

HOW IT IS WITH US

BY ELSA SIMM

THE rabbit's long hind-legs make him a little absurd — until he has to run for his life. The German housewife's meticulous attention to her household was a little humorous — until now, when her intensive knowledge and skill are keeping her country's head above water.

All that we middle-class women in Germany had to do before the war was to sit on the box and guide our household carriages wisely. We had telephones with which to order our food and fuel, and one or two servants to take them in when they were delivered at the door. Of course, we were always trained to know how to do everything, but we also knew how to train others. And with the leisure which the smooth running of domestic matters gave us we went in for traveling, sport, entertainment, the arts, or politics, as our mothers and aunts before us had gone in for fancy cooking or needlework.

It is no longer a question of guiding the carriage wisely, but of keeping it going at all. Thousands of vehicles are in the narrow muddy road, a danger to one another. Now and then you see an old friend or a neighbor exhausted and unable to keep up. You fear to stop to help him, lest you get stuck yourself!

At present the incomes of the higher-grade professional classes, government officials, professors, engineers, and the like, are somewhere between 300,000 and 600,000 marks a month, about a thousand times the pre-war amount. But in the early days of March 1923, food was more than three thousand

times the pre-war cost and clothing four thousand times higher. Let any American housewife perform the above operation on her budget. She is beaten before she begins.

But in the homemaker's fight there is no such alternative as surrender. One cannot say to the children when they appear in the morning ready for school, 'It is very awkward, children, but I could n't buy you any breakfast this morning because, as you know, I had to have new shoes and it took all of papa's salary for the month.'

Such a statement would be absolutely true, but one does not make it. Instead, one 'manages.'

There is milk for the younger children, owing to the card-system, which reserves the dwindling milk-supply for them only. Some member of the family has already had to wait in line with his pail at the milk-shop, which opened at seven. And there is malt or bean coffee, without sugar — which must be conserved for cooking where it is absolutely necessary. Black bread is rationed, half a pound a day; but of course this is not enough for the older children, so we must buy more at four thousand times its old price. Sugar is five thousand times higher, and we can get it only once a month, three or four pounds a head. Eggs are two thousand times what they were; one egg costs as much as postage for five letters, but eggs are seldom to be found.

So the children get off to school with breakfast of a sort — unsweetened malt coffee and black bread, and mar-

malade. I have not had the courage to inquire into the ingredients of the marmalade. It must be confessed that the children do not do as well on this new-fashioned breakfast as their older brothers and sisters did on the old-style porridge, cocoa, bread and butter, bacon and eggs. The Quakers say that nearly all the school-children look two years younger than their ages, and the teachers say that they do not grasp half the knowledge they should in a term.

I have just mentioned butter. It should be written BUTTER and really deserves a chapter all its own. It is the gold of butter that is the housewife's gold standard. The prospective father-in-law is not interested in the number of paper marks his daughter's suitor can earn in a week but in the number of pounds of (hypothetical) butter! A doctor, for instance, receives less than the price of a pound of butter for one visit. Butter seems to be the twin brother of the dollar. It always rises when the dollar rises. Unfortunately it never sinks when the dollar sinks. Actual table-butter has long since been removed to the sphere of the myth, but its price has become the standard for every expenditure, from servants' wages to the terrific cost of a suit of clothes.

The housewife of Germany shall ye know by her big black handbag. She never thinks of leaving the house without it, for shops no longer deliver goods, and one must buy all sorts of provisions when the opportunity offers, and in as large quantities as the shopkeeper and the household purse allow. Underwear, over whose price you hesitated yesterday, is marked higher to-day, and foodstuffs often ascend from morning to afternoon. At first we tried to make food-carrying a graceful procedure by making our bags of black satin. But the morale of our bags has fallen, and now we trouble only to make them

strong and durable. Our grandchildren must keep these bags as a relic: they play such a part in our lives!

The middle class of which I write does not have meat more than once a week, and the lady of the house goes out to conquer it personally (with the black bag). The telephone has, of course, been taken out. Prices vary so that she tramps for an hour or two before she is satisfied that she has made the very best possible purchase for her family. It pays, in regard to all food-stuffs, to search the whole quarter and ask every person you meet about prices. A recent issue of *Simplissimus* shows a proud mother announcing to father, 'Baby has spoken his first words!'

