

A Bit of Variety

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ROCKING W RANCH

New-daughter came trotting into the kitchen last evening just as I was starting dinner. "Oh," she said, and I thought her voice held a note of disappointment, "have you got dinner very far along? I thought it would be fun to have a picnic supper down by the swimming hole. I've got some hot-dogs," she continued hopefully, "and we can roast them on sticks over the coals. Dinner isn't too far along, is it?" she finished coaxingly.

If I had had the whole dinner ready to put on the table I would still have agreed that hot-dogs plus other things served down by the river was to be preferred any old day, that was sunny, to a "sittin'-down meal" eaten in the house. In Sarah Orne Jewett's delightful book, "Country of the Pointed Firs," a country woman remarks, "Some folks wash on Monday and iron on Tuesday even if the circus is goin' by, but I like variety myself." That woman and I are sisters under the skin.

So I eagerly collected my share of the makin's of a picnic, handed one of the baskets to the Big Boss—who growled like a wolf at having to walk down to the river to get fed—and we went through the barn-lot, across the gravel bar and found a campfire burning, and a card-table spread with the necessities and a few of the lux-

uries of picnic eating, in a little alder grove on the island where the river curves.

Now I don't care for hot-dogs as a rule, nor do I eat potatoes, but there was something about a weinie that is toasted brown (and a wee bit black in spots) over glowing coals, and a fat potato roasted in hot ashes, then dusted off and spread with butter, that made a real appeal to that capricious thing we call the appetite, and the smell of hot coffee wafting up from the two steaming pots by the fire blended everything into a perfect meal.

We hadn't gone far from the house. We were not eating food radically different from that which we would have cooked on the stove and served properly and decently on the dining table, and our little excursion didn't cost us an extra cent, yet we four enjoyed the change it made in our quiet lives. The leaping flames of our campfire, the slowly deepening dusk of evening, and the occasional whisper of wind through the alder leaves made a little world that was subtly different from our routine life. We watched the alder logs burn down to a mass of glowing coals and our talk ranged from lightest jest to the far reach of space and stars so many light-years away, from common every-day events to the wonders that the future may hold. It was good talk, yet when we were silent the river and the night talked with us and, who knows, perhaps in that silence we gained a bit of wisdom, a

glimpse of timelessness that frets little about the transitory things of daily life. And when the fire had burned down to only flickering lights, regretfully we smothered their last glow and gathered up the house-things we walked slowly home through the soft darkness.

We all need a change, a bit of variety, to break the daily routine of our days. If we do not have it, there is a hunger that nothing can fill, dreams die, life loses its lilt and laughter and we go plodding wearily along the road of existence. We do not need to travel far from our hearthstone to find a bit of change. Across the road or just around the nearest corner will bring us a new view. Opening our minds to a new thought will widen our horizon; breaking the routine of our daily tasks or introducing new methods of working will give us impetus for further effort. It is in the mind that the deadly sameness of unchanging routine day after day leaves its mark. If men and women travel the same path to work and thought for too long without change, they forget to "lift up their eyes to the hills." Life becomes stale and flat, like a pool into which no fresh water ever runs, yet there are sweet springs of clear water all about us if we just reach out to them. Walk in the quiet dark alone, or with one who un-

derstands, and look at the stars. Let your imagination take wings and fly across the intervening light years of space, and when you come back to your lighted house the things which had depressed you before have stepped back into their proper relationship with life. Facing the infinite, the finite loses its power to bind.

Yes, I am like the old country woman, I like a bit of variety. If the circus comes by, or I want to climb out of my daily rut, then I am going to go sometimes, even if the washing has to wait until Tuesday. Or if duty calls too sternly and I dare not go, then I will think new thoughts. I will send my mind into strange lands and it will bring back rich cargoes. I will play a bit while I am living, even if only in my thoughts, or in having our evening meal by a campfire instead of within four walls that shut

out the night and the stars.

There are many things that are necessary for real living besides just food and security and the daily routine of existence. A wise man once said, "If you have two loaves of bread, sell one and buy white hyacinths," and the gypsy chieftain in "Lavengro"—I think it was—made this simple statement:

"Life is sweet, brother;
Day and night, brother, both sweet things;
Sun, moon and stars, brother,
both sweet things,
There is likewise the wind on the heath."

No, I dare not plod unceasingly along the furrow of daily routine. I shall miss too much of the real beauty of life if I do not break away from it sometimes. The walls of my self-made furrow may limit my vision and I may forget to look at the stars.

The average New York worker spends four and a quarter hours a month in the subways.

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