

THE SUFFRAGIS T OF SANDY CORNERS

Abraham Grover, in McCall's Magazine.

Well, d'ye know that there was just three women at the meetin' Thursday who do hev an allowance or hev a chance to manage any money for themselves. The rest feels about the way you do, an'—I come over to tell you that the next meetin' is to be for to find some plan o' united action in the matter. One woman alone don't stand much chance but all the women o' Sandy Corners—why, that's co-operation an' organization, an' that's what counts nowadays in doin' things."

Jane Palmerson spoke somewhat pompously and with a touch of pride in the rolling sound of the words she used, but there was a shrewd twinkle in her grey eyes, and Ann Amanda nodded approvingly.

"I'll be there sure," she said emphatically. "Tell Mary Bascombe t' stop fer me."

And that next meeting of the Sandy Corners Sewing Club became a landmark in the history of Sandy Corners. The first three-quarters of an hour went mostly to testimony and confession.

Lydia Anderson said that her husband was one of the best men that ever lived in most ways, and that she could give him a list of things to buy as long as from Mrs. Jack's gate to the village store and he'd buy every single thing on the list, but just let her ask for the money to do the buying with herself and he "shut right up like a clam." She said she usually pieced quilts and things in the winter and sold them to get "pin money." And the testimony of most of the other women differed only in details.

Sarah Hardin's case was somewhat different for George Hardin was notoriously "close;" and Sarah, after some hesitation, acknowledged timidly that "makin' out lists" didn't do her much good, for it was "like findin' chicken's teeth" to get anything that didn't grow on the place, and the best of all the farm stuff went to market besides. "I guess George's bank account is quite big, but we don't get any good of it," she added wistfully, "except the satisfaction o' knowin' it's there."

The women who were the happy possessors of allowances which they could manage for themselves, Mrs. Anna Cathcart and Jenny Briscoil, explained briefly how, with their husbands, they had worked out definite little plans for spending and saving—a certain amount for household expenses, which the wife managed absolutely; a definite amount for clothing and incidentals; a certain modest sum for recreation and pleasure; and always something to be put away for a rainy day. The three plans dif-

ferred in details, but in each case husband and wife were financial partners, and the wife had exclusive control of an allowance for household expenses.

The less fortunate portion of the female population of Sandy Corners listened with longing—and with determination. And then they evolved the scheme which changed the whole course of history in Sandy Corners.

It was simple enough but it was radical and in some cases daring, but the women of Sandy Corners meant business. The immediate point to be gained was vastly important, but more compelling still to some of them was the ulterior motive. If they succeeded in this, the way would be clear to do some village housecleaning—the gambling machine could be swept out, and the business methods of the innkeeper given a much-needed dusting and scrubbing.

The plan as finally adopted was simple enough. Each woman was to make a more appeal to her own particular husband, stating clearly her plan for financial partnership and using such arts of persuasion and means of convincing as long acquaintance and individual gifts indicated as being most likely to succeed, and then, failing in this last attempt to gain their point separately and individually they would strike. Yes that was the word; they would strike.

Failing in the last attempt, each woman would walk straight to the home of one of the Three Fortunes. The homes of the Three Fortunes would immediately become employment agencies, and there the strikers would remain candidates for "places" as housekeepers until satisfactory terms could be made either with their own husbands or with some other.

The employment agencies would be secured by the fee which each man must pay for services rendered in procuring him a housekeeper, and the Three Fortunes would refuse to serve meals or food of any kind to the strikers' husbands. Those of the strikers who had daughters old enough to cook were to take them with them, and the few smaller children were to be taken care of by Mrs. Jack. The older boys didn't count in the plan, for they were needed in the fields—and it was the busiest season of the year.

As had been anticipated the "last appeals" were fruitless, except in one case. Young Jack Hankins listened to his wife's plans, first, with patronizing indulgence, then with interest, and finally accepted quite enthusiastically the plan for financial partnership outlined by his pink-cheeked wife. She had never before presented a definite plan

and besides she had never thought about the matter, anyhow, until the day of the lecture on Household Management. So that conquest was easy.