'Really! What did he say?'

'How much is milk to-day?'

You come home dead-tired, your brain whirling with ciphers, and you inspect your shoe soles! Renewing them costs from 12,000 to 18,000 marks, ten thousand times the old price. Sometimes you conscientiously walk a long way (tram-fares having gone up five thousand times), to get cheaper flour and carry the thirty pounds home in a knapsack, only to find that at the grocer's next door it is the same price! Back home, you sink down to rest a moment before beginning preparations for the dinner you have so laboriously assembled, when in comes a good neighbor to tell you that — 'There are eggs at Dollmeyers!' — 'Goodness! I must have some. I could n't get one all last week!' And out goes the black bag again. After all, you get only two, despite your most languishing look at the clerk.

And when you are at home again, it takes a field-marshal's brain to prepare a dinner without meat, with few eggs, little or no milk, little sugar, considering that cereals, vegetables, fruit, and margarine can appear but seldom

on account of the delicate state of the budget. Potatoes and cabbage remain our truest friends, but I am afraid we often look at them coldly.

Luxuries like real coffee, real tea, cream, chocolate, nuts, oranges, candy, and cake, we really do not miss much, we so seldom think of them; and when, on the occasion of a wedding, perhaps, some of these delicacies emerge from a cupboard where a half-pound or so has been hoarded, I think we appreciate them more than ever we did when they were plentiful.

This sort of compensation applies also to our social life. Since our shopping takes so much more time than it used, though we buy half as much, and mending of all sorts has assumed such enormous proportions, owing to the impossibility of considering the expense of replacing linen and clothing, our free time has practically vanished. It is difficult to systematize your day, because emergencies continually arise. One day you will have to wait in line at the workman's sick-fund bureau, on behalf of your sick charwoman; then a summons will come from the *Wohnungssamt*; we are allowed one room a person and the housing department thinks it has discovered an extra room in your house; or a notice from the bank requires your presence at a certain hour without fail; or there will be a difficulty to straighten out at the *Kohlenamt* about the family's 330-pounds monthly allowance of coal. You are allowed so much only if you do your washing at home.

Dinner and supper parties belong to the past, both for lack of money and lack of time. We meet our friends in the evening after the children are in bed, so that the 'warm room,' which has served during the day as playroom, sewing-room, and dining-room, may play its part as reception room. Heating more than one room is impossible

on account of the shortage of coal. Compensation for this situation — and I think anyone who has ever lived in a large and varied family will agree with me — is hard to find. Perhaps it comes in the saving of electric light.

But, after all, people with homes of their own, however unheated and however crowded, should not and do not complain. The housing-situation holds us in a sort of vise. The government regulation of rents, on the one hand, enables us to pay rent at all, on the other hand, by checking building, has brought about a state of affairs in which there are no homes to pay rent for!

Young married couples with us are grateful, and not sad, to be given a room at some relative's. Very often they cannot live together and must continue to occupy their respective single rooms, perhaps even in different towns. The registrar's office shows a steady decrease of marriages and births.

Others, by this housing shortage, are kept from divorce. I know of a married couple with two small boys, who have two rooms in one part of the town and the use of a kitchen an hour's walk away. For their meals the mother must take the children to the other part of 'home,' where the kitchen is. Unlucky people may be seen every day at the *Wohnungssamt*, standing in line with crying babies, only to be told to come again in six months.

Our home, once we have one, becomes our world, since traveling is out of the question, foreign postage is almost prohibitively high, and even the newspaper is a luxury to be shared with several other families. It may even happen that a dear friend dies without our hearing of it, the family having avoided the expense of announcement in the paper. And to lose a member of the family is more now than

a moral grief: it is a serious financial problem. Coffins cost a sum which most families have not ready. The city authorities have met this difficulty by providing coffins that can be rented for the funeral.

