

The Farm Home

"If We Didn't Have to Eat"

(With apologies to Mr. Nixon Waterman.)

Life would be a dreary matter
If we didn't have to eat.
If we never had to utter,
"Won't you pass the bread and butter,
Likewise push along the platter
Full of meat?"
Yes, if food were obsolete,
Life could not be called a treat.
If we didn't—shine or shower,
Old or young, 'bout every hour—
Have to eat, eat, eat, eat, eat,
'Twould be awful if we didn't have to eat.

What would be the good of money?
If we didn't have to eat.
Should we have to cease our buying,
Baking, broiling, brewing, trying?
Life would then be not so sunny
And complete;
'Tis with pleasure that we greet
Every grocer in the street.
Unless perchance, some man or woman,
Or some hungry, helpless human—
Has dyspepsia, or no teeth—
With which to eat, eat, eat, eat, eat.

I'd want to die, yes, die all over,
If we didn't have to eat.
Would the grocer, butcher, baker
Get our money? Yes sir; take her!
With good food we're all in clover,
Cool and sweet.
What would life be without meat,
Bread and butter, pastries sweet,
If we didn't—poor or wealthy,
Halt or nimble, sick or healthy—
Have to eat, eat, eat, eat, eat?
'Twould be sinful, if we didn't have to eat!
—Alex. J. Wedderburn.

Maple Sugar.

No one knows who discovered the possibility of making sugar from the sap of the maple tree. Students of Indian traditions seem to agree that the origin of this art dates back to remote antiquity, and that like the cookery of maize, the early European settlers learned from the Indians how to transform the watery juice of the maple into sugar. This was the only sweet the Indians knew, and though their methods of manufacture were less appetizing than those followed in the best sugar camps to-day, still the result was sufficiently satisfactory to induce the white man to go and do likewise.

The maple crop of the United States is not a large one, yet it is estimated to allow from a half pound to a pound of sugar yearly for every person in the country. Northern New England, New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana are the states which produce the most syrup and sugar. Nearly half of the entire supply comes from Vermont, and about one quarter from Ohio, and both these States have severe fines for adulteration.

Much of what is sold as maple syrup and sugar gets its maple flavor, if it has any, by boiling maple chips with the brown sugar and glucose of which it is composed. Some of the leading manufacturers of the real article are almost discouraged at trying

to compete with such frauds. Consumers should be wise enough to investigate the source of their supply, or at least to know that maple sugar cannot be bought at brown sugar prices.

The true maple season begins about the first of March and lasts into April, or so long as the snow is melting by day and freezing by night.

The sugar maple is a handsome tree fifty to sixty feet high, and is in fine condition for tapping when about twenty-five years old. The ideal tree grows in open ground where it has sunshine all the year. Gnarled and imperfectly developed trees do not furnish the best or most abundant supply of sap.

Will Carleton has thus described the sugar maple:

"The han'some trees! they used to rise
Like they was huntin' for the skies!
All summer they would kind o' seem
To wake an' sleep an' dream;
Their leaves was fresh as fields o' grass
For clouds to step on as they pass;
While in their language soft an' low,
They seemed to whisper to an' fro;
An' every sweetest wind that blew,
An' every drop of heaven's dew,
An' every flower that blossomed near,
An' every bird a-singin' here,
Through all the blessed summer would
Just gather up what sweet they could,
An' then, it al'ays 'peared to me,
Present it to some maple tree!"

The trees are tapped in several places and the flow on the south and east sides usually begins earlier than on the north and west. It is claimed that an extra quality of sugar is obtained where the hole is not too deep. After the tree is bored with a half-inch auger, for an inch or an inch and a half, a metal spout is inserted.

The sap varies in sweetness. That from trees in low, moist land is abundant, but less sweet than that which is yielded in other locations. The first sap of the season is the sweetest and makes the best sugar. The sooner the sap is gathered and boiled, the better the flavor and the lighter the color of the syrup and the sugar. In some sections of the country the syrup is commonly called honey, and the sugar when carefully made is hardly darker than beeswax. The dark color and strong flavor, sometimes in the past associated with maple sugar, was due to the accumulation of leaves and twigs in the sap, and to other imperfect methods of manufacture. Much of this dirt can be removed by careful skimming and clarifying, but it is surely better to keep out in the beginning. Large evaporators now are generally used in the sugar camps, which hasten the process considerably. Syrup is the preferred form for market, and the standard thickness, secured by the use of the sugar thermometer, is about

eleven pounds to the gallon. Thirty-two gallons, or a barrel, of sap is required to make one gallon of syrup.

In the olden days each household laid in its barrels of maple sugar to last till the season came again, and it was commonly used as white sugar is to-day. Now maple sugar retails to-day at about the price of cane sugar.

John Burroughs says that sugar making is one of the most picturesque features of farm life peculiar to this country, and further: "Before the bud swells, before the grass springs, before the plow is started, comes the sugar harvest. It is the sequel of the bitter frost. A sad run is the sweet good-by of winter. It denotes a certain equipoise of the season; the heat of the day fully balances the night.—A day that brings the bees out of the hive will bring the sap out of the maple tree; it is the fruit of the equal marriage of the sun and frost. When the frost is all out of the ground and the snow is gone from its surface, the flow stops.

"Maple sugar in its perfection is rarely seen, perhaps never seen in the market; it has a mild delicacy of flavor that no other sweet can match. What you smell in freshly cut maple wood, or taste in the blossom of the tree, is in it."

Mr. Charles Dudley Warner describes sugar-making in the past as "Something between picknicing and being shipwrecked on a fertile island, where one could save from the wreck tubs, and augers, and great kettles, and pork, and hen's eggs, and rye, and Indian brown bread, and begin at once the sweetest life in the world."

To-day sugar camps have conformed more to the methods in other large factories, but occasionally there is a place where the sugar-making is conducted more for pleasure than profit. However, in the desire for novel entertainment, "sugaring off" parties have been accomplished even in mid-summer. Each guest is provided with a shallow tin pan filled with pounded ice, and a fork or wooden skewer for manipulating the candy. The syrup is boiled until it will keep its shape when dropped in ice water, and is then put in pitchers and passed around the table to pour in thin layers over the cracked ice. Crackers and pickles are the only other refreshments required. If there is any candy left after all appetites are satisfied, it may be reheated and some butter and nuts added to it and the whole poured into pans to serve as caramels later in the evening.

Special recipes for the use of maple sugar are quite unnecessary, for it may be substituted for cane sugar in anything.

A delicious frosting is made by dissolving the sugar in thick cream and boiling until it will harden in cold water,