



GOSSIP has been well defined as putting two and two together and making it five.

When Hiram Missed the Mark

By JENNIE FORD THOMPSON

"NEXT Tuesday is Election Day," remarked Mrs. Barton, as she bestowed a last vigorous rub upon the stove she was polishing and stood back to admire her work. Her husband stirred uneasily in his chair. "I really ought to have some new slippers," he replied, irrelevantly. Then, as his wife made no reply, he squirmed again and let his paper fall to the floor. "This woman suffrage business," he commented, not looking at her, "the papers are full of it. It makes me sick! I'd hate to have a woman who'd go running around to 'lection and such places, neglecting her house and letting her family go to smash!"

Mrs. Barton smiled upon her husband with puzzling brightness. "My house isn't neglected, is it, Hiram?" she queried, with a complacent glance about her tidy kitchen. "I should say not! And I'm mighty glad you haven't got any such moon-struck ideas in your head!" Mrs. Barton made no reply, but her smile was as sweetly complacent as before, and after watching her uncertainly a moment, Hiram arose and strolled out to the barn.

During the following week the coming election was not alluded to by either Hiram or his wife until Saturday.

"I think I'll go to town with you Tuesday, Hiram," Hiram feigned surprise.

"Oh! was you thinking of going? Now, that's too bad! You ought to have told me before, for I've went and engaged the corn shellers, and they'll sure be here on Tuesday."

She cast a quick glance at him, then glanced down.

"Oh, that need make no difference," she replied. "We can go directly after dinner."

"But the dishes," he objected weakly. "You surely won't go and let them stand?"

"Why not?" she queried. "I have left them before."

"Well, suit yourself, of course," doubtfully. "But I wouldn't form such habits." Mrs. Barton's only reply was her own curious little smile, and the subject was dropped.

All the next day Hiram racked his brain to find some plausible excuse for keeping his wife at home, but none could he find until on Monday, when Joe Myers's hired man expressed a desire to go to election. Hiram eagerly offered the use of his buggy and Bessy, his driving mare, which surprising offer was eagerly accepted.

Tuesday came, and with it the corn shellers. Early Tuesday morning Bessy was harnessed to the light buggy and slyly driven out and delivered into the hands of Joe Myers's hired man.

Serenely unconscious of her husband's manoeuvre, Mrs. Barton bustled about the house, preparing din-

ner for the hands. Pies, flaky crusted and daintily marked and pinched, were set out on the long shelf on the screened porch to cool; various hissing sounds of stewing, roasting, and baking issued from the kitchen door, and mysteriously delightful odors floated through the open windows. The shelling was in full swing when Hiram, going suddenly around



Substantial Evidence of Progress—The Old Horse and the New. Notice, too, the splendid planing around screening the view on either side. Photo this Oxford county home—high trees by an editor of Farm and Dairy.

the barn, almost collided with a figure that had been creeping and peering around the corner, and which now scrambled hastily to its feet.

It was a man, very ragged and very dirty, with rough, tousled hair and beard, and a cringing, half-hearted manner that marked him a common tramp.

Hiram viewed the fellow's soddish bulk with a brooding frown.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, sharply.

The fellow shifted uneasily, keeping a furtive eye upon the pitchfork Hiram carried.

"Why," he returned in raspy, wheedling tones, "I jest thought as how you might let a feller stay to dinner."

"Well," Hiram glanced back at the workers, "I'm not in particular need of an extra hand, but I guess we could give you a chance to shovel till noon."

The tramp drew back. "Oh, say now," he whined, "I ain't looking for a job. I've walked quite a ways, an' I thought I'd like to rest up a little till dinner time."

Hiram's eyes hardened. He raised a sturdy brown fist.

"Now you git," he ordered, and the tramp did.

A well-prepared feast was gracing the long table when the hungry horde trooped in to dinner. The shelling was finished just at noon, and an hour later men crowded into the wagons and started for the town, five miles distant.