Concerts and theatres have become very rare treats. Prices are a thousand-fold higher, but sometimes you cannot resist buying a ticket to a beloved opera, and you remodel your 1914 evening dress, but little worn, and go early. Around you are handsome dresses and jewels. Can this be poor Germany? Soon you discover that the smart girls with bushy bobbed hair are Americans. You hear Swedish and Dutch in the boxes, and there are several Italians in gay attire. But here are also Germans, richly dressed and unfamiliar to you. Between the acts you walk through the foyer looking for friends. At last someone approaches whom you surely know. Is it — yes, surely it is the coal-dealer's wife in this elegant dress; when you last courted her for a little extra coal she wore a woolen shawl.

You look in vain for Herr A——, the painter who, in the old days, never missed one of Mozart's operas. He and his wife have disappeared. The wave lifts one and swallows another. Writers, doctors, painters, and musicians slave somewhere in the dark for their existence. Physicians starve, though

there was never so much sickness. People do not send for the doctor except in extreme cases. Public clinics are little frequented, owing to the high tram-fares.

Many of our public baths have had to be closed. Economizing in cleanliness is a real grief to Germans, but at least the children are taught even more carefully than before to be clean and careful.

A great difficulty for everybody is the question of clothing. A glance at the budget shows that there is nothing left for this item. How to get new shoes is a riddle. A maidservant must work six months for the price of a pair.

Sometimes a light appears in the darkness. An odd pair of curtains is turned into a summer dress. Or you give the spread from the guest-room bed to a friend, in exchange for her daughter's outgrown winter coat. Or your eye lights on a vase, a wedding present that you always hated, and you sell it at one of the numerous commission shops which have sprung up everywhere.

At such a Heaven-sent moment, you remember the man Goethe tells of, who, fleeing from a mad camel, fell into a deep ravine and was saved from death only by the bramble-bush in which he was caught. Death awaited him above and below; so he fell to peacefully enjoying the blackberries!

CROSS-CURRENTS IN JAPAN

BY MARGUERITE E. HARRISON

I

THE Nihonbashi is the Broadway of Tokyo. At night, with its electric signs, its brilliantly illuminated shop-windows, its drifting, apparently purposeless crowds, its electric cars and automobiles, which are fast putting the *kurumayas*, the rickshaw men, out of business, its sidewalk peddlers and fakers, its emporiums full of cheap copies of the latest American store clothes, Kewpie dolls, and graphophone records, it is the best imitation that Japan can give of the West. Various types rub shoulders — coolies in their short blue jackets, women of the people in gay cotton *crêpe* kimonos with babies tied on their backs, modern young people walking arm-in-arm, old-fashioned wives toddling after their husbands, cosmopolitan merchants in European clothing, flamboyant geishas, groups of giggling Japanese flappers, serious-minded students, soldiers, foreign sailors, tourists, men about town. There are all sorts of people and all sorts of costumes; but the strangest sight of all is the man in a straw hat, tan oxfords, and a *crêpe* kimono — and he is legion.

The cultivated Japanese turn up their noses at him. They are either correctly European in their outward dress, or conform to the native costume in all its details; but in their mental processes they display the same incongruities. Their brains are European at both ends, but in the middle they are essentially Japanese. It is this fact, which is little understood in America, that

has created the many contradictions, the cross-currents and unrest typical of present-day Japan.

Shortly after my arrival in Japan, I took a trip from Tokyo to Kyoto. At one of the stations an elderly gentleman in European clothes got on, carrying a straw suitcase. Depositing it on his seat, he opened it, took out a Japanese outfit, stripped to the skin, quite composedly and apparently oblivious of his fellow passengers, and proceeded to change his clothes. Then he deliberately folded up his European clothes, laid them away carefully, and settled himself for the journey.

The average Japanese divests himself just as easily, at short notice, of European methods of thought. In fact, you never know when he is undergoing a mental transformation, and this makes it difficult to find out what he is really thinking.

I arrived in Japan shortly after Admiral Kato had returned from the Washington Conference. When he landed at Yokohama, though the Japanese newspapers, with few exceptions, praised his achievements at Washington, he had to be rescued from an angry jeering crowd, that yelled, 'Kato-Baka' (Kato-fool)! A few weeks later, in a Tokyo park, there was a great popular demonstration in favor of a material reduction in the army, in line with the naval reduction programme. While there was general satisfaction over the Four-Power Treaty and the