

The Mother and the High Cost of Living

Written specially for The Western Home Monthly by Sarah Cantwell Smith, B.A.M.A.

IN his speech before the Chicago Association of Commerce, Secretary of Agriculture, Meredith says: "If I were to refer at all to the high cost of living, I would say it is a mutual problem for all of us. It is the farmer's problem; it is the laborer's problem; and it is the business man's problem; and we must all work together mutually—in meeting this situation."

With even greater truth he might have said that even more than anyone else, it is the problem of the women in the home, the mother's problem. She is the one that is hit even harder than her husband, and it is upon her there is laid the burden of making one dollar do—not the work of two as our grandmothers used to do—but far more than the work of five. In the matter of clothes, of help or of vacation, she is the one who bears the brunt, and she bears it too, when her unmarried sister in the workaday world is earning more than ever before. We have all smiled at the story of the bank manager, who with his wife, went out to dine, and after dinner the servant of the house passed through the hall—dressed in her furs and silk—as he could not afford to dress his wife. Humorous as the situation appears, there it is, and it must be faced by the great majority of the mothers of the land; faced too, resolutely and with good cheer, so that as the years go by there will be found in her face the gentle strength and patience of those whose lives have been spent in home making, without the hardness which is too often found in the faces of those whose love is not great enough to soften their toil.

If one goes into the situation blindly she is far too apt to find that nothing whatever is left for herself and her personal needs either of money or strength, so that the budget of yearly expenses, allowing so much for rent, for clothes, for food, and all the other items of family expense is by far the sanest and wisest plan.

But that part settled, even then if we are to adequately cope with the situation, we must have the courage of our convictions and not pay the highest prices just because others are paying them, or because some supercilious clerk is predisposed to look at one in seeming amazement or disdain if she queries the value of the thing at the price asked. For surely to-day prices are no criterion of the value of the thing in itself, scarcely any two stores ask the same price for the same article, so why pay in one store ten dollars for a pair of shoes which can be bought two doors further down for eight? Or ninety-five cents for a certain drug, which can be purchased at the chain stores for sixty-six? Wanting not long since a certain electric fixture for a bedroom I priced it in three different stores in various parts of the city. One asked eighteen dollars and fifty cents, and the clerk assured me that prices were going up that very week. The second on the same street, not more than a block away, demanded fifteen. But the third, not on one of the chief business streets asked ten dollars and a half, so I had the fixture I desired and saved eight dollars by a little looking about.

Even the large department stores do not have the same prices for identical articles. This is true both in manufactured goods and groceries. I found the other day at one or two large department stores a difference of twenty cents a pound on a certain brand of coffee, (we are fond of it in our home), two cents a tin on milk, ten cents a pair on children's garters and so on. Not inferior grades but the identical articles in each case. That saving is worth more to us as financial managers of our homes than the added price is to the other store that is selling them, so these things are not petty but worthy of our best attention.

Another way to be able to take advantage of differences in price is not to be persuaded to run bills at other

butcher or grocer and you benefit here too, in that you pay only for what you get, not that they mean to be dishonest but the best of us are not infallible and twice within the last six months bills have been sent me for things I never purchased, and just last week a bill of several dollars that I paid for at the door and only an invariable rule of paying for everything as it is received saved me from paying these bills. If it is only our memory against what they have down in black and white then they win, even if only once we have found it more convenient to charge a bill. Moreover, if one runs accounts there is far less likelihood of watching varying prices. And why buy lettuce for twenty-five cents per head when further up it is only eighteen, while more than likely the first store has carrots two bunches for fifteen while the second is at least ten straight. Petty as these things seem they are true and if we are to give our families the very best and at the same time keep within bounds in the food allowance we will have to give them our best attention. One is serving just as great a delicacy to set upon their table spring lamb at forty-eight cents a pound as to serve it at sixty, and those were the two prices I noted in the paper to-day.

The problem of clothes is a great one for to be fittingly and becomingly dressed is an anchor of the soul to any woman and one of the best safeguards of her charm which charm is the greatest asset in her family life, both to her husband and to her children. I have no doubt that even Eve chose the brightest and most beautiful leaves for her adornment and that within a couple of hours of her creation she had Adam searching round for a pool where she could see to do her hair. Did Adam like her the less for her vanities? Not he, and all men follow Adam in that respect.

Here one must remember more than anywhere else that cheapness doesn't pay, but by cheapness I mean that of the article itself and not of the price asked and that good taste and distinction in dress is not primarily a matter of expense. If one has used foresight in purchasing, scarcely any article of one's wardrobe needs to be purchased on the spur of the moment and by planning the wise mother can see that she gets full face value for her money both for herself and her children.

A friend of mine needed badly last fall a coat, and coats as you know were very high so that it only pays to get one that would give several seasons of service. After much searching she found just what she desired, a plain dignified coat full satin lined, but the price was exorbitant and if she took it she must use in addition the money she wanted for a frock, so reluctantly she passed it by and decided to wait a bit longer. But that very evening she read in the paper that the shop, a very exclusive one, was selling every coat up to ninety-five dollars for fifty-seven-fifty, so she returned the next day, took home the very coat she had chosen and was twenty-five dollars to the good with no one the wiser but herself, her friends and the clerk who had fitted her. Whether you are paying ten or a hundred dollars the principle is the same and see that you get the very best value for your money. Remember too that it is not a matter of expense but of good taste and see that hat, gloves and hose match as nearly as possible and that the rest of one's costume does not clash.

If you make the children's clothes yourself the problem is much simplified if all are made on one model. For example, the middie style suits practically every boy from three to eight, and if made with sleeves which have a plain cuff to turn back, so as to lengthen or shorten it as desired they will serve for two or three summers, or for boys of different ages and if made in white will look well until the final wearing. Colors are seldom satisfactory in other



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