

and every secret fibre of his soul, perceptibly stiffened. And then Omicron answered, curtly, rebuttingly, reprovably, snappishly, finishingly:

"I don't know."

And took up his newspaper, whose fragile crackling wall defended him from attack every bit as well as a screen of twelve-inch armour-plating.

The subject was dropped.

It had endured about ten seconds. But those ten seconds marked an epoch in Omicron's career as a husband—and he knew it not. He knew it not, but the whole of his conjugal future had hung evenly in the balance during those ten seconds, and then slid slightly but definitely—to the wrong side.

Of course, there was more in the affair than appeared on the surface. At dinner the otherwise excellent leg of mutton had proved on cutting to be most noticeably underdone. Now, it is a monstrous shame that first-class mutton should be wasted through inefficient cookery; with third-class mutton the crime might have been deemed less awful. Moreover, four days previously another excellent dish had been rendered unfit for masculine consumption by pre-