

The War-Time Holiday

By KATHLEEN McKILLIGAN.

Two Real Vacations Which Cost Next to Nothing.

As this fourth war-time summer, with all its changed conditions, approaches we hear again and again the plaint: "I'm not taking a holiday this year. Living is so high it seems as if we really can't afford it"; or, "It seems wrong to spend money on a holiday when there is so much need in the world." Too often comes the addition: "I need a holiday, too, if only I could manage it."

This last for most of us is quite too true. Life has taken on an added strain, an extra burden of anxiety of which, since we have carried it now for so long, we are scarcely conscious. It is so much a part of our lives that we can scarcely imagine existence without it. Yet this very acquiescence is but a proof of our need of relaxation. Let us by no means drop these precious holidays. They give us a measure of preparedness for the future we must face; to a certain extent they counteract the wear and worry of the past. Some sort of holiday, a genuine, restful, joy-filled, health-giving holiday, is the right of every worker. Nor need it prove the expensive luxury which so often we have found it heretofore. In our long vista of holiday summers two of the happiest were enjoyed at an expense so slight that they might be at the command of the most straightened of purses. Some such holiday I am sure everyone could accomplish, and we at least found that they vie in happiness with our more pretentious summers.

The first came to us one summer when mother was in the Western States. We girls decided to forego our usual holiday, and instead planned a stay-at-home time that proved even better than our anticipations. We lived in a big house in a small town, a house that meant plenty of work for us all, for we had no maid that year, and a slow, sleepy country town that offered little of what is generally accepted as a good time. But we were determined to get just as much of a holiday as we could plan, and mother's train was scarcely an hour on its way westward when we three girls who were left began putting our scheme into operation.

We went through the whole house, pulling the furniture into the middle of the room and covering it just as we always did for a summer's absence. As we finished each room we turned the key in the lock. The halls, the summer kitchen with its coal-oil stove, and one large bedroom which we all shared, were the only rooms which we left open. From these we removed every rug, curtain, drape and ornament, and every piece of unnecessary furniture. The house had shutters, so we dispensed with both the window blinds and windows in our own room. In the daytime the shutters kept out flies and moths, but at night they were flung wide open to welcome the fresh outdoor air. The house had two wide verandahs, and in the grounds were several large trees and groups of shrubs which offered abundance of shade. Of these sheltered nooks the one which we used most, and which we had dubbed the "cubby hole," was a large space cut out in the heart of a group of Norway spruce. Even a few feet from it one might well be unaware of its existence, but once through the narrow opening between the thick branches one found oneself in a circular room, perhaps twelve feet in diameter, roofed with sky and rafters with spruce boughs and carpeted with green-brown needles from the trees above. Here there were hammocks, a small table and a chair or two. This was our drawing-room. Tables and chairs and rugs on the verandahs completed our house-furnishings.

Our programme varied little with the days. There was always some work to do, for we had gardens and lawn to care for, and our own washing and ironing to do. The cooking was never more than we could do easily with our coal-oil stove and oven. We did not prepare very "fussy" meals, even when we had company, but I think we were never more hungry nor enjoyed anything better. Besides our regular work we preserved about forty-five quarts of fruit, and picked most of it, too, so we hadn't any chance to be really idle. Our day's plan was as follows: We were up fairly early, and breakfast was served on a table under the trees on the lawn, or if it was wet on either verandah.

We were adepts at transporting huge tray-loads, everything at once, and learned every trick of cosy, hay-box, and hot-water bottle or pail to keep things warm. We found a boy's small express wagon very useful for transporting meals from kitchen to lawn. The bottom could be filled, and then a large tray placed over it resting on the sides. We usually managed with one such trip. Dishes were washed out of doors after the table was cleared, and were carefully stacked in the wagon and covered or packed in the picnic basket ready for the next move. For the most part our mornings were busy; if there was spare time it was usually spent in the hammock with a book or writing letters in the "cubby hole." Dinner was at mid-day, and the heaviest rain never drove us nearer to indoors than the sheltered corner of the verandah.

After dinner we slept or read or followed our own sweet will until the noon heat was over, then packed our picnic basket and sallied forth with rugs, books, sketching or writing material, and, usually, bathing suits. On most days we went to the lake, which was only distant a ten-minutes' walk; but sometimes it was up the river or to some near-by woods. Often we asked some of our friends to go with us, or joined in picnics which they gave; but quite as often were alone, for we three girls were always good comrades.

We were all fond of bathing, and could swim a little, so we had great fun in the water. Often we played about doing "gym" stunts in our bathing suits before we went in. After bathing we were always a bit tired, and usually sat around on the sand while our hair was drying, sometimes reading aloud, but more often just chatting.

Long before six o'clock we set about preparing supper. Our picnics could have given pointers to people who consider picnics "too much nuisance." Our plan was always as little home preparation as possible, so our bread came in the loaf with the bread-board, and was buttered and sliced under the trees by the lake. Our berries were hulled and cleaned there, and we grew to be expert cooks over a little fire, or rather over little fires, for we found it worked best to have as many fires as we had things to cook. We broiled ham or steak over the coals, fried chicken, baked or fried potatoes, warmed pork and beans, made fritters and omelettes; even made tomato soup on cold days. In fact, we tried all sorts of cooking stunts, and had the greatest fun doing it.

Usually we were back at home before dark if we went alone. Often someone dropped in to spend the evening, and we sat on the verandah and ate ice-cream, or we went motoring, or played tennis on the club courts. If we were alone with nothing doing we spent our evenings always in the "cubby hole." There was a hammock apiece, with cushions and rugs, and we hung a lantern from the boughs overhead. With a large white paper shade to throw the light downward this gave a light quite strong enough to read by, and we had many a cosy evening. But our out-of-door day always made us sleepy, and we were ready for bed at an early hour.

Sometimes we planned all day picnics, an excursion by water or a long drive; but these were few, only three or four in the month, and it was the every-days, which, after all, I believe we enjoyed the most.

Of course, there were cold and rainy days, but we had warm coats and sweaters at hand, and always we could find a dry corner on either of our verandahs. There were always heaps of things waiting to be done on those rainy days. By the time the month was over we were all brown as berries, had grown appreciably in weight, and were ready to vote our summer at home one of the very happiest holidays we had ever spent. And it had cost us little more than our ordinary living expenses.

A Holiday in a Tent.

Our other holiday came a few years later, when we were city-dwellers. Mother had been ill and needed a change. We girls had positions in the city and were all eager to get away for the summer—but where?—or how? It was the first year of the war. Things looked terribly uncertain financially,

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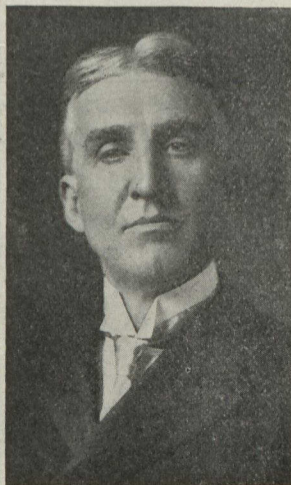
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