Holidaying for Farm Women

By I. B. Graham.

fortable?"

"Perfectly, quite, certainly, very, couldn't be nicer," chorused the group of five women callers who waited upon Mrs. Mills in response to a hasty telephone invitation of the previous evening, to run in to her place for an hour to discuss a brand new and thrilling project, a real inspiration, of which not a hint as to its character would be divulged until all five met together at Mrs. Mills home. Any invited guest failing to arrive would remain outside the pale of Trust at least for a week. Without exception they arrived punc-

"DO have another cup Mrs. Reekie, and YOU too Mrs. Black," solicited

"I'll be glad of another. Thank you but Mrs. Black has had three cups already by actual count; any more is an infraction of—"

"We positively refuse to waste more precious time on a mere catering to the lust of palate," interposed a Spartan member of the council, "the mental or spiritual nourishment should collaborate with the physical, AND-

"Head off Sparta. Somebody do. We all know the danger-signal of her capital 'AND."

"As I was about to observe," crowded in Sparta, "before I was so-er inopportunely interrupted, was that our good hostess having so lavishly gratified the corporeal, has undoubtedly furnished equally sumptuous nutriment for the moral, by means of the suggested or indicated 'inspiration' hinted at in-"

"To The Rescue, to The Rescue, if you love us, Mrs. Mills, we implore. Another such volley will—ah terminate our miserable existence. You can see for yourself we too are getting the habit already. Save us before it's too late—What, WHAT, is your inspiration? Inform us that we may inspect could have dreamed of this; each in-

warrants. But keep us no longer in suspense we humbly pray." Mrs. Mills was used to her company. She sat back in her chair smilingly as if the "inspiration" was all a fake.

'You don't mean to tell us you have NO inspiration, NO brand new project, NO anything after all?" lamented the crowd. Projects were too rare and precious in their humdrum lives to permit any careless escapes.

"Will you promise not to be shocked when I tell it?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Anything is better than this uncertainty," acclaimed the again hopeful guests.

"Well then—(a long pause)—it is this: a holiday, a really truly holiday for us six plain, mediocre, overladen, middleaged neighbor-farm-women."

Everyone of the five looked anywhere but at her hostess or at each other. Dropping in at a neighbor's occasionally for an hour was one thing; picking up and running away to foreign parts indefinitely, in the busy season was quite another. "Had Mrs. Mills gone temporarily—touched?—the "Had Mrs. weather had been very hot, and she had had an unusual crop of berries."

"There, do you wonder I hesitated? I knew exactly how you'd take it. But what's the matter with a holiday? Have we ever had one? Don't we all need it," cheerfully defied Mrs. Mills; conviction at last coming to the rescue of her ebbing courage. "Aren't we All running to seed as it were-going a trifle stale, out of sorts-hasn't the sympathy and joy of living abated somewhat lately-in short hasn't the light of Love sputtered some? Come now, aren't you stale on your husbands-weary of your children-disgruntled with the ceaseless monotonous daily grind? Eh, confess everyone of you," bantered the hostess.

"Stale-seedy-disgruntled-sputtered," echoed the startled conspirators. Who it and reject it or adopt it as its merit wardly canvassing when and how she

had betrayed her inner self to this spying if kindly eye, but fixed in her resolve to admit nothing outwardly. The others could suit themselves certainly, but for her-HER mind was made up. Betray the intimate perplexities or complications of household? Why, the very idea!!! She had just as many conveniences, just as good a home, and if it came to that—well just as good a husband as any other woman there present. Let them do the complaining. As the enormity of the idea grew each eyed her neighbor with a tinge of aloofness which might flare into resentment on slight provocation. A Christian Scientist would have been charmed with the result. Each subject had (mentally, for the moment) all and exactly what she desired, and the proposed holiday loomed disloyal and menacing.

The crisis was one that required and received careful adjustment.

Shrewdly guessing the identical train of thought zigzagging through the wary minds of her cautious guests, and knowing well that one and all would die at her post, unrelieved and undiverted, sooner than concede an excess in fatigues, or a lack of consolations, Mrs. Mills averted impending disaster to her scheme by hastily excluding any oral expression of opinion whatsoever. They "wouldn't discuss it. She had a better plan-much better. She'd like somebody to inform her if they pleased, WHERE was the use in acquiring a more or less faulty knowledge of parliamentary procedure if not to pry people out of dilemmas?" Here was a procedure. Here also was a dilemma. She would take the liberty to suggest that the matter be decided by ballotsecret ballot. Then everybody could do as she pleased, and not be beholden to another, and change her mind every time if she wanted to."

