

LADY OF THE ANTIQUES

THE charm of life lies in the unexpected; the surprise that awaits you round the corner. In this instance, the unexpected proved to be an antique shop of known repute.

Maybe Charles Dickens is responsible with his "Old Curiosity Shop." When we speak of an antique shop, we straightway visualise some old, grey-bearded, bespectacled art connoisseur, fluttering like one of Dickens's ghosts among his treasures. Dickens, undoubtedly, would have been surprised if anyone had suggested a woman art dealer. In those days women toed the line of their front doors—whereas to-day the whole world is their field. Nothing is impossible—even a woman art dealer.

I went, with secret curiosity. I found a youthful fresh-complexioned woman, with a friendly smile and a soft Scotch burr in her voice that had its origin in the ancient town of Edinburgh. No, she did not look "arty"—but what she did not know about art was scarcely worth knowing. She did not accept this as a personal tribute.

In the Blood

"You see, it is in my family—in my blood. For generations my people have been in the antique business. My parents practised in Edinburgh for 35 years. When I came out to New Zealand in 1904, it was just the natural thing that I should carry on."

I moved gently and with awe about the long, graceful room. At every turn there was some lovely piece with the sheen and bloom of age on it. Across the back of a tall, carved Chippendale chair, a genuine Persian rug caught a ray of sunlight. On the wall above, two large oil paintings loomed from the upper shadow.

"You're to be envied," I sighed, "living and moving among such lovely things."

She nodded.

"I know. It is a part of me. I cannot imagine ever being without it. It fills my life. I'm not even interested in picture shows or outside amusements."

BROWN, THE GARDENER

(Continued from previous page)

Awe overcame me. This was a title I had never felt that I deserved.

"Yes," he continued, ruminating. "I only said to Mr. Smith the other day, 'She's a real lady is Mrs. Smith, as nice a lady as you could wish ter work for.'"

My spirits rose. I began to feel grateful. After all, I reflected, the growing tide of years behind me did entitle me to some respect—appreciation even. Perhaps I was, after all, that epitome of all virtues—that awe-inspiring thing, a lady.

Reproof died on my tongue.

"I haven't 'ad time ter do this bed," Brown broke in on my reverie. "I'll do that termorrer."

For a moment I gasped. "Why," I said, as I recovered, "I didn't know that you were free to-morrow."

"Bless yer 'art," said Brown magnanimously, "I wouldn't leave yer before I'd finished. Good-bye. See yer in the mornin'."

I find all I want here. Sometimes when I have everything in place, polished and gleaming, I stand back and take a look at it—it always gives me unique satisfaction."

Aura of the Past

"Do you think New Zealanders are artistically inclined?"

"Yes," she said, "more noticeably so over the past ten years. Perhaps it is because travelling has become more general, and people have been able to view priceless old things on the other side of the world—and to appreciate them. The modern furniture will never replace the antiques."

I agreed with her heartily. To me the chromium, stream-lined furniture of to-day is always reminiscent of a surgical chamber. Its very negation was in these graceful old things that filled the room with their presence. They carried with them an aura; some beauty and dignity bequeathed by the people who once moved amongst them. The rustle of Victorian crinolines, powder and patches of the Georgian period, the hooped petticoats and monumental head-dresses of the French period. The fragrance of their presence still lingered.

I remarked on a magnificent china cabinet. It was a French piece of the Louis XVI. period, of a soft darkness called Kingwood, ornamented with slender traceries of gold. The correct term, I learnt, is ormulo mounted. The effect was exquisite. Above it stood a glorious

Sevres set, clock and twin candelabra. Sevres is now a lost art. This lady visited the Sevres factory when in Paris, and was privileged to see their private museum with priceless examples of Sevres work.

Antiques Before Clothes

It is in London, however, she said, that art dealing has its centre. She mentioned Christies with a little reminiscent sigh. The treasures that pass through this world-renowned firm have to be seen to be believed.

"I paid a visit to London about eight years ago," she said. "I remember only taking away three or four frocks, as I knew I could purchase anything I wanted on the other side. Do you know, I came back even poorer—with just one frock to my name. I was so horribly tempted by all the beautiful old antiques I saw, that I spent all the money on them that should have gone on clothes."

During her trip she visited the Continent: Germany, Italy and the Balkan States. While in Bulgaria she was privileged to see a spectacular dinner service of 500 pieces being made for the King of Bulgaria.

"I'm afraid," she said, "if you could see some of the art centres over there, you would think my own treasures here quite unpretentious."

Since the War, and owing to the difficulty of getting things shipped out, she has been searching locally for antique pieces. Recently, to secure a few special articles she needed, she was obliged to buy an entire household of furniture.

Jewellery Corner

She showed me a fascinating little corner. Here, behind a glass case, was a unique collection of antique jewellery

and family heirlooms. Old ear-rings, brooches and pins, slender bracelets, and cameos exquisitely chased. Rubies, emeralds, sapphires and diamonds, gleaming in their heavy old gold settings. In a nearby case was a magnificent collection of Georgian silver.

Two gracefully shaped wine flagons caught my attention. They were of solid silver plated with gold, and they carried a fascinating history. They bear the Royal hallmark of 1830 and are inscribed with the Royal Arms. These lovely flagons passed from Queen Victoria to the collection of the late Duke of Cumberland—finally joining the collection of the late Sir Andrew Noble. There are 51 solid ounces of silver in each flagon—and the price is £200! I envied their future possessor.

Such Sweet Sorrow

"It must hurt you to part with things like this," I said, "even for the sake of business."

She smiled.

"As a matter of fact, it does. There is one old cameo brooch which I keep hidden in case someone will want to buy it. Sometimes when I sell a special piece, its value becomes enhanced to me as it passes from my possession. I always experience regret. That's greedy, I suppose, but these things are very close to me."

I understood. A tall mahogany grandfather clock—140 years old—stood mutely against the wall. Beside it was a French hand-painted writing desk, as exquisite as the age that saw its fashioning. A mellow old sideboard, heavy with Georgian silver; brocade chairs, crystal chandeliers and transparent china—here was all the beauty and grace of a bygone age.

A Salute TO SUMMER STYLE



Matchless

★ ★ SHOES

FASHIONED IN NEW ZEALAND BY DUCKWORTH TURNER & CO. LTD.

Is this expensive-looking Matchless Teal Blue Suede Side Bar. Trims of patent to tone . . . pepper-pot punching completes smartness far beyond its budget price. Mae last.