



HOW TO KEEP FIT

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Nyal Figsen
 FOR CONSTIPATION

IN A CHINA SHOP

She Sticks The Pieces Together Again

IT didn't exactly come apart in my hands. Actually, I banged it quite hard against something, and the handle, naturally enough, fell off. Fortunately, I had seen this little notice "China Repairs" every day as I passed it in the lift, and next day found me standing in a little lobby with pot plants on one side and little stacks of mended china on the other.

I called for my cup next day. This time I got as far as the inner room. An interesting room—a curious mixture of studio and work place. A business-like bench littered with paints and mechanical tools of the trade, fragments of china, and pots of cement. Elbowing it a piano, with music open at a Chopin waltz. A settee with a half-finished tapestry waiting upon it. And everywhere quaint pieces of china and bowls of flowers.

She handed me my cup. "I've had to rivet it," she explained. The rivet had

been gilded, and was almost unnoticeable in the gold line of the handle.

"Sometimes I Could Scream"

"As good as new," I said. "Was it a natural aptitude that made you take up china mending?"

"No, I suppose it was just luck," she replied. "Until about ten years ago I was a music teacher. Then the depression came, and naturally people couldn't afford to have their children taught music. And just at this time a friend of mine who had been doing china repairs decided she needed a change, so she taught me all she knew and then I took over her practice. And like Johnny Walker I've been going strong ever since."

"And do you find it interesting work?" "That depends. Sometimes it's such tedious and finicky work that I could scream. But I suppose it is interesting. It's like Doctor's work in a way. A doctor may have to set several broken legs in a day, but no leg is ever broken in exactly the same way. The same is true of mending broken china. No matter how many broken handles you have to fix in the same day they're all slightly different."

All Those Little Bits

"I hope you don't have to mend a whole series of broken dinner plates and soup tureens. Don't you get some interesting things?"

"Oh, yes!" Her voice was enthusiastic. "Look at this." It was a five-branched Dresden candelabra, the middle column hopelessly shattered. "What a shame!" I said.

"Oh, no! It should be all right in the end. But it takes so much time and I have to put it aside for other things. See? This is what it looked like."

She poised a piece of the central column in its place and began to fit in the larger pieces.

"But all those tiny chips!" I remonstrated.

"I'll probably be able to fit in most of them. And where I can't I fill in with cement and continue the pattern or the gilding over them. But I always ask people to send me all the sweepings. And then I use what I can."

She put the candelabra affectionately back on the top shelf. I had a feeling that perhaps she was purposely delaying its final recovery and despatch.

The Old And New

"You don't see work like that nowadays," she sighed. "There is so much forethought and grace in old china that you don't get in modern work. In one way I believe in simplicity of line and colour—and I think it's logically right to get a maximum effect with a minimum of effort. But all the same I can't help feeling much more affectionate about the older, more elaborate work. The craftsman who spent whole days making a single rose of that candelabra (and how many would there be altogether?) must have felt it was worth while."

"Do you like some of the modern work?"

"Yes, I like Susie Cooper, more so now that she has abandoned the stark

Can Sound Break Crystal?

THE china-mender interviewed on this page was asked about the familiar theory that a piece of crystal would shatter if a note was struck coinciding in pitch with the ring of the vessel itself.

"Funny you should ask that," she said. "Last autumn a woman brought in to be mended a large crystal vase. It had been standing full of autumn leaves on the piano. The radio was on—a violin solo I think she said, and she heard a loud 'ping'. The vase had cracked in several places. Afterwards she told me that she had put glycerine in the water and she wondered if this had had anything to do with it."

"Once I had mended a crystal vase by cementing in a portion of the lip. I had my back turned to it—it was standing on a table—when I heard two sharp little rings. I looked round and found the vase cracked in two places. The fine layer of cement had been just sufficient to throw the vase off balance, and it had cracked in an attempt to right itself."

modernism of her early work. And of course her sense of line is superb. And I'm rather enthusiastic about Clarence Cliff's work. I like her unbalanced balance, if you see what I mean."

She took down a drawing folio and showed me a design of Clarence Cliff's which she had copied into it—two trees which illustrated her theory.

Orange And Purple

"I suppose I'm really cosmopolitan in my taste. Yes, I like some Chinese work. And here's a rather interesting thing. India, I suppose."

She showed me a large plate in a rough kind of pottery. The design was mainly a dull orange on the greyish ground, and round the plate stood trees of dull purple, evidently made by the impress of the heel of the palm. Orange and purple. Yet the whole result was strangely pleasing.

"I suppose it's because I have more to do with old china that I like it so much better," she said. "But look at this. You never get anything like that nowadays."

It was an antique cup lined with gold. The outside was dull black with a curious velvety texture. There was a small design of a chariot and horses.

She turned it over. There were two rivets under the base, scarcely noticeable from the inside. "It will still be usable," she said.

I imagined, however, that its use had long been restricted to occupying the place of honour in a china cabinet.

"Cloisonné." An intricate little vase of mosaic work with unfortunately a piece of the lip missing. "That's my

(Continued on next page)

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