

# NO ILLUSIONS PLEASE!

**T**UCKED away between the hills for a long week-end, one can, just occasionally, chance on a jewel of a book. John Langdon-Davies, however, is not so much a jewel as an invaluable metal. I had already devoured his "History of Woman," and here, in a farm-house kitchen, in a heap of seed catalogues, simple patterns and brochures of agricultural implements, I came on his "A Short History of the Future."

What a book—what a mind!

The rain pattered, but who cared! Here was sanity. A novelist's fluency, a scientist's sureness of touch, an idealist's broad vision. A country library exchange.

Somewhere about the third page I was brought up with a round turn.

"On my first day at an English Public School I sat down to School Chapel with some 400 boys. . .

"Suppose that, in that morning, at 9.10 a.m. of September 20, 1910, the Headmaster of Headmasters had appeared above the altar and read from a scroll in His hands the names of 100 of us boys—the name of the boy to my right, 5 of the boys on the bench behind, and so forth, and had said, 'These hundred boys, one in four of those present, will never have children, will never marry, will never enter their fathers' businesses. In seven years their bodies, more or less intact, will be lying in foreign graves.'

"He would have spoken the truth, of course. But what difference would it have made?

"If our parents had known could they have saved those hundred boys? Or, not being able to save them, could they not have given them a carefree boyhood, since they were to be denied all manhood by the stupidity of their elders?

"And we who are left, and have boys in our turn, are we powerless to prevent those same forces working to the same result?

"... We have been warned, and we dread them night and day. We cannot wash our hands of the future. But what can we do?"

That is not the end of the book—as it might be, indeed, with so many that are written to-day—but the beginning. The rest of it—every one of its concise illuminating pages—is given over to telling us what we can, and must, do.

The thing that appears to have got, so disastrously, beyond our control is, the author suggests, within it.

John Langdon-Davies is essentially the scientist. He strips us of all illusions. But—he leaves us hope.

## What Are Children Worth?

Recently, when Europe still resembled Europe, a young man and his wife concluded a curious contract. Borrowing the not extraordinary sum of £16/16/- on which to marry and set up house-keeping together, they promised in repayment to provide Hungary with four healthy children. Value; four guineas apiece. What price do you put on yours?

—A.G.



## HIGH HAT

"Hats to help you put on inches" is one of the passwords to winter chic. Tall, with feathers and a wisp of veil is this model designed expressly to enhance the dignity of this round-cheeked Miss. Wine red suede—front peaked and titled—feathers matched, lacquered and curled.

The waist-long cloak is Mink—and lovely.



# WHILE THE KETTLE BOILS

Dear Friends,

What I want to know is, on February 29, did New Zealand spinsters make hay while the sun shone?

Don't tell me you forgot it was Leap Year? Even if the proposal proved to be a boomerang, you might at least have been richer by a kiss—and a silk gown.

Being a member of the single sisterhood myself, I made out a tentative list of possibilities—finally tore it up in disgust—and went out and bought a silk frock for myself!

Up till a century ago, however, this was no joke. Any young man who refused a proposal on this day had to soften the blow, if he refused, by giving the venturesome maiden a kiss and a new silken gown. What a chance for the gold-diggers! Still, they really deserved the forfeit, for, after all, they did run the risk of being accepted!

The myth has it that St. Patrick himself, after clearing the frogs out of the bogs, and the snakes out of Ireland, was responsible for the institution of Leap Year Proposals.

A band of repining maidens beseeched him to do something for them in the way of finding husbands, and St. Patrick, anxious to oblige, decreed that on this one day in every four years, a lady should have the right to propose. He also named the forfeit if the gentleman refused—namely, a kiss and a silk gown.

So much for the myth. In 1528, the identical law became operative in Scotland. Among the musty old legal files, the original decree can be read to-day—that:

"It is statut and ordaint that during the rein of her maist blessit megeste, for ilk yeare knowne as lepe yeare, ilk mayden as ladye of bothe highe and lowe estait shall hae liberte to bespeke ye man she likes, albeit he refuses to taik hir to be his lawful wyfe, he shall be mulcted in ye sum ane pundis or less as his estait may be, except and aurs gif he can make it appeare that he is bethrothit ane ither woman he then shall be free."

Though never actually decreed by law, the custom gradually became established in England. A curious Leap Year superstition is still to be met in some parts of New England, where the natives believe that in Leap Year the "beans grow on the wrong side of the pod."

February's chill blasts must have disorganised the New Zealand bean crops. For I inspected our own kitchen plot—and the beans are all growing on the right side!

Talking of Leap Year, one thinks of marriage—and talking of marriage, one reflects on love; that curious phenomenon that seems to have been, and continues to be, a monopoly of poets down through the ages. Love must be a most durable and hardy emotion to withstand all the sentimental vapourings in verse and music which even our modern-day "swing-music makers" persist in giving us in saccharine doses. Yet, despite all the fun and the jesting, it still remains the dominant force in the world.

A girl in love. There is nothing like love to teach a woman loveliness. It

may only be one of Nature's ruses, but it is a delightful one. For whether she's twenty or forty, a woman in love is beautiful. She seems to emanate a particular radiance, that makes her eyes brighter, her hair more lustrous, her step lighter, and her eyes more tender. She is kinder and sweeter—because, for the enchanted moment, all the world is kin. She is endowed with a clearer vision. She sees herself as her lover sees her—and in this radiant reflection she is capable of miracles.

Cordially Yours,

*Cynthia*

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