



THE one who reads a bad book when he might be reading a good book, is poisoning his life instead of enriching it.

A Vacation from Worry

(From Farm and Fireside.)

By ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL.

MRS. HEATH'S anxious voice filled the hall, down the stairs: "Did Caroline take an umbrella?"

A cheerful 16-year-old voice drifted back up the stairs, up the hall: "I don't know, I'll count 'em."

"I know she didn't," groaned the anxious voice in the period of waiting, "and she had all her best clothes on, as she always has when it's cloudy." "She never! Here's four in the umbrella stand. But don't you go to worrying, Marmie; it only looks like rain."

Mrs. Heath resumed her darning and worrying. She was only a tiny woman, who should have been pink and white and smooth, unworried. Faint care lines, as it was, crisscrossed her gentle face. Umbrellas were but one item of her daily program of anxieties. She was the family worrier—all the possible calamities that might or might not happen to seven lusty Heaths happened to them in her imagination.

"That lovely hat! Caroline is so care—Mercy, I'm sure I smell smoke!" She hurried to the head of the stairs. "Mig, Mig!"

"Yes'em," again the cheerful young voice.

"You there?" Mrs. Heath was mildly added to needless questions. "I smell fire, is the baby anywhere near the matches?"

The baby was five and utterly un-reconciled to his mortifying title.

"He's in the same room, but he's on the floor, and the match—"

"Then it's Thyra. She's probably lighting the fire with kerosene. Run, Mig, quick!"

"I will! I'll put her out—never you mind, Marmie!"

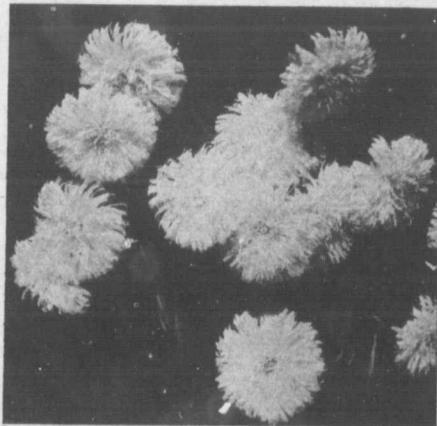
There was a scurry of light feet, followed by clumping little ones. It was the baby who reported, a moment later.

"Nothin's burnin'! 'cept the fire," he shouted at the top of good lungs. "Well, it's a mercy! Something else will burn one of these days, with everybody so reckless. We shall wake up some morning and find ourselves burned to a crisp. I wonder where I dropped that needle! Now someone will step on it and have the lockjaw! I sha'n't take a minute's peace until I find it."

She took ten or six minutes' peace, day or night. Did Griffith I. read his Latin over the second time before he went to school? Had Griffith I. remembered to order coal? Was Thyra coming down with another earache? What if the new neighbors turned out to be the wrong kind? What if the dressmaker got Mig's dress too short, or too long, or the sleeves skimpy? What if a hundred other dreadful things happened?

The seven other Heaths enjoyed life in a beautiful, untroubled fashion that

to the little family worrier appeared incomprehensible. The weight of the cares they ought to feel and the worries they ought to worry added to her own full quiver until the burden grew almost too heavy for her slender shoulders. It happened that this particular afternoon was destined to be the fateful one. Quite suddenly and un-expectedly the half-mended



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stocking dropped from Mrs. Heath's fingers.

"I'm too tired to worry about another thing!" she said with a curious air of finality. "Somebody else must do it now—I've done my part." Her tired eyes had a strained look. She was conscious of a sudden desire to change places with the baby so that she might cry. She put her hand to her head if anything should snap—she had never been afraid before that anything would snap.

"I've got to stop worrying," she said aloud. "Henrietta Heath, you listen to me. When I say 'three' you stop!" She had left her little straight-backed sewing chair and sunk into Griffith I.'s soft rocker. "One—two—she counted, slowly, 'three! Have you stopped, Henrietta Heath?"

