

THERE'S A WAR ON—

—And Even School Reunions Aren't The Same

I ALWAYS enjoy our Old Girls' Reunion Dinner. I've been to every one we've had since I left school six years ago. It's great getting together with the girls and finding out all the things that have happened since you met last. Though I suppose we really spend more time discussing the things that happened when we were at school. It's funny the way things that weren't so very amusing at the time gain entertainment value with the years, isn't it? Like the time when Hilary dropped the vase on the Senior Inspector's toe, and we were all scared we wouldn't get our Higher Leaving Certificates.

Last year we had it in the Bolonia ballroom. Of course there were lots of faces I didn't know—children who had come to school after I left—but all the old gang seemed to be there. Joan and Marion and Helen and Marcia and Con. We had a little table to ourselves. Reunion dinners are awfully cliquey affairs, aren't they. We'd never dream of doing anything like welcoming a stranger into our midst. But I suppose everyone who goes knows somebody.

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"MY dear," said Marion, "you're looking marvellous! Being married must agree with you."

"You're looking rather marvellous yourself," I retorted. Marion has red hair and she was wearing a jade green velvet dinner frock. "I believe that frock's exactly the same colour as the one you wore to the school dance. Remember?"

"I'll never forget," said Marion. "I suppose it was rather advanced to wear a halter-neck at the age of sixteen."

"But quite unnecessary for the Head to mention it in hall." This was Joan.

"And do you remember Hilary won the sweepstake on which frock the Head would wear? She drew the flowered pink chiffon. And sure enough old Florrie turned up in it, although she'd worn it to the Swimming Bath Opening and the Parents' Social."

"What's she got on to-night?" I asked craning my neck to the official table.

"The black velvet and pearls. I'm sure it's the one she wore to the 1936 do, but Marcia says there's something different about the neck-line."

"Of course I'm quite ready to admit it may have been remodelled," conceded Marcia.

"By the way, where is Hilary?" I asked. "Can't see her anywhere."

"Oh, didn't you know? She's having a baby."

Incredulous whoops from the five of us.

"Can't imagine Hilary with a baby. How on earth would she manage about bathing it? She's bound to drop it."

"Do you remember the time she dropped the vase of gladioli on the inspector's toe?" More laughter.

"Say, girls, don't tell me that's old Sonia over there. The one in that unfortunate shade of pink next to Barbara."

"Yes, that's Sonia. Did you know she'd got engaged?"

"Impossible. Who to?"

"A rather lanky youth with spots and spectacles called Christopher something. He's in the Army. They're going to be married on his final leave."

"They say all things are possible. But why pick on Sonia?"

"She says he writes poetry."

"That explains it. Do you remember old Harty quoting her essay as the supreme example of gush?"

"And she was so upset she had to get under the desk to powder her nose. An objectionable habit. Do you remember Shirley used to, too? But that was because it shone. By the way, did she marry Michael?"

"No. He's overseas of course. But she's awfully keen on him and writes every second day. And when she gets a letter she goes round telling everybody about it."

"Rather a mistake, I always feel. I wonder why they didn't get engaged?"

"No idea. But you know he stayed with her family on his final leave? And there they were all sitting round waiting for Michael to 'speak.' But he didn't. And then he went away and he still hadn't. At least that's what her young sister told me."

"How pathetic. And now her only social activity is sitting at home embroidering table linen."

"I know. Every stitch a dream. And she's being depressingly faithful. Won't even come to the Girls' Club to entertain the members of the Forces."

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THE chatter eddied around me. Everywhere else things are changing, I thought. This war. But people don't change much. Marcia, Joan, Helen, Con, Marion. And the things that happened when we were at school are exactly the same. And the Head's still wearing the same frocks, and we're still talking about the same things. There's something to hold on to.

I THOUGHT of our Reunion often when I was working up in Auckland. I hadn't intended to go to it, because it's a long trip and it would mean getting an extra day off from work. But I got so tired of hearing people talk of nothing but invasion possibilities and the fall of Singapore, and seeing ordinary suburbanites digging trenches in their back gardens and of being dragged out of the office about once a week to try out dispersal schemes. I wanted to hear all about Hilary's new baby and Sonia's poet and the Head's pearls.

We didn't have it in the Bolonia Ballroom this year because the Air Force has taken it over for stores. So we had it in St. Thomas's Hall instead. I'd written to Marion to tell her I was coming and they'd kept me a seat at their end of the table. Marion was still looking marvellous, in ice-blue satin this time, and none of the others looked a day older.

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MEET MRS. GANDHI

(From an article in the "Sunday Statesman," Calcutta)

M AHATMA GANDHI and his wife are of the same age (71) and they belong to that period in India's social history that is associated with child marriages, purdah, and a rigid caste system.

Gandhi was betrothed twice before he married Kasturbai, and even then their marriage was solemnised at the tender age of 13, just when she was stepping out of childhood and he was very much a boy. It was a great adventure, but Gandhi took his duties as a husband very seriously. His sense of fidelity was very strong, and this tended rather to make him jealous and suspicious, and this was most irksome for his wife, who was a girl of spirit and personality. He wanted to draw her into everything that he did, but this entailed the tedious task of educating her, for she was illiterate.

Kasturbai did not take kindly to these lessons, and they were not successful. This would make him irritable and more inclined to impose his will upon her.

Very Much in Love

But the more restraints he imposed upon her the greater liberties she took to show her independence of spirit. It was all very innocent, and rose out of an almost aggressive desire on Gandhi's part to make her the ideal wife. Also he was very much in love with her.

During all those tedious and troublesome days, when the spirit of Gandhi was undergoing a metamorphosis, to be reborn again as the man is to-day, she gave him all the love and support that his heart could desire. Their family life was very happy, even while Gandhi



KASTURBAI GANDHI
... far removed from publicity

was labouring to make the cause of the Indians in South Africa his own.

But in the moment that Gandhi found himself, it was then that Kasturbai lost him. Let it not be supposed that his great love for her forsook him. On the other hand, it found greater expression in the vast well of love that was born in his heart for his countrymen.

It is not difficult to picture her indignation when public doubts have been cast on her husband's morality by enemies who found in this a novel mode of attack. In his own humble way he has answered these accusations, and paid her the greatest tribute that any wife can desire: "I took the vow of brahma-charya (asceticism) in 1906, and

that for the sake of better dedication to the service of the country. . . . My wife became a free woman, free from my authority as her lord and master. . . . No other woman has any attraction for me in the same sense that my wife had. I was too loyal to her as a husband and too loyal to the vow I had taken before my mother to be a slave to any other woman."

Through the hectic days of Gandhi's return from South Africa and his appearance at the helm of Indian affairs, she has been actively connected with his work.

Her Trust Never Faltered

It was his cause, and therefore hers. It is difficult to imagine the state of her mind whenever her husband undertook his fasts. After all, she was a woman, whose entire life was centred round him, yet, without a word of complaint, she awaited her fate at his hands, for all his fasts were voluntary.

There was no reproach from her; she gave him unselfish understanding, even while her own heart was nigh to breaking. Even old age did not find her faltering, and during the Rajkot trouble she was among the first to volunteer for passive resistance.

Nearly 60 long years, punctuated by "memory stones," has Kasturbai Gandhi spent in the sublimation of self. She is now a frail old lady, who is as simple as she has ever been, with a charming courtesy of spirit.

Ostentation and outward show have no part in her life. She is as far removed from the whirl of publicity as an ascetic in the Himalayas. Yet it swirls round her husband, and then smilingly she withdraws out of its reach.