an' retirin', an' all day long, an' success'll come, sure! I been thinkin' success for three days now, Maria, while you've jest been worryin' an' makin' your face worse."

Maria came out of her trance. "Yes, thinkin' success!" she snapped. "That's one way of gettin' a job!"

"I been lookin' for work, too, Maria," reproached her lord.

"Lookin' for work an' prayin' you won't find none," muttered Maria, as she rammed her darning-egg into the remnants of a heel.

"What's that, Maria?"

She drew a thread savagely across the ragged chasm.

"I said you was havin' success all right!"

Sam assumed an injured expression and retired once more behind the alluring pages of advanced thought. Maria continued to darn hole after hole, vindictively. When the fifth was neatly bridged over, she suddenly laid aside her basket, arose, and slipped from the room. Up-stairs she crept into the bed-room, where the children were peacefully sleeping, and, lighting a small gas-jet above a cracked mirror, stared silently at her reflection.

It was a long time since Maria had looked at herself critically, if indeed she had looked at all. The face staring back at her could not be called pleasing—that she admitted; and the one-sided distortion effected by the cheap glass didn't mend matters. Maria's feminine vanity, almost extinguished beneath the crushing load of her daily toil, came faintly to life. She experienced an honest flash of resentment over her vanished "looks."

"My, when I think of what you was when I married you!" Sam had said.

A dull, angry red flamed over Maria's face.

"Yes, an' if I hadn't married him I'd be that way yet, the good-for-nothin'—"

Still, that didn't help her in her present predicament. What could she do? "Keep smilin'," he had said. Maria grinned at herself ferociously. The result was almost terrifying. She tried a softer, more ingratiating smile. That was better, though the lines of her face seemed hopelessly stubborn. She began to grow discouraged. Placing a finger on either side of her mouth, she pressed the corners up forcibly. A yell of fright came from the bed behind her.

"Ma! What're you doin'?"

Maria dropped her hands and glared into the mirror at the staring reflection of her third youngest. Then she wheeled around.

"You mind your own business," Dolphus Binney, she flared, furious without

quite knowing why. "If I hear one other peep out of you, or any of the rest of you, I'll come in here with a shingle!"

Reassured by the familiar scolding voice, Adolphus sank back. Maria turned off the gas viciously, and, in thorough ill-humor, flounced into her own room and slammed the door.

An hour or two later she crept from the side of her snoring consort, felt her way down the creaking stairs, and lit the ill-smelling lamp once more. Seated beneath its rays, with her feet tucked comfortably under her, she opened Sam's discarded magazine and began to read. As she absorbed the precepts set forth, life actually seemed to lose a little of its blackness, and even to absorb something of a faint, roscate hue. It all looked so simple and easy.

Maria was not lacking in intelligence, nor in keen common sense. But for her practical capability the little household would long since have been to use her own expression—"skylarkin' in the poor-house." As she read, she sniffed audibly at intervals.

II

At seven o'clock the next morning, when Sam Binney awoke to the sound of an unusual uproar from the children's room, he was surprised and somewhat agast to find his faithful Maria still slumbering peacefully beside him. It was Mrs. Binney's custom to rise at half past five, to have the wash under way, the children dressed, and breakfast on the table by seven-thirty. He prodded her indignantly.

"What's the matter, ma? Are you sick? It's seven o'clock!" he added, in the voice of one who makes an astounding revelation.

Maria opened her eyes. "That so?" she commented indifferently. Mr. Binney stared.

"Ain't you goin' to get up?"

"When I get ready," Maria yawned lazily. "I'm cultivatin' serenity of spirit, an' I don't think early risin' is good for it. Liza Jane!" she called sharply. "You stop that rowin' an' help dress them children, or I'll send your pa in there! A big girl like you leadin' them on 'stead of tryin' to help!"

She sat slowly up in bed, slid over the edge, and, thrusting her feet into a pair of dilapidated slippers, shuffled across the room to the open window. Raising her arms above her head, she carefully drew in a long, deep breath.

