



What Shall We Give the Bride?

By MARGARET LAING FAIRBAIRN

PERHAPS you have been asked to Miss Priscilla Pink Primrose's wedding, "just like me"—that's the way that nursery dialogue goes, isn't it? where the grand climax is reached when one says, "I saw a donkey," and the other says, "Just like me," and perhaps you have been wondering what on earth you can give her, "Just like me."

It is quite a problem, I grant you, especially at this time of the year, when so many of one's friends are June brides. One's choice is hampered by very many considerations. Firstly, there is the one of expense. That is not in the least complex, but it is quite formidable. Secondly, you have to think of what will suit the bride's taste and future circumstances. For instance, she might dote on a Russian samovar or a grand piano, but as she is going to live in a tiny house on the outposts of civilization, and as the transportation over the last fifty miles has to be in wagons, the useless bit of brass would be a bit of foolishness and the piano an impossibility.

Thirdly (this sounds like a sermon, but don't be alarmed!), it seems to me there should be something of yourself about every gift. Now, the little bride may admire a certain kind and style of ornament, which you know violates every canon of decorative art, hence it would really be immoral of you to bestow any of it on an unsuspecting mortal who may one day arrive at your advanced stage of aesthetic culture, even if she would like it at the time.

There it goes, you see. The difficulties increase at every step. It may relieve you a bit to have your mixed perplexity analyzed and have a grain or two of advice thrown in.

Perhaps it would help you if I were to tell you a few of the presents Priscilla has already received; at least it would eliminate some from the list you may be contemplating. I called the other afternoon and the little lady took me into the room where they were all set out.

There were times as we went over the gifts when Priscilla's fever was expressionless. I knew what that meant. Loyal little soul that she is, she was not going to let me see how her gorge rose at the sight of some of them! At such times she praised the generosity of the giver, and passed over the gift without saying much. It must be a great strain on the coming housekeeper with her vision of a faultless house and everything in the best taste, to have to be thankful for things which she abhors.

In the collection there was an elaborate tea kettle with spirit lamp that was as clumsy and ugly as it must have been costly. I could guess just how it had been bought. Mrs. Auto Mobile is fond of Priscilla, and decided at once when she knew of the wedding, to spend a certain amount on the gift. She went to Ruby Hall, looked at the kettles, and decided on the first one that was about the right price. She has seemingly no aesthetic sense, so the combination of three different metals did not offend her, nor the iron stand that takes up as much space in the room as an arm chair; instead of being a snug little affair for the table, she was satisfied that the job of selection was over, and never gave a thought to the bride's point of view. Heigh ho! To think of all that waste of good money!

There is just one gleam of hope, though. Mrs. Auto Mobile may think to say to the bride—she is a kind-hearted woman when she is not too pre-occupied with her own affairs to take in an idea—"Now, my dear, if there is anything else at Ruby Hall you would like better, don't hesitate to change this. I shan't mind it in the least, and neither of us believes in luck, do we?" That would be a way out.

A few other things that are going to give the bride a good many bad half hours, are a gaudy table lamp for electric light (if the club that gave it had only consulted me I would have suggested an umbrella as at least offering a safe choice); a huge mission chair from her great-aunt, who is vastly pleased with the bulk of her gift and its cheapness (it was a bargain); a pair of pictures which are poor reproductions

of great pictures cheaply framed, and a gilt chair, suitable for a Louis XV. drawing-room, but not the simple living room Priscilla plans.

Another gift with a question mark after it is a fine Eastern rug, from her brother Tom. He goes to Europe once a year for his firm and has an unlimited complacent confidence in his own taste, so this is his choice. He is so perfectly satisfied with his selection that I am sure tender-hearted Priscilla will never hint that the pattern is grotesque and the colors, beautiful as they are in themselves, will be quite out of harmony with the scheme she has settled on. It is about the ugliest Bokhara I ever saw.

This makes me think of a story of Anstey's, I cannot recall its name, in which a bride-elect (it is in England, of course), returns from a visit to find that her fiancé had planned a surprise for her. He, with his sister's help, has furnished the pretty little house they had taken. Every last thing was impossible, for the young man's family were not of the enlightened in things of art. Oil-cloth masqueraded as inlaid wood, figured paper as stained glass, the paintings were bargains and the furniture after the worst mongrel design of modern times.

The girl was too kind-hearted to dampen her lover's boyish delight in his own taste and ingenuity, but she pined away in secret over the prospect of life in this nightmare, and only a fire which burned the whole house and its contents saved her from either an early grave or a broken engagement, I forget which.

But to come back to Priscilla. You may think my criticisms are in bad taste, but remember I am telling you this in confidence, and feel I can be frank.

The thing that seemed to be the matter with so many things was that people were trying to trick you into believing the present cost more than it did, and the giver had evidently been thinking almost altogether about himself—oftenest the offender was "herself"—and very little about the person to whom he was giving. He was either too lazy or too selfish or too stingy, or too self-opinionated to find out the bride's taste.

But you must not think all these wedding gifts were misfits. Dear no! There was the cabinet of silver given by the groom's family and the dinner set by the only rich relative Priscilla has, who let her make her own choice. There was the row of jam pots filled with amber-colored grape fruit marmalade that Mrs. Younghusband made. She has two babies and tiny flat to look after, and no maid, and a small income. She said, for her part she hated fancy things that were no use, and only cluttered up the house, so she thought she was safe in giving something that wouldn't be in the way. She was all right.

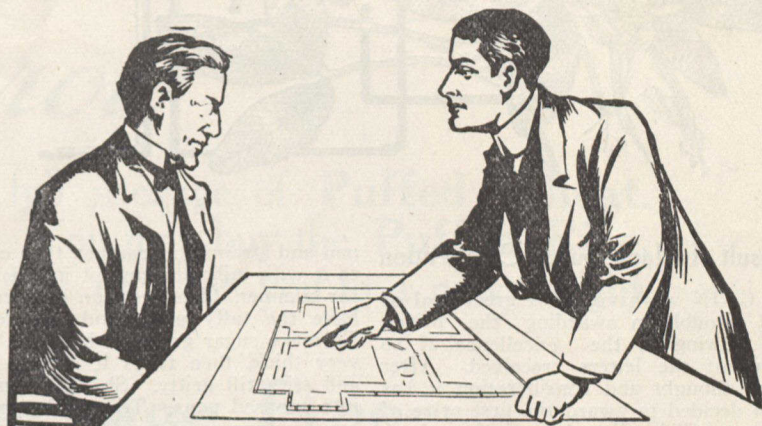
Then there was the thoughtful aunt, who, remembering her own tired arms after wielding the broom, sent Priscilla a vacuum cleaner.

But the thing Priscilla made the most fuss over was a big print kitchen apron. The old lady who gave it said it was made after a pattern which the Duchess of No Castle gave her when she was a housemaid in the Old Country, and she is firmly convinced it has for that reason special virtue. Every stitch of it was sewed with such delight that it was for Priscilla, and the color (it has blue sprigs) was chosen because John said once it suited her. The old lady has the early Victorian idea that a wife should try and find favor in the eyes of her lord. "It is the usefulness of all my presents," the bride-elect tells her old friend.

On the principle of "Biddy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady" having much in common, all new brides must feel much the same delightful thrill concerning their new possessions, and also are apt to have occasionally the same feeling of surfeit whether in the case of Lady Melinda, the daughter of a thousand earls, to whom royal princesses and duchesses present strings of pearls, diamond tiaras and wonderful ruby and emerald jewels, or only plain Mary

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