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WHAT ABOUT WASHING-UP?

Thoughts Over The Kitchen Sink

(Written for "The Listener" by
BERTIE HEYMANN)

THE recent Parliamentary debate on the advisability of conscripting women for domestic service must have interested many of your readers. My own interest is real but detached. I shall not benefit from whatever decision will be taken. My sons are not in the maid-needing age any more but rather in the aid-providing, and I am neither frail nor old enough to be entitled to conscripted or non-conscripted help. I am even hoping that my interest in the matter may remain detached and general for a long time.

Yet I do not belong to that female section of our community who play bridge in the afternoon, and Mr. Fraser's reference to them did not make me blush. But I do not like housework, and I know that many other women, bridge or no bridge, do not like it either. The results achieved are not equal to the efforts employed. The aim of creating something which in the best of instances may be called "spick and span" seems rather poor and does not encourage enthusiasm in the long run. The idea that one could "eat from my floors" if I scrubbed and polished them sufficiently has offered me little consolation. We do not eat from the floor; I can't see any reason why we should, either.

Liking What We Do

I realise, of course, that the emotional approach to our duties is no concern of Parliament. So we must help ourselves. Since we cannot always do what we like, we must try to like what we do. This appears to me more important than labour-saving gadgets, and it seems that whoever has made a step forward in this direction ought to communicate it to others.

I have made such a step forward in one particular branch of housework, one which does not affect the housewife only but the whole family, one which seems to top the list of domestic dislikes: the washing of dishes. Formerly I believed that the washing-up is so specially disliked, or at least so much talked about, because it affects the entire family. But I found that women, the silent sufferers, of the wash tub, the floor polish, and the darning needle, hate it just as much as do husbands, sons, and daughters. I also found that it is only the dinner washing-up which meets with so much animosity. Nobody seems to feel so bitter about lunch or breakfast dishes.

I do not believe that the number of plates, or the greasiness of pots and pans has anything to do with this fact. I have come to the conclusion—and I am inclined to call it a discovery—that the dinner washing-up is disliked because it has to be done *after* dinner. We do not mind how hard we work, how much we rush during the day. But once we settle down to our evening meal something inside us seems to say: that is the finish.