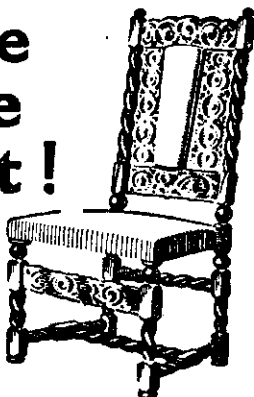


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YESTERDAY-TODAY-TOMORROW

New York on 16 Dollars

SECOND DAY

The second of two articles written by a former member of "The Listener" staff, who recently travelled to London

SOME of the elevator attendants in Macy's are Negroes, dressed in sky-blue livery. They chant a sing-song of the names of departments as they go, and do it with touching dignity. In Gimbel's over the road there are women in cyclamen-coloured uniforms. Above the head of one of them I read a little framed sign: "The attendant on duty in this elevator, Miss F. Edelman, has pledged herself to courtesy and service."

One thing you *don't* do in Macy's is ask the clerk for something "cheaper." From the pain I saw in one or two faces when I did this I concluded that the word means "shoddier." Standards of comparison don't go downwards, anyway, they go up. Macy's printed guide ("Where to find it") lists two fur departments: "Furs, better," and "Furs, less expensive." Clearly there is nothing inferior about the latter; (indeed, there is a suggestion of virtue, further borne out by the motto "It's smart to be thrifty at Macy's"). It's only that there is something superior about the former.

Another thing that is not done is to ask a salesclerk (even if you have just bought something) to direct you to another shop which you want to visit. All the other shops are competitors to Macy's, and are unmentionable. The clerks are fiercely loyal in this matter. On the way out I asked a sour lady at the Information Desk where I could find a public 'phone without having to climb back to Macy's Balcony and Post Office. "Why don't you go to the five-and-ten over the road?" she asked, sweeping a lock of hair from her forehead with a tired wave of the hand. I went to the door and saw that there was a huge Woolworths on the opposite corner. But I doubt if the name is ever whispered in Macy's.

IN Woolworths I bought crisp airmail paper and pleased a salesclerk by offering to change a five-dollar bill someone else had tendered. There was enough goodwill engendered by this helpfulness of mine to start a friendly conversation. So far I had been eyed and answered evasively everywhere, except by the news stand man. "You're not Americans, are you?" she said. "No," I said, "and everyone spots us." "It's the way you say Spahrts," she said. "You say spaats. We say spahrts."

THE "Town and Country," a smart restaurant on Park Avenue, where we were taken for lunch by an American woman, is air-conditioned. You step in from a hot street to sweet coolth; it is magical, and breath-bereaving. You feel no draught, no initial

chill. Some diabolical scientist has evidently discovered the perfect temperature-ratio that makes the change comfortable though considerable. Again, to describe the food that is to be had there is more than can be borne on board this ship, and such standards of luxury in any case are better forgotten than sighed for in these times, because they involve waste. I do like, however, to recall how my New Zealander's eye was caught by the fact that the right kind of light bulbs were available for the imitation candles and special lights by which the place was illuminated, and the plates and cups and dishes were of the same set at all the tables. I was startled to find how impressive this seemed, which after all was nothing but a piece of normality, and not luxury. It has been customary for so long in New Zealand to find yourself surrounded with crude makeshifts in hotels and eating-houses and



"CRUDE makeshifts in New Zealand hotels and eating-houses"

all the semi-public places where the equipment and décor would be ordered in bulk and maintained as it was first conceived if only the stuff could be got, that I think something has been lost—a feeling of stability and security, I suppose. Makeshift, when it becomes a habit, can be vicious and demoralising, more especially if there is an aesthetic factor involved. Certainly it has its virtues, and if New Zealanders have a common genius it is for making shift brilliantly, yet I wonder what effect habitual makeshift has upon aesthetic habits when it pervades life as much as it does in New Zealand to-day.

OUR second, and last, day in New York ended (quite rightly, as I thought) like something in the pictures—with a desperate, frantic attempt to get back to the boat in time. I can easily believe that of three cars in New York's thoroughfares, two are taxis. But try and get one of those taxis on Fifth Avenue up in the Forties after four o'clock on a Friday afternoon when it happens to be the Jewish New

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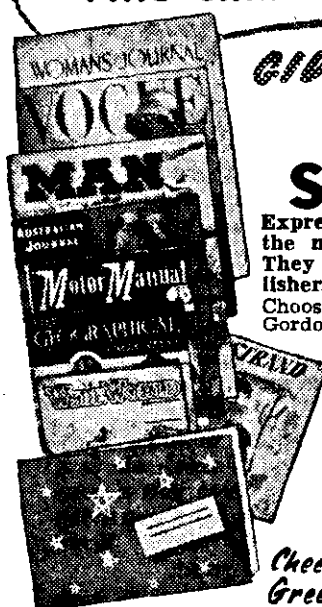


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