

STEPHEN LEACOCK

Stephen Leacock (1869-1944) was a famous Canadian writer of the 20th century. He wrote twenty-seven books on history, criticism, economics and political science. But he became internationally famous as the author of books of humour.

His humorous stories showed the contradictions¹ of life in modern America. Leacock made fun of wealthy and pretentious² people and of the hypocrisy³ that he saw in political and social life of society. Leacock said that the basis of humour lay in the contrast offered by life itself, and that humour was revealed⁴ only to the few who, by instinct or by effort, had given thought to it.

Leacock was a brilliant lecturer, and travelled all over the British Isles, Canada and the United States. His audience always enjoyed listening to him, and literary critics agreed to place him next to Mark Twain as the first literary humourist in North America.

Exercise 1. Read the words and try to guess their meaning. Pay attention to the suffixes:

-en: hight — lighten, light — lighten;

-ful: rest — restful, pity — pitiful, meaning - meaningful;

-tion: celebrate - celebration, introduce - introduction.

Read the word combinations and translate them:

a special celebration; to heighten the enjoyment; a lovely restful day

Read the story **How We Kept Mother's Day** and say whether the family did their best to make Mother's Day enjoyable for Mother.

How We Kept Mother's Day

Of all the different ideas that have been started lately, I think that the very best is the notion⁵ of celebrating once a year "Mother's Day." I don't wonder that May the eleventh is becoming such a popular date all over America and I am sure the idea will spread to England too.

It is especially in a big family like ours that such an idea takes hold. So we decided to have a special celebration of Mother's Day. We thought it a fine idea. It made us all realize how much Mother had done for us for years, and all the efforts and sacrifices that she had made for our sake.

We decided that we'd make it a great day, a holiday for all the family, and do everything we could to make Mother happy. Father decided to take a holiday from his office, so as to help in celebrating the day, and my sister Ann and I stayed home from college classes, and Mary and my brother Will stayed home from High School.

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1. **contradiction** — противоречие
 2. **pretentious** — претенциозный
 3. **hypocrisy** — лицемерие, ханжество
 4. **to reveal** — открывать, показывать
 5. **notion** — идея, намерение

It was our plan to make it a day just like Christmas or any big holiday, and so we decided to decorate the house with flowers and with mottoes, and all that kind of thing. We got Mother to make mottoes and arrange the decorations, because she always does it at Christmas.

The two girls thought it would be a nice thing to dress in our best for such a big occasion, and so they both got new hats. Mother trimmed⁶ both the hats, and they looked fine, and Father had bought silk ties for himself and us boys as a souvenir of the day to remember Mother by. We were going to get Mother a new hat too, but it turned out that she seemed to really like her old grey bonnet⁷ better than a new one, and both the girls said that it was awfully becoming to her⁸.

Well, after breakfast we had it arranged as a surprise for Mother that we would hire a motor car and take her for a beautiful drive away into the country. Mother is hardly ever able to have a treat like that, because she is busy in the house nearly all the time.

6. **to trim** — отделявать

7. **bonnet** — дамская шляпа

8. **to be becoming to** — быть к лицу

But on the very morning of the day we changed our plans a little, because it occurred to Father that it would be better to take Mother to go fishing than to take her for a motor drive. If you go fishing, there is a definite purpose before you to heighten the enjoyment. So we all felt that it would be nicer for Mother to have a definite purpose; and anyway, it turned out that Father had just got a new rod(1) the day before.

So we had everything arranged for the trip, and we got Mother to cut up some sandwiches and to make us a sort of lunch in case we got hungry. Mother packed it all up in a basket for us ready to go in the motor.

Well, when the car came to the door, it turned out that there hardly seemed as much room in it as we had supposed.

Father said not to mind him, he said that he could just as well stay home, and that he was sure that he could put in the time working in the garden; he said that we were not to let the fact of his not having had a real holiday for three years stand in our way; he wanted us to go right ahead and be happy and have a big day.

