

Sap-Time

By Elisabeth Woodbridge
(In the Outlook)

It was a little tree-toad that began it. In a careless moment he had come down to the bench that connects the big maple tree with the old locust stump, and when I went out at dusk to wait for Jonathan, there he sat in plain sight. A few experimental pokes sent him back to the tree, and I studied him there, marveling at the way he assimilated with its bark. As Jonathan came across the grass I called softly, and pointed to the tree.

"Well?" he said.

"Don't you see?"

"No. What?"

"Look—I thought you had eyes!"

"Oh, what a little beauty!"

"And isn't his back just like bark and lichens? And what are those things in the tree beside him?"

"Plugs, I suppose."

"Plugs?"

"Yes. After tapping. Uncle Ben used to tap these trees, I believe."

"You mean for sap? Maple syrup?"

"Yes."

"Jonathan! I didn't know these were sugar maples."

"Oh, yes. Those on the road."

"The whole row? Why, there are ten or fifteen of them! And you never told me!"

"I thought you knew."

"Knew! I don't know anything—I should think you'd know that, by this time. Do you suppose, if I had known, I should have let all these years go by—oh, dear—think of all the fun we've missed! And syrup!"

"You'd have to come up in February."

"Well, then, I'll come in February. Who's afraid of February?"

"All right. Try it next year."

I did. But not in February. Things happened, as things do, and it was early April before I got to the farm. But it had been a wintry March, and the farmers told me that the sap had not been running except for a few days in a February thaw. Anyway, it was worth trying.

Jonathan could not come with me. He was to join me later. But Hiram found a bundle of elder spouts in the attic, and with these and an auger we went out along the snowy, muddy road. The hole was bored—a pair of them—in the first tree, and the spouts driven in. I knelt, watching—in fact, peering up the spout-hole to see what might happen. Suddenly a drop, dim with sawdust, appeared—gathered, hesitated, then ran down gayly and leapt off the end.

"Look! Hiram! It's running!" I called.

Hiram, boring the next tree, made no response. He evidently expected it to run. Jonathan would have acted just like that, too, I felt sure. Is it a masculine quality, I wonder, to be unmoved when the theoretically expected becomes actual? Or is it that some temperaments have naturally a certain large confidence in the sway of law, and refuse to wonder at its individual workings? To me the individual workings give an ever fresh thrill because they bring a new realization of the mighty powers behind them. It seems to depend on which end you begin at.

But though the little drops thrilled me, I was not beyond setting a pail

underneath to catch them. And as Hiram went on boring I followed with my pails. Pails, did I say? Pails by courtesy. There were, indeed, a few real pails—berry-pails, lard-pails, and water-pails—but for the most part the sap fell into pitchers, or tin saucepans, stew-kettles of aluminum or agate ware, blue and gray and white and mottled, or big yellow earthenware bowls. It was a strange collection of receptacles that lined the roadside when we had finished our progress. As I looked along the row, I laughed, and even Hiram smiled.

But what next? Every utensil in the house was out here, sitting in the road. There was nothing left but the wash-boiler. Now, I had heard tales of amateur syrup-boilings, and I felt that the wash-boiler would not do. Besides, I meant to work outdoors—no kitchen stove for me! I must have a pan,



Capt. H. Strachan, V.C., M.C., the First Victoria Cross Hero in Return to Canada. He is being welcomed and congratulated by Major-General Jack Hughes, G.O.C., Military District No. 10, and Lieut-Col. Grassie, A.A.C. He had charged at a headload of 200 returned soldiers which reached Winnipeg, Mar. 20, and had just stepped from the train when the picture was snapped. He won the V.C. by leading a squadron of the famous 24th Fort Garry Horse into action at Cambrai, where this little band of horsemen penetrated the German lines to a depth of 8 or 10 miles and literally had to back their way back through thousands of footmen. He is on his way after being wounded.

a big, flat pan. I flew to the telephone, and called up the village plumber, three miles away. Could he build me a pan? Oh, say, two feet by three feet, and five inches high—yes, right away. Yes, Hiram would call for it in the afternoon.

I felt better. And now for a fireplace! Oh, Jonathan! Why did you have to be away! For Jonathan loves a stone and knows how to put stones together, as witness the stone "Eyre" and the stile in the lane. However, there Jonathan wasn't. So I went out into the swampy orchard behind the house and looked about—no lack of stones, at any rate. I began to collect material, and Hiram, seeing my purpose, helped with the big stones. Somehow

my fireplace got made—two side walls, one end wall, the other end left open for stoking. It was not as pretty as if Jonathan had done it, but "twas enough, 'twould serve." I collected firewood, and there I was ready for my pan, and the afternoon was yet young, and the sap was drip-drip-dripping from all the spouts. I could begin to boil next day. I felt that I was being borne along on the providential wave that so often floats the inexperienced to success.

That night I emptied all my vessels into the boiler and set them out once more. A neighbor drove by and pulled up to comment benevolently on my work.

"Will it run to-night?" I asked him.

"No—no—'twon't run to-night. Too cold. 'Twon't run any to-night. You can sleep all right."

This was pleasant to hear. There was a moon, to be sure, but it was growing colder, and at the idea of crawling along that road in the middle of the night even my enthusiasm shivered a little.

So I made my rounds at nine, in the white moonlight, and went to sleep.

I was awakened the next morning to a consciousness of flooding sunshine and Hiram's voice outside my window.

"Got anything I can empty sap into? I've got everything all filled up."

"Sap! Why, it isn't running yet, is it?"

"Pails were flowing over when I came out."

"Flowing over! They said the sap wouldn't run last night."

"I guess there don't nobody know when sap'll run and when it won't," said Hiram peacefully, as he tramped off to the barn.

In a few minutes I was outdoors. Sure enough, Hiram had everything full—old boilers, feed-pails, water-pails.

But we found some three-gallon milk cans and used them. A farm is like a city. There are always things enough in it for all purposes. It is only a question of using its resources.

Then, in the clear April sunshine, I went out and surveyed the row of maples. How they did drip! Some of them almost ran. I felt as if I had turned on the faucets of the universe and didn't know how to turn them off again.

However, there was my new pan. I set it over my oven walls and began to pour in sap. Hiram helped me. He seemed to think he needed his feed-pails. We poured in sap and we poured in sap. Never did I see anything hold so much as that pan. Even Hiram was stirred out of his usual calm to remark, "It beat all, how much that holds." Of course Jonathan would have had its capacity all calculated the day before, by my methods are empirical, and so I was surprised as well as pleased when all my receptacles emptied themselves into its shallow breadths and still there was a good inch to allow for boiling up. Yes, Providence—my exclusive little fool's Providence—was with me. The pan, and the oven, were a success, and when Jonathan came that night I led him out with unconcealed pride and showed him the pan—now a heaving, frothing mass of sap—about-to-be-syrup, sending clouds of

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Members of the Manitoba Legislature Visiting Tuxedo Park Convalescent Home. Members of the Hospital Staff are also Shown in the Illustration.