No so with the others. Each in his own way refused, ignored, laughed at, or put aside the carefully presented plans, and went about his work calm in the superiority of man's estate, scarcely giving the matter a second thought except to smile, or to frown, or to shrug a shoulder, or to lift an eyebrow—individual ways of saying. "What notions women do get into their heads!"

Ephraim Bates was even more stolid than usual. "Give me a list o' the things you want, Mandy," he said, "I'm goin' in to town to-morrow afternoon."

He had scarcely listened to the plan she had tried to present, and had not so much as asked a question or made a remark concerning it. He was still less attentive to the ominous calm of Ann Amanda's voice as she said, "Very well, Ephraim," and proceeded to make out the usual list.

That was Wednesday evening after supper when the dishes were done and Ephraim was sitting on the porch smoking serenely. There could be no more propitious time.

The next morning, by ten o'clock, the strikers had their homes in order, a cold dinner on the table, the various keys in their accustomed hiding-places, and were wending their way to the "Employment Agencies."

There were some misgivings and heart flutterings, a few fleeting doubts, and several little waves of regret for the cold dinner that hungry husbands would find, but those feelings were temporary. Firm determination and high resolve prevailed, and twelve o'clock found every single member of the Sandy Corners Sewing Club registered in one of the three employment agencies, busy with some sewing and calmly awaiting an employer.

The local paper came out on Thursdays and the male population of Sandy Corners usually spent Thursday evening perusing that enlightening periodical. A conspicuous notice on the front page would inform those same readers that employment agencies had been opened at the homes of Mrs. Jack Barclay, Mrs. Wm. Briscoil and Mrs. Martha Cathcart, and that prospective employes might be provided with suitable housekeepers by paying a certain fee at the said agencies.

"S'pose they get mad an' don't come," said timid little Mrs. Hardin nervously. It had taken a good deal of encouragement to bring her to the point where she dared to take so decisive a step, and even now she had serious misgivings.

Jane Palmerson promptly reassured her.

"Why, you needn't be afraid. George Hardin'll be one o' the first to come to terms. The fee gets bigger every day he waits, an', besides, none of us'll keep

house fer him ter less'n thirty dollar a month, an' you're willin' to go back ef he'll allow you twenty-five dollars a month fer all housekeepin' expenses. He'll come to terms soon enough. Wait in'll be too expensive."

When the men of Sandy Corners found locked doors, cold dinners, and no wives waiting for them Thursday noon, they were somewhat surprised and some of them a trifle uneasy. A few of them thought of the household allowance plan refused the night before with some misgiving, but most of them concluded that the women had gone off on some sort of a picnic and would be back by supper-time.

When "knocking-off" time came with houses still empty and no sign of supper, the men of Sandy Corners swore softly under their breath and proceeded to get their own suppers. After supper they repaired to the porches discovered the "Employment Agency" notice.

Some of them failed to see any connection between the notice and the absent wife, but young Harry Bascombe whistled thoughtfully, laid down his paper, hitched his horse to the buggy, and drove straight to Mrs. Jack Barclay's. He walked boldly up to the front door.

"Be you the Employment Agency?" he asked with a slight grin.

"This is one of the employment agencies," replied Mrs. Jack with dignity. "What can we do for you?"

"Wal, I reckon I want a housekeeper, but there's only one that'll do," he grinned. "D'ye think you've got the right one? Blue eyes, brown hair, worth her weight in gold any day, medium tall. D'ye think you've got her?"

"Yes, I think we can accommodate you. The fee for those who engage their housekeepers to-night is one dollar. To-morrow it will be two dollars; the next day, three, and so on." She will arrange terms with you herself."

Mrs. Jack disappeared and presently, like a whirlwind, in rushed Mary Bascombe and threw her arms round her husband's neck.

"I knew you'd come soon," she said; "dear old boy, you couldn't get along without me!"

Then she remembered and drew away, standing very erect and speaking with dignity.

"Do you wish to engage a housekeeper?"

"Course I do; what else'd I come for?"

"Well, these are my terms," and she proceeded to explain in detail her allowance plan.

Young Harry followed her carefully.

"Course I'm willin'," he said cordially. "Been thinkin' it over to-day and intended to tell you to-night, to go ahead with it anyhow. How much do I owe you, Mrs. Jack?"

