

THE GOOD HOUSEKEEPER

RUNNING THE HOME ON A BUSINESS PLAN

How I Made My Income Meet My Needs

I HAVE just spent a very busy afternoon—talking! My sister-in-law and her two-year-old son came to tea, which we drank to the accompaniment of a most earnest discussion of household management. My kiddies were naturally overjoyed to see their cousin, and so the three little people, as good as gold, played blocks on the rug at our feet.

"Let's build flats," said Edith, my eldest hopeful. "I think our flat is just lovely since it has been all fixed up new, don't you?" To which the baby gurgled an enthusiastic assent.

"Cute little mites," said Marion to me; "but really, dear, those children show a great deal of discriminating appreciation when they praise this flat. Everything is so attractive and pretty. I don't know how you do it unless you have a magic Aladdin's lamp, hidden away, or a rich relative at your disposal."

"There ain't no sech animal!" I answered, laughing.

"There is some secret, and you must tell me! Running a home on an income such as yours and mine isn't exactly what I should call a soft snap. You have one more little mouth to feed than I have, too."

And so we talked shop and immensely enjoyed our discussion of the ways and means of housekeeping and the ever increasing problem of the high cost of living, which we were each facing in our own way, with more or less success. I brought out my budget and ledger and Marion and I pored over the figures they contained with as vital an interest as if we were directors at the annual meeting of a corporation in which we had invested large sums of money.

"I still don't see how you do it!" Marion exclaimed. "I keep accounts, but I can never bring my expenses down to such low figures as you have here."

First Comes Waste Elimination

"How do I do it?" I replied. "By the elimination of waste and a firm determination to get good value for every cent I spend as well as every dollar. Now take rent, for example. The first question that arose when I started my business-like housekeeping was whether to take a flat out in the suburbs for \$12 and add \$2 for car fare a month, such as we are doing now, or look for a house at \$14 near Will's office in the heart of the city, where no car fares would be necessary. I found in one day's investigation that the only accommodation at \$14 in the city was a dingy, dirty tenement in the foreign quarter, with bad air, no daylight, gas instead of electric light, and the dirt of ages on the floors and walls. Out here we have an endless car ride, it is true, but it only costs one ticket, no matter how far you go, and Will might as well read the paper on the cars as any other time. At any rate, he doesn't seem to mind it. The air is so good for the children out here that we really feel that we are getting value for every cent of our \$14 spent in this way."

"How would your kiddies like to have their little cousin as a neighbour?" said Marion. "When Boy and I were coming out to see you this afternoon, we thought we should never get here, but now that we have actually arrived, we are charmed with everything, aren't we, Son? Twelve dollars seems awfully low for rent. I always figure on about \$18 at least."

"So did I at first, but I found it was better to leave a little extra for house-furnishing, in order to provide myself with good cupboard accommodation and labour saving devices in order to eliminate waste in both work and materials. For example, if you haven't a cold cupboard for food and preserves, a dry place for groceries, and an airtight box for bread, you will lose more money in waste than the whole outlay for these necessities amounts to. I calculate that every dollar expended in home comforts and conveniences brings in a good rate of interest. Come with me and I shall show you a few of my little stunts, many of which cost practically nothing. Everything is designed to save something, for whether it is labour, time or materials, it is money in the end."

Little Economies That Count

"You wouldn't believe it, but I spent next to nothing on all these things. Those cushions, for instance, are entirely home-made, even to their very insides! I set the kiddies to work to clip up an old silk dress

and a curtain, and in this way I have a soft, light stuffing that never lumps. All the covers are washable, you see, and bear a remarkable resemblance to the family's last summer wardrobe and the curtains in our last flat! I really enjoyed making those pillows, as I had to use so much ingenuity!"

"The furniture coverings I do consider a triumph. I always dislike that cheap furniture we bought when we were married, and when it got soiled, I positively hated it. When we painted the woodwork white, it looked worse than ever. I priced chintzes, but any designs I liked were at least 50 cents a yard—a hopeless proposition for yours truly. As I was going out of a shop I passed the gingham counter and stopped to price some goods for the children's summer dresses. The saleswoman showed me this very material in green and white stripes at only 15 cents a yard. And then it was that I had the inspiration. Why not make my furniture covers out of this instead of the expensive chintzes! I have forgotten just how much the bill came to—somewhere about five dollars, I think, for the whole room. Don't you think they look smart the way I have boxed them with cords?"

"You are positively too ingenious for words," was Marion's delighted comment.