In a twinkling the little paper slips were ready, indeed suspiciously ready. Reticence charged the atmosphere. The affair had its weak spots and might topple any minute for want of a discreet word.

"All agreed," announced Mrs. Mills no doubt directed by a prophetic hand, That'll give 'we ballot five times." everybody a chance to RE-consider; and 'second thoughts are best' the poet says,—and then we'll call in John to be scrutineer and—"

"NO, NO, NO mere man in on this," protested the five.

'Norah, then?"

"Norah, it is." "Mark your ballots 'yes' for a holi-

day; 'no' for stay home.
"We'll total all the yesses and all the noes; subtract the totals and the difference determines the holiday.

'Is that parliamentary procedure?" doubtfully.

"Not-exactly; it's an improvement, or variation of the old style." At the imminence of the decision, they broke

out with:
"What about the children?"

"And the chickens?"

"And the HUSBANDS?" "And the cows?"

"And the hired-help?"

"And? ? ? ? ?' Mrs. Mills raised a protesting hand "One thing at a time," she laughed. "If we don't vote a holiday, we can all go home and work for them as per usual; so don't cross a bridge before

you come to it." cross on when we do come to it," warned the Irish lady of the party, "if we vote a holiday first, and consider the et als afterwards."

"That's too deep for us; go on with the ballots," encouraged the hit-ormiss party.

"Kindly perservere with the balloting," primly chided the Spartan. "All agreed then? All pledged to stand by the ballots?"
"ALL," came the unanimous em-

phatic pledge.

The slips were sorted, marked and collected. Norah proceeded to the counting. Somebody wanted the returns before the second balloting. Somebody objected because it made more mystery not to know. No counting was a'lowed until the five rounds of balloting were completed. Norah

"didn't know what to do with the 'spoiled' ballots." She "couldn't tell whether the voter meant yes or no." One word was written squarely on top of the other. She "couldn't account for that unless the voter changed her mind while writing." They all wanted to examine the "spoiled" ballots. This was objected to, as being unofficial. After due deliberation, all spoiled or double-

marked ballots were thrown out. The scrutineer's final official report gave a majority of five for the holiday. Though not openly so reported, twentyfive papers had to be thrown out. Mrs. Mills alone had voted straight for the holiday. The other five were victims of their own doubledealing and insincerity, but they must not know it-not yet at least. Now they were in for it.

"What will our husbands say?"

"And our children?"

"And the chickens?" "And the cows? And??????"

"Alas where was now the bridge to cross back upon."

"When do we have to go-and WHERE-and how long do we have to stay-and how much will it cost-and who'll do the work while we're awayand?"

"La, la, la," parried Mrs. Mills, grasping her hair with both hands. "My brain is positively jammed up with question-marks. Wait a minute. Now then I do assure you I've thought of everything. I give you five days to settle your work, bring your husbands round, and get ready to go. I know where there's a neat little shooting-box or shanty, right by a water's edge, owned by a friend of mine—he has a boat or two and it's all ours for the taking. We'll bring our own bedding, a few dishes, a hammock or so, and the little food we require—I'll contribute a pound of tea, you one of coffee, another butter, and so on. Each can bring a two-quart sealer of canned fruit, a glass or more of jelly, we'll catch our own fish, coop up half a dozen live fowl to dress when wanted, a bag of vegetables for good measure. AND we'll live like kings-and THERE YOU ARE, and what more can mortal want?"

"Put WHERE, that's the point,

WHERE?" "Ch, of course, where? You must have faith in me for that. I know WHERE, but on the whole it may be better to keep that secret at present, in fact till we are ready to start, and even then from our dear men friendsand just one other thing, Norah here, you all know what a gem Norah is, will undertake to go the rounds of your homes daily or oftener if necessary, to see that the children are doing

and the work going properly now that's positively all, so away with you to your preparations, there's not a minute to lose for threshing is at hand. We've all to be back for that. Next Wednesday we leave—good-bye. Yes, Wednesday, at ten a.m. I'll come round for you all in my car-good-bye,

"Now WHAT do you know about THAT," ruminated the Mills' adherents as by wheel or horseback or buggy they promptly dispersed; intent upon how to "bring our husbands round," which was the recognized though unacknowledged climax of the undertaking. "Could there be anything in that old adage mother used to joke about, "But there won't be any bridge to his stomach," and Aunt Jane always arned the Irish lady of the party "if substituted gizzard—it can't hurt if I make Jack a big Johnnycake with rich sour cream, he likes nothing better, unless a green-apple pie with flake crust and cinnamon, that'll pave the road if anything will."

After the various Jacks had gorged themselves at the evening meal, upon the diplomatically assorted dainties and

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