



HOME MAGAZINE



"Go not abroad for happiness. For see!
It is a flower that blossoms by thy door.
Bring love and justice home; and then no more
Thou'lt wonder in what dwelling joy may be."

A Hole in the Roof.

By Edwin L. Sabin.

It was not yet midnight when Mrs. Halder, awakening, conceived that she smelled smoke. She sniffed, and now she was sure. She half sat up in bed, and sniffed some more. Her husband stirred, as if protesting, and she said:

"Lew!"

No response.

"Lew!"

A wriggle.

"Lew! I smell smoke!"

A more vigorous wriggle.

"I do! (Sniff, sniff.) Don't you? Pine smoke!"

"It comes in from outdoors. What's the matter with you, Libby? Go to sleep!" murmured Mr. Halder, drowsily.

Thus having decided, he burrowed into his pillow, and presently began to breathe with an exasperating, guttural accent. Mrs. Halder continued to sit up and sniff, alone and unsupported.

Suddenly there approached the sound of bare, hurrying feet, a fusillade of thumps assailed the bedroom door, and a voice called frantically:

"Oh Mishter Halder! Mishter Halder! Th' house is on foire! Th' house is on foire! Wake up! Mishter Halder! Oh, Mishter Halder!"

Mr. Halder, too, sat up in bed; and while he was collecting his sluggish wits Mrs. Halder rushed to the door and opened it, disclosing Maggie, the girl—a spectral shape in an amazing state of dishabille.

"Where? Where is it, Maggie?" demanded the mistress.

"Oh, it's on the roof! I was just goin' to bid after comin' in, an' whin I put out th' light whut did I see but sparks fallin' outside th' winder an' whin I shuttuck out my hid there th' roof be all ablaze! Mishter Halder! Foire! Foire! A-a-a-a-h Mishter Halder!"

"Jee-hoshaphat!" exclaimed that gentleman, pierced by the concluding wild Irish yell, staggering for the door and plunging on flat, slapping feet down the hall. Mrs. Halder, speechless, and Maggie, quite the opposite, followed.

Up in the attic they found a hole burned through the roof, and live coals dropping upon the floor, which already was smouldering dangerously.

"Foire! Foire!" wailed Maggie, stunned by the sight into a fresh paroxysm.

"Quit that screeching," bade Mr. Halder, sharply.

"Bring me up some water, both of you as quick as you can!"

Maggie, whimpering, rushed off. Mrs. Halder paused only long enough to ask, anxiously:

"Shan't I call the fire department?"

"No, no! I'll put it out if you'll bring water some time to-night!" rebuked Mr. Halder.

So she left him standing guard over the threatening cinders—now and then valiantly essaying to smother a flickering flame with bare sole—and hastily descended to obey orders.

She and Maggie (whom she found aimlessly wandering about hunting water when all she had to do was to turn one of several taps) filled a couple of pitchers in the bath-room, and panting

up-stairs with them watched Mr. Halder empty them over the scorching floor beneath the hole.

Down again to the bath-room they sped, and up to the attic again they toiled, and the floor being drenched beyond danger, their lord and master discharged the contents of the pitchers at the hole. Any person who ever has engaged to deliver water from a wash-pitcher at a hole slightly elevated, and distant a few paces, knows how erratically said water slops and splatters, and gorges in the pitcher's neck. Consequently on this occasion the fire, scarcely diminished by the effort, continued to burn briskly around the edges of the hole.

"Bring me up a towel, too! Hurry!" commanded Mr. Halder, waxing excited.

The roof of the attic sloped quite to the floor, and the hole was not far from the eaves, so that it was about two feet above the boards. When more water and a bath-towel had been brought, Mr. Halder saturated the towel with water, and, thus armed, slapped manfully at the flames which appeared inside; then, extending himself on his back along the eaves, he thrust his hand and arm through and dabbled with the wet towel upon the outside. The aperture was of diameter which permitted him to insert his arm to the shoulder, when he chose.

The water from the vicinity of the hole, where the contents of the pitchers had been ineffectually vented, dripped in sooty drops upon his face and chest. Mrs. Halder and Maggie gazed with mingled hope and horror.

"Don't you think it's out?" queried Mrs. Halder. "Oh, Lew! I wish you didn't have to do that!"

"Well, I'm not doing it for fun!" grunted Mr. Halder, rudely.

"Howly saints! Th' sight of him!" commented Maggie, under her breath.

Mr. Halder, having dabbled in every direction, finally withdrew his arm, and to the onlookers' amazement proceeded to stick his head through.

"Oh, Lew! I wouldn't!" pleaded Mrs. Halder, aghast, watching him butting with his sooty crown and tearing with his sooty fingers at the hole.

"You needn't!" snapped Mr. Halder. "I would. I want to see if there's any fire outside."

"Howly saints!" repeated Maggie, softly, fascinated, as all of a sudden Mr. Halder's sooty crown and sooty face disappeared, and the roof shut down upon his sooty, soaked shoulders.

Thus to insert his head Mr. Halder, who, as has been explained, was lying on his back, along the eaves, had slightly raised the upper portion of his body and was now supporting it with his two arms, while presumably he was scanning the roof without for more fire.

"Do you see any?" called Mrs. Halder, nervously.

Mr. Halder's only response was a convulsive movement of his trunk, preliminary, it seemed, to extracting his head from the hole. He twisted in this direction, and in that, and putting a hand to the juncture of neck and hole fumbled there until a tendency to slew sideways compelled him abruptly to replace the hand for a prop.

"Can't you get it back again?" queried Mrs. Halder, alarmed.

Mr. Halder was now struggling violently.

"No," he confessed, in muffled tones which sounded far off and vague.

"Howly saints!" moaned Maggie, who had become reduced to that single expression.