When Hubby Helps

"Lately Will and I have had a regular craze for 'built in' furniture. Of course, it would not be worth while if we had not a fairly long lease of the flat, but under the present circumstances we feel that the labour and outlay are justified. There was hardly a shelf or cupboard in the place when we came—you don't get everything you want in a cheap flat!—but now we have them in every room and to suit every purpose, whether it be for books, linen, clothes, medicines, or stores generally. When one has plenty of cupboard space, it is six times as easy to keep the house in order. This window seat, which I have covered with a chintz cushion, is really a dress box in which I keep all our best clothes."

"I should have thought it would have paid you better to have bought such furniture at a shop."

"Well, no! You see we could use a cheap wood and paint it white to match the woodwork of the room. The results are more satisfactory, too, for this style of furniture is easier to keep clean, takes far less room, and is more durable."

"And just as pretty," added Marion.

"I want you to see what Will made me for Christmas. It is simply a little medicine cupboard, with the door dropping down instead of opening at the side. He has hung it at a convenient height so that I can jot down my expenditures as they occur, keep my laundry list, bread and milk tickets, my laundry bill, receipts, and so handy, and file my bills, receipts, and so forth. I do believe I use it more than my writing desk in the sitting room. Hanging beside it is my loose-leaf cook book, in which I paste hints and recipes which I have cut out of papers and magazines, all arranged alphabetically. Some of them are well worth trying."

"There is something I want to show you especially. Here it is! I cut this out of a housekeeping magazine. It is called an ice-less refrigerator, and I mean to try it next summer, as it only costs \$1.23, which is considerably less than 10 cents a day for ice during the hot months."

"It says: 'Place a large pan of water on the floor and in it stand a wooden framework of shelves suitable to lay your provisions on. A smaller pan is set on the top, also filled with water. A heavy covering of coarse cotton is wrapped closely around the whole structure, with the ends hanging down into the pan of water at the bottom and touching the water at the top. By capillary attraction the cloth will keep wringing wet as long as the pans are kept full of cold water, thus lowering the temperature about 35° or 40° on a hot day. This is an excellent plan to keep butter, milk and meat.'"

"That sounds good to me," said Marion. "You could have it in addition to your ordinary refrigerator and only buy ice in the very hot weather. I think I shall try it too, if you don't mind passing the idea on!"

"Mind! I should say I should be delighted! What do you think of these dusters made from flour and sugar bags? All my groceries I keep in old cans and bottles which I have labelled so that I can see them easily, and my jelly and pickles are put away in odd jars with paraffin covers. My flower pots all over the flat are nothing more than tomato cans with holes punched

in the bottoms and glorified with a piece of crinkle paper. I am always needing more as I cut off slips and plant them. This is my paper cupboard, for I never throw away a newspaper. I find a hundred uses for them—wrapping up garbage, putting around the ice in summer and between the bedclothes in winter, covering the table when I am preparing fruits and vegetables, and even for tying up our winter clothes to keep out the moths. If they ever accumulate, I send for the scrap metal and paper man, and he buys them from me at 50 cents."

Saving Labour

"It seemed to me that I used to spend half my time washing and wiping dishes, and I felt as if I had a millstone round my neck three times a day. Come and see how I have fitted up my kitchen and banished labour by the help of science. First of all here is my dishwasher, which works in season and out of season like a charm. It cost me very little, for I had this pail anyway. This is neither more nor less than a wire office scrap basket, which fits inside the pail. I fill my pail with warm, soapy water and the basket with the dishes and cutlery already scraped. I then plunge the basket into the pail and revolve it from left to right and right to left, and work it up and down. A second rinsing in clear hot water, and I lay the dishes on this frame to drain. No further polishing is needed except for the cutlery, and I am ready to put the dishes away. Even here I have a short cut—Will's contribution in the shape of a service wagon just like the ones they use in bakeries or hospitals to carry things from one room to another. You see Will added these two lower shelves to this little table, put castors on the feet, and enamelled the whole affair white. Instead of carrying the dishes into the dining-room two at a time, I pack everything on to the wagon and wheel it all at one go. One trip to lay the table and one to clear it away! That's how I have time to plan new stunts and read for an hour or so every afternoon!"

"Do you know castors are a splendid invention? If you notice, I have them on every table, bed, and dresser all over the flat, as in this way I can move the furniture easily when I am sweeping, and thus produce far better results without the back-breaking labour I used to have."

"How do you keep everything looking as immaculate as you do?" said my guest. "You must houseclean three times a day, judging from the freshness of your home."

"Not quite! I am for reducing work to a minimum rather than speeding up to a maximum. The reason you think everything looks spotless is that I have so many washable things about. These rugs, curtains, quilts, and covers all go into the washtub periodically. Most of them I can wash myself, so it is only the rugs that need to go to the laundry. I can oil the floors every day or two with a mop, now that Will has varnished and shellacked them for me. The white furniture—painted by the firm of We, Us & Co.—and the woodwork I sponge over with water in which onions have been boiled, and in this way remove all the finger marks."

