

OUR FARM HOMES



It is not the events of life, nor its emotions, nor this, nor that experience, but life itself which is good.—*Phillips Brooks*

When the Sap Runs*

By ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL

"Do you think it really will do to leave them alone overnight, Perry?"

"For the tenth and last time, yes!" laughed Perry Baxter. "That is, of course, if we do them up in plenty of antiseptic cotton bat—"

"Perry, stop! You're laughing at your own old father and mother."

"No such thing. I'm laughing at you, Honey! 'Clare to gracious, you do baby those dear old souls within an inch of their lives!'"

Soft color crept into Geneva Baxter's cheeks—crept up to her fair hair, "I baby!" she scorned. "What about you? Who is it won't let father mail letters on the corner because he'd have to cross the street?"

"Oh, that!" dismissing the charge lightly. "The boulevard is so broad and, besides, Father needs as much exercise as round the block to the post box on Hanover."

It was into the post box three streets back of Hanover that father usually dropped the letters. Once out of sight of the house of this careful son he pounded briskly away on his cane. Father usually took considerable "exercise." He came home now from a mailing expedition and sought out Mother in their great sunny room.

"Well!" he demanded. "Well, mother?"

"They've about decided to go, father!" she whispered excitedly. Mother's face just now in its soft pink becomingness was lovely. "We'll just keep very patient and wait."

"Very im-patient," he corrected, suddenly kissing her. For fifty years father had been suddenly kissing mother, and she still received the dear onslaught with the shyness of a girl. These two had come a long distance together, always in perfect step.

"Be great, just us two alone!" whispered mother.

"Great! What do you suppose I've been hatching up, mother? Mischievous! Came to me right in the middle of the night. It was too late to save myself; he might as well have added the 't'."

"Nahum Nathaniel Baxter, you've been crossing streets again! What-ever'd your son Perry say?"

"Sh!" begged the old sinner. "Don't speak so loud. You'll get me into trouble. If you do, with sudden inspiration, I shan't tell you my great idea—Mary Euphemia Baxter!"

In subdued chorus they giggled like children. Curiously a load seemed lifted from father and mother. It was a load of kindness and tender care. "Perry, you tell me quick that idea!"

"Well, see here—I'll have to kiss your hair away from your ear first, so you can hear—"

"Father! Old lover!"

"Old lover yourself! Sh, listen!"

*From Farm and Fireside.

He whispered something in the soft, crumpled shawl of mother's ear, and mother uttered a little cry.

"What! Why, how'd you come to think of such a beautiful thing's that, Nahum Baxter?"

"Like it, don't you, Mary Baxter? Well, it came to me right in the middle of Harrison Square, just before I mailed Geneva's letters, an' if I didn't mad drop the whole caboodle!"

"Harrison Square—oh, Father! What would Perry say to you, crossing all of those streets? It pretty near scares me too."

Father nodded. "That's because of all the fuss the children've made. I guess my eyes are good enough still to see both ways, an' my ears can hear both ways. While back I just

fully. Oh, the joy of spring in his blessed country when it could be so good here! If here he could pound along like a boy, what could he not do there! He visioned another father in blue overalls, starting out to inspect fences, to see if the sap was running—"

Oh, the sap would be running to-day! That was the thought that came to father in the middle of Harrison Square just before the Big Idea. Then on its heels, the wind of it taking away his breath, came father's Big Idea. It stopped him like a clutching grip; when he went on again it was hand in hand with it, jubilantly home to mother.

The marriage of Geneva Baxter's old school friend in a distant city had been for some time a disturbing subject of discussion between Geneva and her husband. Should they not? Should they not go? Ought they to leave father and mother the better part of two days, and, worse still, a night?

It was the night that really worried Geneva, although she could scarcely have defined her fears.

"They're fleshier and bloodier to you than they are to me," she sighed, finding relief in gentle humor. "I'm only flesh-in-law and blood-in-law. You ought to worry the most, Perry."

"Oh, I'm doing my part, Honey," he returned. "I guess when I tell you what I've done—Sh! Wait a minute! He rose and closed the door with careful silence. "I've hired a night watchman!"

