

WHILE THE KETTLE BOILS

Dear Friends,

While writing this letter to you, I have in mind a very charming lady in her late fifties. She has one fault, and if she reads this she will understand. She lives almost completely in the past. Her young days were full and colourful, and now that she has reached a placid corner of life, her eyes and thoughts are constantly turning backwards.

The good old days! What a familiar and really boring expression. Our good days are the present in which we live; born out of our own achievement and effort. Those people who sigh for the good old days forget: their imagination plays them tricks in painting the past rosier than it actually was. Time has a way of erasing the memory of uncomfortable moments and leaving us in contented possession of the pleasant ones.

The early Victorian Miss was a very delightful person, a paragon of all the graces; gentle, maidenly, modest. A cocktail or a risqué joke were meaningless terms to her. She moved in a comfortable, padded world that protected her from all the rude jars and bumps of hustling progress. But Miss 1940 scorns such frailty. She faces facts. Her eyes are wide and fearless as her outlook on life. She never shrinks from an issue; she accepts it with a challenge. She knows that to-day it is not alone a man's but a woman's world as well, and she strives earnestly to earn her own little place in it.

I am not attempting here a serious discussion of the past and to-day. Perhaps it can be termed best a barter or exchange. What we have lost in grace and leisure we have gained in a fuller, more vigorous living.

But to return to this question of grouching. Married women are often the main offenders. Mrs. Middleman looks back and bewails the fact that she has not the pretty things to wear or the same money to spend as in her single days. She overlooks the fact that she dressed then—and quite rightly so—to attract some nice man her way, and when she got him, she gained at the same time security and protection. Not such a bad exchange for extra pin-money and a pretty frock, when you come to work it out.

Women, at heart, are incurably romantic. They are apt to look back on some romantic affair, and to wonder in their secret hearts if he was not the right one after all. Don't you believe it, Mrs. Middleman, it is only your romantic nature playing you tricks. The one you chose, if you are a serious-minded person, is the one to whom your heart really belongs. The other affair looks glamorous in retrospect, but even glamour wears thin when you live and eat with it three times a day. So be content with what you've got. Once we realise the futility of living in the past, we can grasp with firmer, surer hands the happiness of the present—and our future will be fuller and more secure.

This little quotation, I think, answers everything:

"Happiness is the gift of seeing the good things of life in such high relief that the rest is unimportant."

Yours cordially,

Cynthia

LIVING IN FLATS

(Continued from previous page)

As for colour, more and more subtle weavings can now be had, and it is often fadeless. Our colour schemes should be easy and unobtrusive, not too hard and fast. As a general rule, the floor and wall colours should set the key and unite the smaller elements, for colour, of course, must be related in some way. Since we have found patterns too restless, we may achieve variety by the different textures we use. For instance, among matt surfaces, a shiny material could be introduced, but we must remember, in furnishing anyhow, that all that glitters is not gold. The aim should not be a jumble of bits and pieces, but unity.

Unless a flat is very large, all fittings should be kept to a minimum size, with nothing that is not strictly functional. House planning to-day makes one object serve the use of two: the divan which can be bed at night; folding tables and chairs to be stacked somewhere when not in use; screen or curtains to make two rooms of one. One object should never be made to look like another. The early motor car that we now laugh

at was built to look as much like a buggy as possible; so electric or gas fires are proceeding on the wrong lines when they are made to resemble flames.

Carrying Round the Past

It is wonderful, too, how much of our past we carry round with us. That aspidistra will crop up even in the most modernistic homes, and so will the frilled muslin curtains coquettishly looped up and even tied with ribbon. The modern flat provides a tasteful setting; let us rise to it and not insult it with mournful carry-overs from our Edwardian past. If there is any pattern in the upholstery, let it be in plaids, stripes, or geometrical designs. Bent wood is now used very skilfully for chairs, and in bookshelves the curve gives variety. Metal or tubular steel may look too clinical for some tastes, but when you have got used to the new idiom, it can be most attractive. Even pianos have been remodelled to merge harmoniously with modern furniture.

Let us too discard many of our pictures. This may be serious for the easel painter, but simplicity calls for uncluttered space and practically unadorned walls. If our grandmothers could see our bareness, they would certainly be shocked; but we can carry ancestor worship too far.

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