"One dollar, please," said Mrs. Jack, and she smiled quietly as she placed Harry Bascombe's crisp greenback in the club treasury.

"Better let George Hardin know the terms," she called to Mr. and Mrs. Harry as they drove away. "Fee is a dol' ar more each day."

Before the Bascombes reached home they met four or five Sandy Corners men, and to each one, young Harry gleefully exhibited his new housekeeper and explained how he got her. While Mrs. Harry, smiling and dimpling, corroborated every statement. He felt that the women had the right of it and considered the whole thing a good joke on the Sandy Corners men.

But all of the Sandy Corners men were not so easily won. Some of them were thoroughly angry, and others attempted to turn the "joke" on their wives by engaging as housekeepers some

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other man's wife. They found, however, that prices were practically prohibitory in that case, for not one of the women would engage to keep house for any other man than her husband for less than thirty-five dollars a month. That made acceptance of the wife's plan so decidedly advantageous financially that only two of them had to pay a fee larger than three dollars.

The man who held out longest was Ephraim Bates. He hired a girl from Lindsay, ten miles away, for twenty dollars a month, and then stood the bad cooking, the untidiness, and the wastefulness, stolidly while he waited for Ann Amanda to "give in" and come home.

But Ann Amanda didn't "give in." She was prepared for just such an emergency as this. As soon as she heard that Ephraim had hired a girl, Mrs. Jack sent word to Jonah Slocum who was a bachelor and kept house for himself. Jonah promptly appeared and the result was that he engaged Mrs. Bates to keep house for him for eight dollars a month.

Then Mrs. Bates set to work to outdo herself at housekeeping. Jonah allowed a certain amount for household expenses, surprisingly small considering the results produced—and Mrs. Bates did the rest.

The once untidy home of Jonah Slocum assumed an air of thrift, and prosperity fairly beamed from its pleasant porch and from its well-kept yard. Jonah himself began to grow sleek and prosperous-looking, and he openly boasted at the village store that his "livin'" plus Mrs. Bates' wages cost him a good sight less than his "livin'" alone had cost before.

Ephraim Bates passing Jonah Slocum's house every time he went to the village, began to weaken. He noticed the growing thriftiness of the place and the well-mended clothing of Jonah with mixed emotions. He knew of Jonah's oft-repeated assertion that "livin'" cost him less now than it did before he hired a housekeeper, and he tried not to hear Jonah's rapturous descriptions of the berry pie or the hot biscuits he had just eaten, but comparison grew more and more odious as his own domestic arrangements became less and less satisfactory.

Finally, he felt he could stand it no longer, and one morning he hitched up his horse and drove to Jonah's house.

He climbed out of the buggy and knocked at the front door. Ann Amanda came to the door with a sweeping cap on her head and a broom in her hand. A wiff of delicious odors from the kitchen made his mouth water and steadied him in the carrying out of his purpose.

"Mandy," he said quietly, "you can have that allowance ef you'll give up this job an' come home—twenty-five, thirty, or whatever you think you'll need."

Ann Amanda looked at him steadily. "Have you been to the Employment Agency?" she asked.


"The Employment Agency be d—d!" he remarked with emphasis. "I guess you c'n go home without askin' any employment agency."

"Those fees all go into the club treasury," responded Ann Amanda calmly. "When you've paid the twenty-eight dollars—one dollar a day—you can stop for me and I'll go back with you."

Two hours later, the Employment Agency went out of existence leaving to the treasury of the Sandy Corners Sewing Club the neat little sum of sixty dollars, and Ephraim Bates drove happily home with Ann Amanda by his side—past the smiling fields of grain, past the splashing mill-wheel and through the sweet wood road where the fragrant breath of the honeysuckle filled Ann Amanda's soul with a great content—the content of one who has achieved.

The man who tried to kick his way to popularity learned better after awhile.

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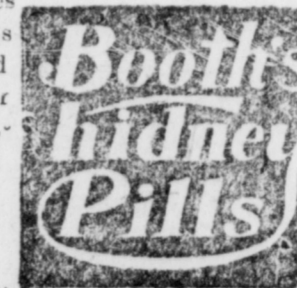
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