"Perry Baxter!—a what?"

"Well, perhaps not a really a night watchman, but someone to happen round three or four times Thursday night and see that everything's all right."

With soft red cheeks mother headed him off, though mother felt just that way. Savage unrecognition caught at mother's throat too, beneath her Sunday laces.

"Wait—hush, father!" she pleaded. "You've forgot the back yard! You come look out a back window—yes, father, remember what we're going to do the minute the children have gone! You haven't seen and forgot that?"

If he had, it came back to him now quietly. He dropped rather heavily into a chair.

With a visible grip they got themselves together again and sat still, in their Sunday clothes. Mother had quickly drawn the filmy folds of Geneva's lace draperies across the front windows. She took up her knitting and began to hum as the needles flew. Father listened to his customary whistling accompaniment—

They were resolute in their determination to have a great old time when the children were out of the way. But still—there should be no but still!

"Be it ever so humb—" crooned mother, and stopped. That was the wrong tune.

"Ever so humb. There's no place like this!" Father stopped too. His whistle trailed out ludicrously. When their two glances met the old people laughed. Father and mother could always laugh. But the beautiful hunger for Home, Sweet Home was in the misty back of their eyes. It was always there.

"Start up something else, mother—'America! or There We Be If All!' advised father gaily. But the humming whistling duet was not continued that afternoon.

Early next day the children, with no intimates added to the old, tore themselves away. Geneva carried runs back from the corner to remind father not to stumble over the loose place in the carpet at the head of the stairs. She had just those of it.

There were only time for Perry to put in some more tacks!

Neither father nor mother could sit still in their chairs. Or was it something other than the stir of spring in their blood? Was it that other stir down stairs?

"They're going to start at eight, father."

"And get back about eight at night next day. I been looking their train up."

This was a rather threadbare topic, but worth repetition. To an old couple, stifled and swathed in mild suffocation in affectionate care and anxiety, the respite of two days and a night was an epoch. But there was something deeper than that.

"We'll have such a beautiful time, father, don't you know what?" suddenly cried mother.

"I know what!" father responded mysteriously. Here-upstairs too, the doors had to be closed cautiously. A new elation had crept into both faces. "Father, you been feeling any—different, just lately?"

Oh, yes, he had been feeling—different!

"Why, what you mean, mother?" but he knew what she meant.

"Kind of—different. Something kind of the air, as if you'd got to get outdoor and do things. Father, I want to put my old shawl over my head an' go watch you spade up my panny bed and the sweet-pea rowal! It's spring, father. The time of year we always started in—"

Father was on his feet, pacing the floor. A kind of savageness seized him by his old old time and wrung out hot, long-denied words:

"The city's no place to have it spring in!" bared father. "It's wicked to be cooped up when the sap's running! Look out the window out the window! What business have you and I got dressed up in Sunday clothes like this with the sap running!"

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(Continued next week.)



Evergreens Do Much to Add to Winter Attractiveness. Some farm houses have a tendency in winter to look rather bleak and deserted. Not so in this case, however, as the evergreen trees do much to add to the cozy, homelike appearance. The home here illustrated is that of Mr. B. G. Jenby, Ingersoll, Ont.

Photo by an editor of Farm and Dairy.

struck at going round the block, Mary—I couldn't stan' it. Me as spry as ever I was!"

"I know," sighed mother gently. "You don't grow a mite older, father. I feel same way about dishes with—If Geneva'd only let me wash 'em!"

But they came back with a bound to cheerfulness at the remembrance of the beautiful idea Father had had in the middle of Harrison Square. It grew momentarily more beautiful. They put their old heads together and added splendid details to it gleefully—made it into a thrilling little conspiracy.

"I know just the kettle 'I'll use!" conspired mother.

"Lord pull! I do for me," father said. "Genevie got any big lard pails, think?"

It was late March. Spring was already afloat and abroad through country lanes and in moist woody nooks. For a week the spring elixir had been in the air even in the city, and father in his walks had breathed it in wist-urrest outdoors had surely leaked in.

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