Hiram lingered about the house in an unaccountable manner, while his wife hurried around clearing the table and piling the dishes into the pans. Presently she spoke.

"Haden't you better be hitching up, Hiram? I am almost ready."

Hiram's start of surprise was rather over-acted.

"Why, did you mean to go?" he asked, innocently. "I wish I'd known that. I've went and let Joe Myers's man have Bess and the buggy! Thought you'd give it up. I couldn't have gone anyway. I've got some fence to fix."

A very small spark glimmered in Mrs. Barton's black eyes, but she regarded her husband with her old inscrutable smile.

"Oh, well," she returned affably, "that need make no difference. I thought perhaps that you wouldn't want to wait for me, so I arranged to go with Mrs. Myers."

Hiram gazed helplessly at her a moment, then turned round abruptly and strode out to the barn. He entered Bessy's empty stall and stood there moodily kicking his heels against the manger. The roll of wheels passed the barn, but Hiram did not glance up.

"If that woman don't beat all," he muttered. "I just knew that smile meant's something." His mouth twisted half humorously. "I'll bet

reached the broken fence, and set to work, he thought grimly that, for this time at least, she would not.

Down the hill a buggy came driving.

"Hello, Hi," called the occupant, genially. "Ain't you goin' to 'lection to-day?"

"Guess not, Steve. Horses all been to work and I lent Bess. I can't, can't you? I come back right past your house."

Hiram hesitated. Dared he leave Emily a prisoner so long? There was only one window to the room, and it was small and high. She couldn't possibly get out. Then he reflected that he would have to keep her there anyway until it was too late to vote, for she would find or make a way to go to town, if she really wanted to go.

"Well," he replied doubtfully, "I ain't fixed up any."

"Oh, that's all right," the other assured him. "A fellow doesn't have to fix up to vote." And with a guilty feeling that he wasn't playing the game fair, Hiram climbed into the buggy and was driven rapidly off to town.

Arrived there, he stopped short. What was the matter with his eyes, he wondered.

A woman was just coming out of the store ahead of him, and if he wasn't drunk or crazy or something like that, that woman was his wife.

He brushed his sleeve across his eyes and looked again. Yes, it was Emily. She came up to him, with no sign of embarrassment.

"Well, Hiram, I thought you weren't coming. I've been here some time and will soon be starting back," she announced brightly. The other man passed on to take his place among the voters, but Hiram stood still in his track.

"Emily," he inquired solemnly, "how ever did you get out of that pantry?"

Emily looked startled. "The pantry?" she echoed. "Why, Hiram, what do you mean?"

He stared at her for a moment in silence.

"Somebody," he began, then stopped. "Well, I locked the pantry," he finished rather lamely.

His wife looked at him curiously. "I guess you've been dreaming, Hiram," she replied at last. "I locked the pantry door myself and laid the key on the kitchen table. But you don't look just right. Perhaps we ought to get home rather early." And with that she passed on.

Hiram pulled the key from his trousers pocket and stared at it.

"Dreaming, was I?" he muttered. "Well, I guess not! But she's right about getting home early. I'll do that."

As luck would have it the two teams in which the couple had gone to town pulled up at the Barton home at precisely the same time, and without stopping for further chat with their neighbors, Hiram and his wife alighted and entered the house together.

Hiram hung up his coat and then sat down mechanically in the chair his wife pushed toward him.

Emily stepped lightly into his chair, then something slipped down over his shoulder, and looking down he found a pair of very handsome slippers upon his lap.

"What in the world—" he began, when his wife's merry laugh interrupted him. "Happy birthday, Hiram!" she exclaimed, gaily.

A sudden light broke over Hiram's mind. "Happy birthday!" he ejaculated. "Why, of course it is! And I'd forgotten all about it, Emily," he queried suddenly, "is that why you went to town?"

"Of course it was," laughed Emily, with a hand on the kitchen door. "Just 'out wip and see—"

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