

# A YEAR ON A SHOESTRING

MANY listeners will remember Catherine Gilbert, who described for the *Women's Hour* the birth of Susan, her first-born. In six new talks called *The Shoestring Year*, she tells lightheartedly of the difficulties of that year when Susan was born. These talks were due to start from 1XN this week (April 17), and next begin from 2XN on May 1, and 2XP on May 8. They will follow on the other X stations and later from the ZBs and ZAs.

When the pregnant Catherine left work, she and her medical student husband Dick had £15 in the bank. A regular income was still 15 months away, and their house was mortgaged. Their assets were a determination not to raise a second mortgage, and an immense capacity for hard work. In her first talk, "We Unbalance the Budget," Catherine tells how they came to buy the house, and how they managed to furnish it on next to nothing. By the time they were finished, she could exclaim thankfully, "Bathrooms are wonderful; they come complete—they aren't meant to be furnished."

The second talk shows how they made the money, from Dick's vacation projects with other medical students and her articles, to see them through that year. The "Smell of an Oily Rag," the third talk, is about the spending of that money. The mortgage, electricity, rates, the unexpected telephone came to about £210 that year, and they used another £140 to live. The secret of living on almost nothing, according to Catherine, seems to be that "you doggedly and persistently don't buy anything you can conceivably scrape along without. It isn't very pleasant, but it works. If you know it's not a permanent state you can put up with almost anything."

Housekeeping expenses had to be kept to a minimum, but meals were one item which could not be too drastically cut. And men do not easily swallow something cheap and nasty in the interests of economy. In "Ways and Means" she details her housekeeping economies, which were to some extent helped by the fact that they were able to grow most of their own vegetables. In "Real Estate" Catherine talks about the garden—the task of breaking it in and the worry of keeping out the cows from the near-by farms.

Her last talk deals with the social aspects of economy: their entertainment, and friends and their kindness. For Catherine and Dick did have fun in their shoestring year, even with the bad moments in between. Outside excursions were few, but all the more pleasant for that, and quiet evenings at home were enjoyed. They were able to entertain a few friends to economy dinners, which did not spoil the company. After it all Catherine says: "There is a certain queer pleasure in seeing how little you can manage on, and a terrible lot in the slow acquisition of the things you want."

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