

Artist Who Conquered Her Illness And Went On With Her Work

WHAT would you do if, after an operation which left one arm powerless, the doctors said that you would have to resign yourself to having the use of one arm only for the rest of your life?

Coming from the lips of doctors the average patient would naturally believe the depressing news. There is, however, someone in Wellington who refused to believe the doctors' words and had a bet with one of them that she would regain the use of her left arm.

"I just couldn't believe that I was meant to be hindered in my work," said Mrs. M. E. Pitt to a "Radio Record" representative last week. Mrs. Pitt is a well-known Wellington artist who specialises in hand-painted china. "As I was determined to win the bet, I started on a little 'mind over matter' treatment which, for many cases, is the finest thing in the world," continued Mrs. Pitt. "While in hospital I massaged my left hand and arm with my right one, until I gradually felt it waking up. You cannot imagine the thrill of feeling the first throbs of life and then the twitching of the fingers. Nearly all day long I kept opening and shutting my powerless hand with the other one, until it could move of its own accord. Then I began to raise my arm. I was determined to raise it above my shoulder before long. So the destination of my left hand, while in bed, was the top of the bed rail. Each day I came a little nearer to it, being careful, though, not to strain myself. When I returned home from hospital and was walking about again, I used the towel rack for my exercises every morning before I had my bath. As the exercise and massage began to bring the life creeping back into my arm, I regained the use of the hand. That was only about 18 months ago, and since then I have driven a car and continued with my art work—and I won my bet!" laughed Mrs. Pitt. "The doctors were amazed, and I told them that apart from my determination to get better, a cat had been the means of helping me. I saw one stretching when awaking one morning, and I remembered that animals and some humans do this simple exercise, so I decided to experiment." (Incidentally, isn't it Miriam Hopkins, the film star, who declares that this is her favourite exercise and her best beauty hint?)

"If more people took up hobbies there would be fewer doctors' bills," said Mrs. Pitt. "It was the thought of my art that was my great concern. I felt that the best years of my life and art were ahead of me. My son and daughter are grown up and away from home, so I have plenty of time to devote to my work. I am afraid that if I had no hobby, and without my children, I would be lost."



Mrs. M. Pitt, of Island Bay, Wellington, who has executed many beautiful pieces of hand-painted china. The story of how Mrs. Pitt overcame a serious disability is told on this page.

This touches upon a subject which has recently been coming in for a great deal of publicity in England—the problem of women having to face life when the children leave home. Lesley Storm, the well-known novelist, said that she was advised to keep something of herself always to herself, which is never more necessary than in the home. Mrs. Pitt had her art,—her hobby—to fall back upon, keeping her life brim full of interest and happiness. Mrs. Pitt mentioned that one Wellington woman recently came to her to take lessons in craft work, just to get away from the eternal round of bridge, which she felt was eating up her life.

In the china cabinet in Mrs. Pitt's sitting-room are shelves packed with exquisite examples of her work, perhaps the most beautiful being her hand-painted lustre china. When applying the colours to this china they are invisible. The paints look like brown treacle, and are numbered. This is like working in the dark, and is the most difficult of all china painting. The colour is brought out by the furnace when it is being fired. The oven and furnace used by this skilful artist is heated by gas. Visible colours are used for ordinary hand-painted china and some of her most artistic examples of these are her native flower designs. The real gold on china, when applied, is a chocolate-coloured paste, and when it comes from the oven it is a dull gold. It is then polished by scouring with glass brushes. The finest piece of china is a satsuma bon-bon bowl with applied enamel and gold. Mrs. Pitt imports satsuma ware from Japan to decorate and also a small quantity of unpainted, present century Dresden.

Mrs. Pitt is always experimenting. That is the charm of her work, which is so original and interesting. As soon as one enters the front door and notes the French paintings on tapestry, and the massive chests of brass and leather one knows that it is a home stamped with delightful individuality. Mrs. Pitt has covered some of her chairs with saddle-leather woven and tooled into fine designs. A Maori table with brass top and wooden legs, portraits, still-life studies, pewter work and jewellery—all are the finished expressions of a talented artist who has in her studio, overlooking her flower garden, piles of raw materials stacked to the ceiling, which are to her the symbols of many long and happy hours to come.