

A Family Affair

THE anxious parents waited fretfully for the tie-up in the street car system to be untangled.

The father, already worn by the strain of a slack, unprofitable day at the office, now writhed under the monotonous reiteration of "whys" and "whens" which proceeded out of the mouth of a restless child who balanced herself uncomfortably on his knee.

Let that be the excuse for the fatuous course he now pursued.

"I can see," he said, in that irritating sort of semi-public aside, "I can see where the chap who is paid to write excuses for the C. B. Traction Company will have to work up something new this time."

He was addressing his remarks to the mother, and, of course, talking to his fellow-passengers.

"Just look at that, now. Cars running on the line to the right of us and even in front of us, and here we are stuck fast and not even a trolley break to excuse the hold-up. I suppose the 'Weekly Car Tract' will call it an 'act of God.'"

As a public satirist he was a weak amateur. He wilted under the glances of disapproval of those about him, even getting the impression that one youth with long hair and a fishy eye was making him a subject of pitiful regard, if not of silent intercession.

The mother had not even listened to him. She had heard him often before saying things of that sort, and just now was not in the mood for heavy trifling. She sighed.

"If only I knew where that boy is, and what he is doing," she said. "He has had two hours already in which to get into trouble."

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She sighed again, and indulged in the feminine luxury of meeting trouble at its starting point. She just knew, she told herself, that Andrew was sitting in the house, his feet wet and cold, or else playing outside, such a bleak January day as it was, and after all her watchful care during the epidemic. Oh, those stupid old cars and that careless little wretch! Now her feelings were beginning to get the better of her.

"Here we are at last," said the father. They dismounted from the car, the father carrying the little daughter so that they might hurry faster.

The welcome sign of light in the front room could be seen as they reached the top of the hill. "He's at home, thank goodness," said the mother, with a sigh of relief. "At least, you won't have to go hunting for him."

The boy looked up with quiet indifference from the book he was reading as they entered the house. He bore quite patiently the boisterous attentions of his little sister. The mother casually conducted a swift investigation. Apparently all was well—suspiciously so. His coat and hat were hung up, his boots carefully put away. The boots were not very dirty and quite dry. And, wonder of wonders, there was an ample supply of kindling wood in the box. She looked searchingly at him. Her gaze was met by a baffling, far-away look.

Soon they were all sitting down to a hastily prepared meal. The boy's appetite for soup had never been ravenous. Tonight he seemed to have accepted the oft-spoken dictum that it "was good for him," for