"Can I help you?" screamed Mrs. Halder.

Mr. Halder continued struggling, and did not reply.

"Shall I get a knife and cut the hole bigger?" asked Mrs. Halder, wild for the safety of her imprisoned spouse.

"No, no!" gurgled Mr. Halder. "Let me alone."

Other words, of character so inflammable that he was reckless to use them, sifted down to the ears of the helpless spectators in the attic. In the course of his contortions Mr. Halder's body was swung with the neck as a pivot and evinced a tendency to point at right angles out into the room.

"You'd better go down stairs, Maggie," suggested Mrs. Halder. "The fire's out, and you needn't be afraid to go to sleep. I'll help Mr. Halder."

"Very well, mum," agreed Maggie. "With him swearin' an' kickin' I guess you're right, mum."

And muttering to herself she departed.

"Oh, dear! Can't you get back?" implored Mrs. Halder, feeling spooky in thus being obliged to address an apparently headless man, especially a husband. The moon, shining through the attic windows, illuminated the interior in a glamorous, ghostly fashion well calculated to give effective setting to the white water-pitchers, Mrs. Halder's white, flowing costume, and the costume, not so white, and rather damp and clinging, of Mr. Halder.

"Can't you get back?" again entreated Mrs. Halder. "Why don't you yell, then? Shall I yell?"

"For heaven's sake—NO!" snarled Mr. Halder, resting a moment on his oars, unwilling as yet to admit defeat.

Nevertheless, he was caught hard and fast. Never a stock held more securely. His head, pushing through, had lifted the shingles sufficiently to give it passage—but when he would have withdrawn it those same shingles closed in about his neck ever the more firmly as the more he strove. To employ his hands was difficult and perilous, attendant as it was with the risk of strangling whenever his weight pulled him downward.

A passer-by would have been much astounded to perceive, in the moonbeams, a man's head balanced, as it seemed, on the edge of the Halder roof. Townville not being a flyak village, it was not the custom here to expose heads thus, to be cured—even the head of one's enemy. Naturally the passer-by would be moved to investigate, and the chances were that the humor rather than the pathos of the situation would appeal to him most strongly. This thought occurred to Mr. Halder, and spurred him to renewed efforts.

"Aren't you going to help me?" he blurted, oblivious to the fact that he had repulsed her offers of assistance. "I don't want to stay here all night!"

"But what shall I do?" appealed Mrs. Halder, agonized.

"Why, poke these shingles loose around my neck!" directed Mr. Halder, irritably. "And be mighty careful how you do it."

Mrs. Halder advanced a step—and hesitated. An inspiration seized her. Dared she? Oh, dared she?

"Didn't you hear me?" demanded Mr. Halder.

"Yes, I heard you," answered his wife, endeavoring to present a steady voice.

"Why don't you come, then?"

"I will—after you promise me some things, Lew. I want you to promise me that you won't smoke in the parlor."

Mrs. Halder had dared, yet it was in fear and trembling that she bided the consequences.

Mr. Halder could scarcely believe his

ears—the lobes of which just touched the shingles.

"Come, come!" he said. "Don't let's fool, Libby. This fix may be funny to you, but it's not to me. Somebody's liable to come along, too!"

"I'm not fooling; I really mean it," assured Mrs. Halder. "I've often asked you not to smoke in the parlor, and now I want you to promise. You've got lots of other rooms to smoke in."

"All right, all right," agreed Mr. Halder, shortly. "Now help me out of this hole."

"That's a promise then, is it?" continued his wife. "Well, I want you to promise another thing: Not to fuss because meals aren't ready ahead of time just because you happen to be home. You make me so nervous, asking 'What's the matter with dinner?' and blaming Maggie, and sitting down by the table, when you know it's too early. Do you promise, dear?"

Mr. Halder writhed and jerked in a tremendous essay at breaking from the grip of the shingles; but it was of no avail. Mrs. Halder grimly watched.

"Promise," she reminded. "It isn't much."

"Uh, huh," growled Mr. Halder.

"You promise?" insisted his wife.

"Yes!" he snapped. "Can't you hear?"

"And you won't complain when I say I need some money? You make it very mortifying for me sometimes. Perhaps you do it in fun, but I don't like it. I feel embarrassed whenever I come to you for even a dollar—you act so put out about it. Promise me you won't be so any more, dear," stipulated Mrs. Halder.

"All right," said Mr. Halder, in tones calmer than heretofore.

"And please let me go to functions, and things, when I like to, and don't scold because I don't happen to be home the moment you come in. I know how you act, and whenever I'm out I'm uncomfortable all the time lest you get home before I do. Promise me that, won't you, dearie?" pleaded Mrs. Halder.

"Certainly," answered her husband, extraordinarily docile.

"And now that's all," announced Mrs. Halder, gladly. "There are a few other things, but those are the biggest. You poor darling, you! Hold still! Am I hurting you? Poor boy!"

Under her gentle manipulations he gradually, gingerly withdrew into the attic, sooty chin, and sooty nose, and sooty brow, and sooty crown. As soon as she saw his precious head restored to her (as well as to him) again, she pounced upon it, and hugged it deliciously, murmuring:

"Oh, Lew! You aren't angry with me, are you? It was such a good chance to talk to you. You always cut me off so short."

Mr. Halder rose to his feet and sneezed.

"I was cut short, myself, that time," he grunted. "I'm going to the bath-room."

But the grunt was not unkindly.—
[From August Housekeeper.]

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I have sent you nine subscribers to the "Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine." Please send me the lady's gold-filled watch, No. 2, as per premium announcement in Aug. 4th issue. I hope to send you several new subscribers.

HARVIE DOAK.

Doaktown, N. B., August 12th, 1904.