"I have stopped," nodded Henrietta Heath from the depths of the great chair. She closed her eyes in relaxed abandonment of earthly cares. But

unconsciously she worried on because she was not worrying! someone must worry—a helpless family could not be left in the lurch like this. She must find someone to take her place—

"I'll advertise," she thought, and got paper and pencil. The wording of the notice gave her little trouble; it was odd how her pencil flew from line to line. Things one might suppose to be difficult and unusual appeared simple enough now to her. She read the advertisement aloud. It sounded well.

"WANTED—A working worrier for a family of seven. Only competent person need apply. Permanent situation for the right one. References. Address Henrietta Heath, Crescent Terrace."

The Pineboro "Evening Call" went to press at noon. It was too late for to-day, but none too early for to-morrow. Mrs. Heath, in the calm conviction of doing the right thing in the right way, put on her things and departed leisurely for the printing establishment of the "Evening Call."

"I wish this advertisement" inserted in to-morrow's paper," she said to the polite person who came forward to meet her. "I am sorry it could not have been—I is too late for to-day, I suppose?"

"M—m, yes, certainly, madam." The polite person was reading the little slip of paper. He looked up un-

"I came in answer to your advertisement in to-day's "Evening Call."

"Oh! Oh, yes, you are a—!" Mrs. Heath faltered in palpable embarrassment.

"Worrier—yes. Professional. Forty years' experience. Thirteen years and a half in my last place. Lady died, man in the asylum. I can't refer you to them, but—"

"Yes, oh, yes! I'd like references," little Mrs. Heath faltered weakly. This professional worrier abashed her strangely. In this presence she herself assumed such a novice—amateur. The stranger went on in a matter-of-fact tone:

"In my place before last I worried for a family of six—Mrs. Elbertus Lee, Derry Bridge. Family numbered only three in the place before that, but the work was hard, very hard. I have worked in only three places." The latter was said in a tone of pride. To have worried, professionally, for forty years in but three places appeared occasion for pride. Mrs. Heath was only thirty-four. She blushed uncomfortably.

"Well, if you think I'll suit, I'm ready to begin at once. We can give each other a trial away, but I want one thing understood at the start—"

"Yes?" hesitated Mrs. Heath.

"And that is that I'm not to be interfered with. I'm to do it all."

"There are seven. Seven is a good many—"

"I am perfectly competent to do all the worrying for seven. It must be left entirely to me. I suppose the seven includes you?"

"Dear, no!" The little amateur worrier had never worried about herself. It had not occurred to her.

"Eight, then. Names, please? I wish to get acquainted with my cases before I begin work, and any little hints that you can give me—"

"Griffith I., Griffith II., Caroline, Mig, the twins, the baby," recited the wife of one and the mother of all the rest in rather a tremulous voice. A sob seemed to be tangled up in her throat. Was she giving them all up to this solemn, sour person in black!

The solemn, sour person wrote the names in a small black book, with capable flourishes.

"Have you any preference as to which one I worry about first?" she inquired, snapping the covers of the book together. "We are losing time. I should like to begin at once."

"The baby," faltered the baby's mother. He was a good one to begin with and end with. At this very minute—

"Oh, I'm afraid he's playing with matches, or falling down the cellar bulkhead!" worried the professional worrier in a businesslike manner. She entered upon her work with a perfect acquaintance with its requirements—her tone, her look, her motions were all in harmony with her calling.

Mrs. Heath found herself watching her with fascinating gaze. It was as if she was watching herself from a little distance. The anxious lines and creases in the stranger's face filled her with horror, for they mirrored her own face. She put up her hand to feel and see. They were there!

A network of fine lines threaded the forehead of the other woman. More lines ran down her cheeks, more still from the corners of her mouth. Henrietta Heath, in a little whirl of panic, ran to her own room and peered into the mirror. The face she saw there resembled faintly the lined face of the woman she had engaged to do her worrying—there was no doubt of the resemblance.

Downstairs the girl twin was drumming scales on the piano, and wrong notes drifted upward discordantly, but the girl twin's mother laughed softly.