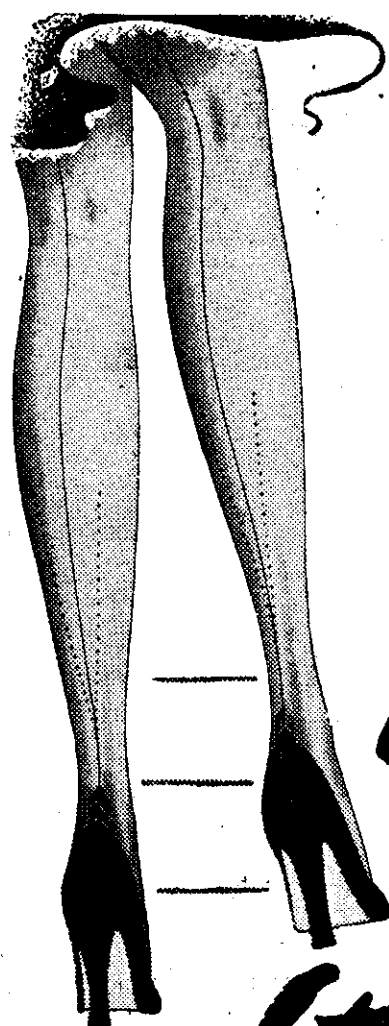


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Interview With A Dutch Woman

TULIPS and CO-EDUCATION:

FROM the tram-line a steep path zigzagged down, fringed with yellow broom. I followed the path to number 53, a stout, brown, sensible house with a sun-porch. Perhaps I was the victim of the preconceived idea in thinking that there was a certain air of Dutch solidity and honesty of purpose in its strong outlines, for I had come here to see Mrs. Felix Schwimmer, a Dutchwoman who, with her husband and three children, managed to escape from Holland on the actual day of the Nazi invasion, and who has now settled with her family in New Zealand.

I was shown into a large room with wide windows that looked over the gorse-covered hills. "You New Zealanders don't like your broom, do you?" asked Mrs. Schwimmer. "I think it's so beautiful. Even the prickly kind."

"We like it in the distance," I admitted, "just as we like hills in the distance rather than in the foreground."

"I agree with you about the hills. However, I've been in New Zealand over a year now, and I'm getting quite good at getting up and down them."

Nation of Flower Lovers

There was a short silence as Mrs. Schwimmer poured the tea. "Are the Dutch as confirmed tea-drinkers as the New Zealanders?" I asked.

"Almost. At this time of the morning, however, we should be drinking coffee. Not that my friends in Holland to-day are likely to be drinking either, for coffee is unobtainable, and tea is rapidly becoming so. I believe they're making some substitute out of ground and dried tulip bulbs. Of course, most of the tulip fields have been ploughed under to make room for the growing of essential foodstuffs for the Nazi Army. Even apart from this, there is very little point in growing tulips for export, as trade with England and America is now at a standstill.

"Do our tulips measure up to the Dutch standard?"

"Yes, except in price. In Holland, if your friend was sick, you would take her two very carefully wrapped arum lilies as a mark of esteem. In New Zealand you might take her perhaps four tulips."

Help in the House

"Are most of your countrywomen keen gardeners? One hears such a lot about flowers in Holland."

"Perhaps they are rather flower-lovers. Even in the towns, almost every Dutch house has its patch of garden. But almost every house with a garden has a gardener as well. When I first came to New Zealand I thought it strange that so many women worked (or perhaps played is the better word), in their gardens. For that matter, I was surprised that so many women worked in their own houses. In Holland even people of very moderate means have at least one girl to do the housework. In most cases there are two, one



MRS. FELIX SCHWIMMER
We are not so different

to cook and one to look after the house. When I came out here, I found myself doing a number of things that I had never had to do before, and that I had never expected to do.

"Dutch housewives have always had a reputation for cleanliness. But I think this high standard is only to be expected when domestic help problems have never existed for us."

"But you seem to be maintaining the standard in a country where there are no such things as domestic servants," I commented. On first entering the room I had been struck by the "Dutch Interior" effect. The furniture was of polished wood, the floor, bare except for the fireside rug, had the soft glow that can be given only by long and frequent polishings.

"The floor? That's thanks to the children," said Mrs. Schwimmer. "We've discovered that polishing the floor can be a fascinating business. That's one of the good things about our coming to New Zealand. The children have learnt to make themselves quite useful in the house, and I'm sure they'll be glad of it in after life.

Girls And Boys Together

"One of the most striking differences between Holland and New Zealand is in education. In Holland there are special schools, grammar schools, which prepare boys and girls for the university, and schooling, particularly in the grammar schools, is a much more intensive business than it is in New Zealand. It takes six years from the time he enters secondary school for a Dutch child to qualify for University Entrance, and throughout his secondary schooling he must take six compulsory language courses as well as mathematics, science and history. I see much more of my children now than I did when they were at school in Amsterdam, for then they used to rush home from school, have dinner and retire immediately to the study to start their homework. It seems to me that the New Zealand child is much happier in his school life than the Dutch child.

"There is one other thing about schools in Holland—co-education was
(Continued on next page)