

## THE HOME CIRCLE

### Mrs Berwick's Easter Hat.

By Waldo.



ALL happened years ago, but the memory of it is as fresh and strong as if it had all occurred but yesterday, and many a good laugh have I had as I recall that Easter morning. We had taken a brief spring vacation, a friend and myself, to experience for ourselves what we had long read of and heard of the joys of sugaring. And that is how we chanced to be up in the little hill town of Worthington at Easter time. We had planned to return home the Saturday before Easter, but finally yielded to the persuasions of our host and hostess, Mr and Mrs Berwick, and decided to remain over until Monday. And this decision settled the fate of Mrs Berwick's Easter hat.

It was in part due to the hat that we agreed to stay over, for from the moment of our arrival Mrs Berwick's hat had been the subject of much good natured banter and many jests. The fact is we had brought up the hat from the city with us. The Berkshire hills affording a limited choice in millinery, Mrs Berwick had written my mother to buy her a hat in time for Easter, giving her a few specific directions, but trusting largely to my mother's good taste. The letter wound up thus: "I want a hat that will show the natives what an Easter hat is." Mrs Berwick was city bred and was living in the country under protest. So the hat was duly bought and entrusted to my care for delivery and in due time Mrs Berwick was trying it on before the looking glass to a running fire of comment and chaff. It certainly was a beauty, a dainty creation from New York and most becoming to our hostess, although we pretended to find all manner of faults with it. So it came about that one of the inducements held out to us to remain over Sunday was the privilege of accompanying Mrs Berwick and her hat to church. We accepted and plans were immediately laid for the morning.

As I have said, the season was late. There had been much snow that winter and now the last of March, there were still huge drifts and roads were in a terrible condition. It was therefore with a justifiable degree of doubt that Mr Berwick finally consented to Mrs Berwick's suggestion that we attend service at the little meeting house on the tip top of Peru hill, the highest point in Massachusetts, rather than at the Worthington church, some miles nearer. Of course we city innocents loyally supported Mrs Berwick's plea and the majority ruled despite many a protest from Mr Berwick. But we knew not what we did. And then there was that hat. Worthington could bow down before that hat anytime; it should take Peru by storm first.

Easter morning dawned bright and beautiful and we were early astir, for the ride was a long one at best and we were beginning to suspect a hard one. Mr Berwick harnessed old Jerry, a sober, sedate old family pet, out of whom the interminable hills had long since taken any colts, friskiness he may have had, and presently the open democrat was at the door. While the rest of us were getting in Mr Berwick disappeared. Soon we saw him coming, carefully carrying a five-quart pail. "For goodness sake, John, what have you got there?" exclaimed Mrs Berwick. Mr Berwick handed the pail to me and it was heavy. "We go past Abe Hopkins' place," said he, "and I want him to try my syrup. Promised him I'd bring some over the first chance I had, and now's the chance."

I have said the roads were bad, how bad only a hill farmer can know. In places the roads were so gullied that we were forced to get out in the mud while Mr Berwick skillfully piloted Jerry and the wagon across. Twice we took to the fields through openings in the fence, made for the purpose in order to get around huge drifts. Progress was slow. Occasionally the road pitched sharply down hill and the brake with which the democrat was fitted was all that made

descent possible, but for the most part it was up, up, up; it seemed as if we would never stop climbing. The Sunday morning shine disappeared early, for up the steepest parts all save Mrs Berwick walked, and the mud, sticky, slippery Berkshire clay, it was awful. The day was warm and the wind was soft, but it blew as only on those hill-tops it can blow. It has always been a marvel to me that they do not have to anchor their roofs up there as they do in Switzerland. Mrs Berwick started with the new hat where it belonged, crowning her bewitchingly pretty face, but alas! the wind whooped and howled and played hide and seek among its flowers and ribbons and threatened to ruthlessly destroy this dainty bit of millinery, so that Mrs Berwick tied a scarf over her head and carried the hat in her lap while we chafed her unmercifully.

At length the little Peru meeting house was outlined against the sky; it seemed scarce a half mile distant, but Mr Berwick assured us that we still had two miles of hard climbing, the hardest of the trip. The road certainly did not improve, but the goal was in sight and there was every prospect of our being in time for service.

Then there loomed up a huge gleaming, dazzling barrier, a tremendous drift. As before we took to the fields and when we again struck the road, congratulated each other on the surmounting of what was probably the last of our serious difficulties. But it is the little things of this life that are often of greatest moment. Just above the drift on the steepest part of the grade was an innocent looking little gully, a very small gully. It promised nothing worse than one more jolt. Old Jerry stepped over it, the forward wheels struck into it, and then—well, after that things happened at a rate that left no vivid impression of details. The king bolt, weakened by the long strain, snapped as the wheels struck the gully. Old Jerry, startled by the crash, started forward suddenly with the forward wheels, pulling Mr Berwick, who fortunately had a tight hold on the reins, over the dashboard. But the rest of us? Oh, the memory of that wild ride.

Of course with the departure of the forward wheels we were all pitched sharply forward, and then while we struggled to untangle ourselves we started down hill at a velocity that threatened dire destruction. To this day I bless that snow drift. Rushing down the hill backward we struck the drift fairly in the middle and such was our speed that the body of the wagon was thrown completely over with the three of us struggling underneath. Fortunately the snow was soft, otherwise we could hardly have escaped serious injury. As it was, when we had struggled out from the smothering snow and taken account of damages, we found nothing more serious than a few bruises and scratches. Mr Berwick, who had tied Jerry to a neighboring tree, had come manfully to our rescue. He was unhurt, save for his dignity, but his Sunday clothes were a sight.

Suddenly Mrs Berwick beheld her of her hat. "My hat! my hat!" she cried. "Who has seen my hat?" We began the search at once. The wagon body was removed and we plunged into the depths of that drift. Mr Berwick's foot struck something hard and I saw a comical look of dismay pass over his face. He dug in cautiously and then brought out the syrup pail. Needless to say the syrup was not there, but it was full nevertheless and it contained—Mrs Berwick's hat. And such a sight as that hat was! Syrup dripped from every point of ribbon and draggled feather. It oozed through the delicate straw. In fact the hat was the most pitiful wreck that could be imagined. The cover of the pail had evidently been forced off when we first struck, and then in the struggle in the snow someone had forced the pail down over the hat.

There were tears in Mrs Berwick's eyes as she viewed the wreck, and yet for the life of her she could not help but laugh, and as for the rest of us we laughed until our sides ached. "I don't care," said she, "I said from the first that that was the sweetest hat in Berkshire county." "It certainly is now," remarked Mr Berwick, dryly. By this time we had begun to appreciate our own troubles, for save Mr Berwick, not one of us had escaped more or less of a syrup bath, and it was a sorry looking party that finally accepted the hospitality of Mr Hopkins and cleaned up

and made repairs, while Mr Berwick arranged for another wagon to take us home. Since then Mrs Berwick has had other Easter hats, but I suspect she still mourns the one that never got to church.

The better evil is, the worse it is.

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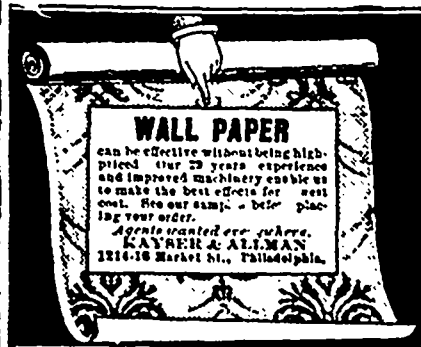
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