

"Woman and Her Ways," January 10, 1907

Woman and Her Ways

By Estelline Bennett

Leisure--A Lost Art

The so-called leisure classes lead as hurried and strenuous an existence as people who work ten hours a day for a mere existence, and the women of the rich who need take no thought for the morrow, what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed, have nevertheless fallen into the same rush and hurry as the men who are fighting for fortunes and fame. Everyone knows the obligations and occupations of the fashionable woman. She must be charming, and to keep her youth and beauty takes time. She must give hours to her hair dresser, her masseur, her manicurist, she must take her daily exercise. Her dressmaker takes much of her time, and when all this is done, she has only commenced. She has her luncheons, teas, receptions, charity fetes, dinners, balls, and theater parties, and to accomplish all these she must always rush. The automobile, telephone, electricity, all practical modern things which have the advantage of moving quickly, of gaining time, seem to push and hurry modern life into a round of perpetual motion. It is characteristic of modern life. If a woman finds a little time between times for leisure, she does not take it to rest. She does not take a siesta on her couch or read a restful book, she plays bridge. And when one plays bridge, it is good by [sic] to pleasant comradeship, interesting thoughts, or intelligent conversation. There is only the table and the cards. They make work of their play. And that is the resume of modern life. Society women not only endure it, but they seem to love it. When summer comes and one would naturally expect them to take a little much needed rest, the majority of them betake themselves to watering places or mountain resorts where they find the life of the city reproduced.

And yet, when all is said and done, life is not so different, nor women so different, from one century to the next. Women simply progress with the age, they keep abreast of the times. They do more to-day than they did in Colonial times because it is possible to do more in a given time than in the days of our great-great-grandmothers. One can travel faster and farther in an automobile than in a pony chaise.

From the beginning of time, the dress and personal appearance of the fashionable woman have been her most assiduous need, her dominant occupation. Whether she dances the minuet gravely and slowly, romps through the two-step; whether she talks, as she did in Colonial days before conversation was a lost art, or whether she plays bridge for high stakes; whether she drives in a couch [sic] and four, or races in a 1907 model motor car; for whatever she does, in whatever age or time, she dresses for the part, and it took as long to powder the hair and don a

stiff brocade as it does to have a marcel wave and get into a creation of chiffon cloth. Then, too, in the olden time, people dined earlier so that the day was shorter. And through it all, the lady of high degree dressed and flirted and made herself charming. If she had more leisure and more repose, it was because the time and the men of the time demanded it of her. If the woman of to-day is and strenuous, she is simply what the men of to-day would have her.

The Problem of a Home

To the women who work and who do not live at home the question of how to live is a never-ending problem. It is an open question. There seems no solution of it. The boarding house is not a solution. There never was a man, woman, or child who like to live in a boarding house. The hotel is not a solution. It gives more comfort than the boarding house, but it costs more and it lacks as well an atmosphere of permanency which is necessary to the making of a home. To live in some one's else family is worst of all. And the last resort is usually an apartment of one's own. Then the real trouble begins, and for the simple reason that no one person can be home maker and bread winner at the same time. That is what the woman tries to do when she sets up her own establishment, even though it be only a tiny apartment, while she is working for the wherewithal for her daily bread. So it comes back to the original statement. There is no solution of the problem. The woman who is a bread winner must either live in her own childhood's home or she must be homeless. The woman who goes deliberately out into the world to make a career for herself should consider this. If she is forced out of the home nest by grinding necessity, she can only make the best of things.

Now the Lady Cab Driver

All Paris is agitated over the fact that two women have recently taken to driving cabs. One of them was the wife of a cabby who taught her to drive, and after his death she decided that the simplest way of making a living was to continue his business. That was simple enough. The French woman of the working class frequently understands her husband's business well enough to carry it on alone, and although this was the first one to drive a cab, she did not therefore, make of herself a nine days' wonder. Newspapers commented on it as one more avenue of industry open to women, and speculated upon the possible advantages to be derived from the innovation. But following in the carriage tracks of the cab driver's wife, came a woman of the nobility, a woman with a title, who took out a license and mounted the box. Then Paris really began to talk. The new cab driver was disgracing the nobility of France. And all because she was trying to find a way to pay her bills and live honestly. For she needed the money she would collect from her fares. That was the pity of it. If a woman does not need money, she may do what she likes and people call it a fad. But if it is necessity, then it is disgrace. That is the Old World view, and it is a view which taints more or less, the New World as well. If a woman makes her living selling milk, she is "Old Milk Annie," or something like that. If she has no need of the dollars her model dairy brings her, she is a clever and ambitious woman who is not satisfied with the frivolous whirl of society.

And so with my lady of the cab. She has no money, no property, nothing but her empty French title, and so when she draws the reins over her cab horse instead of her neighbor's tandem, she

is disgracing the French nobility. It would have been considered no disgrace if she had continued to live in idleness and owe here modiste and coutouriere.