Cutting Down Fuel Costs

"No, I don't use papers for kindling! I don't need any. I don't let my fire go out. That is much too extravagant a practice as regards both fuel and labour. Which reminds me that I haven't told you any of my little methods for keeping down my gas bill to \$1.50 a month. I consider that \$9 for gas, light, coal, cleaning materials and laundry is quite an economical triumph. Want to see how I do it?"

"The most important item in the scheme for saving gas is my home-made fireless cooker, which cost me well under a dollar all told. Do you see how it is made? A tin lard pail, which I lined with two thicknesses of paper before packing, is used for the outside container of the cooker. A gallon oyster can in which three inches of packing are allowed on all sides and at the bottom makes the nest. A piece of asbestos is wrapped around the outside of the nest, and another piece put under the bottom to prevent the scorching of the packing when hot soap stones are used. Shredded newspaper, hay and excelsior are packed tightly around and on top of the nest with a circular piece of cardboard to make a neat finish. Will enamelled the two pails white to finish

it off. I always use an iron saucepan when I cook in this way, as it keeps the heat so much longer. There you have the real secret of my gas bill of \$1.50 a month. All soups and stews go into the fireless cooker, and the results are as satisfactory as if I had had the gas burning for hours. And not only that; I can put the supper on to cook at lunch time, go out for the whole afternoon, and come back at night to find it piping hot and ready to serve on the instant."

"Of course a fireless cooker won't do everything. I have to use a great deal of care in ordinary cooking on the stove, watching that no gas is allowed to escape or go on burning unnecessarily. When the food in the saucepan comes to a boil, I always lower the gas, for after it has reached the boiling point it cannot cook any faster. The only thing you can do with a high gas in this case is to scorch or toughen your food."

"Whenever I use a gas jet, whether it is on the top of the stove or for the oven, I see to it that I am using every available calory of heat. I always think twice before I go to the expense of heating the oven, and when I do, I not only roast my meat, but I arrange to have baked potatoes and a baked pudding, and very often some apples and biscuits for supper and breakfast. And note well, when I go to the work of making buns, I make enough to do for more than one meal. This little rule applies to the cooking of all foods that can be kept for a day or so without spoiling. After I have taken my dinner out of the oven, I turn off the gas and slip in some dry bread to be made into crumbs for cooking or rusks for soup. By the time the oven is cold, the bread is done without danger of burning."

"The same principle applies to the top of the stove as to the oven. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer permits it, I shall invest in a real double decker steamer, in which I can cook my whole dinner on one jet. Meanwhile I make every saucepan into a double boiler so that I do not waste the steam. A lard pail is a wonder in this respect. I have punched holes in the bottom of this one so that I can use it as a steamer over the teakettle. The cover makes a very convenient baking pan, as it fits easily into a corner of a crowded oven."

"Do you find the flat warm enough? I am afraid that you and Boy may be chilly, as we never keep the rooms over 65 degrees. I dress the children warmly, and I find that they are much healthier than at 70 degrees. I always keep a shallow pan of water simmering on the back of the Quebec heater to make the air as moist as possible. You think \$4.50 a month is low for coal in this climate? Perhaps it is, but I am a very careful stoker. I sift the ashes every morning and pick the clinkers out of the good cinders that are left before throwing them on the fire. Not even cinders go to waste in this house!"

Laundry Down to a Science

"Don't you hate doing laundry work?" said Marion.

"Well, I do and I don't. I have that department down to a pretty fine point, so that it really does not worry me very much. My big idea is to reduce the work as much as possible, and hence the crepe underclothes you see hung out on the line. No starching and no ironing are required. All you have to do is fold them up and put them away. When I am ironing I usually pin a piece of paper to the garments that need mending so that I have no further sorting to do."

"Lately I have been using paper for all sorts of purposes. This roll of tissue paper is for cleaning or for drying your hands, and when we are alone, the children and I always use Japanese serviettes to save washing the linen ones. Barring accidents, I make our big tablecloths last for a record length of time by using plain linen strips placed side by side on the table for breakfast and lunch. I cannot manage to do up the tablecloths myself, so I have to send them to the laundry, but my two strips do not give me any trouble to wash and iron at all. I always use cheesecloth for wet cleaning rags, and they cost so little that I can afford to throw them away if they are very dirty."

"I always wash my own curtains, as it is not a very hard task when you have a stretcher. My stretcher is only an amateur affair which Will made, but it does splendidly. He bored a row of holes at each end of these four pieces of soft wood scantling, so that I can adjust them with pegs to fit the different sized curtains. I fasten the curtains down with thumb tacks which I keep from year to year for the purpose."

(Next month "How I Keep Up with the Rising Costs of Food.")