"Joy!" she murmured. "Happiness!"

Sam stared, a hint of fear in his eyes. "What in thunder are you doin', Maria?"

She turned on him angrily, then thought herself of her expression, and smiled softly.

"I'm assertin' things," she explained, condescendingly. "I read your book last night, an' some things in it is good." She hitched the torn sleeve of her night-dress higher up, brushed the straggly wisps of hair out of her eyes, and took another breath. "I am beauty!" she asserted dramatically. "I am youth!"

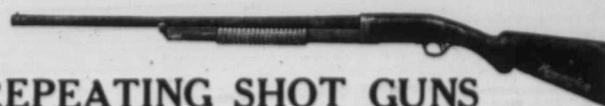
Sam made an assertion of his own. "You're a silly fool, Maria!" he exploded. "You quit this here tumfoolin' now an' get breakfast. I've got to get out an' hunt a job."

Maria drew another long breath. "I am riches!" she declaimed. Then she turned, with careful attention to her expression, to where Sam was glumly pulling on his trousers. "You go an' get breakfast yourself," she retorted sharply. "You can hunt a job jest as well in the kitchen as you can sittin' in Hassenplug's saloon! Your pa's gettin' breakfast," she proclaimed grandly to the curious children, who came clamoring into the room in various stages of undress as their indignant parent flung down the stairs. "You go an' help 'im. Shoo!"

She bundled them out and shut the door. Then she slowly dressed herself, carefully smiling the while.

Some fifteen minutes later, when she entered the kitchen, Liza Jane was attempting to set the table amid the deafening cries and plaints of the younger ones, while Sam stirred sulkily at a sticky mass on the stove.

Mrs. Binney glanced indifferently into the pot.



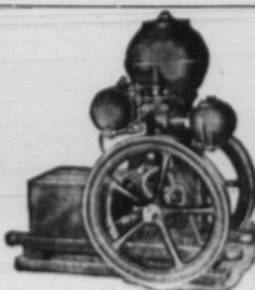
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"It needs more water," she observed. "Oh, it does, does it?" Mr. Binney snatched up the kettle with a vicious jerk, and a stream of boiling water spouted out of the spout and cascaded down his left leg. He ripped out an oath and danced wildly about the kitchen, holding the wet cloth away from his skin. Maria smiled vindictively.

"What're you grinnin' at?" he demanded furiously. "I'm thinkin' happy thoughts," she responded, humming softly to herself as she lifted the kettle and stirred more water into the oatmeal.

Sam glared, and surreptitiously examined his thigh.

"Oh, I guess it didn't hurt you much," remarked Maria easily. "Come on now, an' eat." She poured the oatmeal into a huge bowl and set some bread and sirup on the table. "Right after breakfast, Liza Jane," she added crisply, as she served generous helpings to her brood. "I want you an' James William to take that wash back to the Collinses, an' tell them I ain't goin' to do it. Tell them I've give up washin', 'cept for my own family."

"What?" shouted Sam. "Give up washin'? An' how are we goin' to live,

I'd like to know, with me out of a job?" "Now, don't you worry, Sam, an' spoil your expression," warned his wife. "I'm goin' to think success thoughts. You ain't the only new-thoughter in this house. I'm goin' to assert riches all day long, with deep breathin', an' that magazine says they'll sure come."

Sam stared, speechless; then, without a word, he swallowed his breakfast and flung out of the door, steering a straight course for Hassenplug's. Maria, with watchful glances against his return, herded the children up-stairs and washed and dressed them properly, then bundled them out to play.

III

When Sam returned, at the sound of the noon whistles, hungry and somewhat apprehensive, his worst forebodings were realized. The soiled breakfast-dishes still littered the table. The range was stone cold. The children swarmed, quarreling and noisy, about the kitchen, seeking what they might devour.

"Ma's up-stairs with the door locked," complained Liza Jane. "She said you'd get dinner, an' if we came up again she'd spank us."

Sam tramped up the stairs, turned the handle, and shook the door violently.