But of course we all felt that it would never do to let Father stay home, especially as we knew he would make trouble if he did. The two girls, Anne and Mary, would gladly have stayed and helped get dinner, only it seemed such a pity to, on a lovely day like that, having their new hats. But they both said that Mother had only to say the word², and they'd gladly stay home and work. Will and I were ready to drop out, but unfortunately we weren't any use in getting the dinner.

So, in the end it was decided that Mother would stay home and just have a lovely restful day round the house, and cook the dinner. It turned out anyway that Mother did not care for Γ fishing, and also it was just a little bit cold and fresh out of doors, though it was lovely and sunny, and Father was rather afraid that Mother might take cold if she came.

So we all drove away with cheers for Mother, and Father waved his hand back every few minutes.

We had the loveliest day up among the hills that you could possibly imagine.

It was quite late when we got back, but Mother had guessed that we would be late, so she had kept back the dinner so as to have it just nicely ready and hot for us. Only first she had to get towels and soap for father and clean things for him to put on. That kept Mother busy for a little while, that and helping the girls get ready.

But at last everything was ready, and we sat down to the grandest kind of dinner - roast turkey³ and all sorts of things like on Christmas.

The dinner lasted a long while, and was great fun, and when it was over all of us wanted to help clear the things up and wash the dishes, only Mother said that she would rather do it, and so we let her, because we wanted just for once to please her.

It was quite late when it was all over, and when we all kissed Mother before going to bed, she said it had been the most wonderful day in her life, and I think there were tears in her eyes.

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1. **rod** — удочка
 2. **Mother had only to say the word** — только одно мамино слово
 3. **roast turkey** — жареная индейка

Exercise 2. Read and translate the sentences:

1. Father decided to take a holiday from his office, so as⁴ to help in celebrating the day.
2. Well, after breakfast we had it arranged⁵ as a surprise for Mother that we would hire⁶ a motor car and take her for a beautiful drive away into the country.
3. We had everything arranged for the trip, and we got Mother to cut up some sandwiches and to make up a sort of lunch in case⁷ we got hungry.
4. There hardly seemed as much room in the car as we had supposed.
5. Father said that we were not to let the fact of his not having had a real holiday for three years stand in our way.
6. We all felt that it would never do to let Father stay home, especially as we knew he would make trouble if he did.

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4. **so as** — с тем чтобы
 5. **to have something arranged** — устроить
 6. **to hire** — нанимать
 7. **in case** — в случае

Exercise 3. Answer the questions on the text:

1. What celebration did the family once decide to have?
2. What did each member of the family want to do to mark the holiday?
3. What plans did they have and how did they change them?
4. Why did Father suggest that they should go fishing?
5. Why did Mother have to stay at home?
6. How did each member of the family try to explain why they would be of no use if they stayed at home?
7. How did they spend their time in the country?
8. Did the members of the family show consideration for their Mother on her day?
9. What did Mother do when Father and the children returned from the trip and exchanged impressions?

Discussing the Theme of the Story

1. *Explain why the family thought it a grand idea to have a special celebration of Mother's Day.*
2. *Say what Father and the children did for themselves and what they did for Mother.*
Explain:
 - why a new hat for Mother wasn't bought;
 - why it was decided to change the plan a little and go fishing instead of going for a motor drive away into the country;
 - why Mother had to stay at home;
 - why Mother said it had been the most wonderful day in her life.
3. *Say whether you could recognize the selfishness of Father and the children at once.*
4. *Describe:*
 - how Mother spent Mother's Day;
 - how Father and the children spent Mother's Day.
5. *The family had grand plans for keeping Mother's Day. Say which of their plans were realised and which were not.*
6. *What do you think Mother felt and thought when the children kissed her good-night? Why were there tears in her eyes? Give reasons for your answer.*
7. *Give your opinion about the members of the family: Mother, Father and the children. Explain your attitude towards them.*
8. *Say what the story makes you think about.*
9. *The story seems funny when you are reading it. Is it really so humorous? Why or why not? Can you feel any sad note in it? Explain your answer.*