

MAKING ENDS MEET.

STRUGGLE WITH HIGH PRICES.

HOUSEKEEPERS' PROBLEMS.

There can be no doubt that the last eight or ten months have been very trying for the housekeeper who has "no money to waste." In the average household there must be always a careful adjustment of expenditure to income, if there is to be any saving done at all, or even if the cost of living is to be kept within the family's means. The process of adjustment is never an easy one, and a rise in the price of any article of daily consumption necessarily disturbs the routine, and renders the anxious house-mother's task more difficult. But when, as has been the case during the last year, almost every branch of housekeeping is affected, the women who are charged with the duty of making ends meet are well-nigh distracted with the worry and responsibility. The increased cost of living has almost driven out the domestic servant question as a topic of conversation. And there is unquestionably a great mental relief achieved by unburdening the soul of these daily worries, by comparing notes with others, and by giving and receiving the sympathy which makes every task easier.

"We shall be ruined if this sort of thing goes on," I hear constantly on the lips of one or other of my women friends. "First of all, nearly all our groceries went up. And then bread got dearer. And then there was the dry summer, and we couldn't get vegetables, and fruit is twice as expensive as usual. And now there's another penny on milk. What the really poor people are doing I simply don't know." Most of these conversations have a real practical value, independently of the sympathy evoked for "the really poor." There is a constant interchange of ideas and plans for "managing" and manœuvring to keep the standard of living as nearly as possible at its old level. The "doing without" in most households is not restricted to luxuries. There are fewer evenings at the theatre, a less expensive frock does duty for "occasions," little feet are less daintily shod, there's one row less of lace in a tiny summer frock, and muslin has done duty instead of silk, last winter's dresses are being anxiously looked over to see which "will do again," shoes are worn a little longer, and go oftener to the shoemaker for new soles and heels; there is more patching and darning done than of old, the new side-board long "wood up" for is still in the furniture-shop, the savings bank account has had a smaller increase this summer than before.

But even when all these more obvious ways of coping with the increased expenditure have been availed of, the problem has not been solved, and the housekeeper has been driven into her kitchen to make a rigid scrutiny of the department of supplies. What a tale of management the domestic history of this last summer would make could it be written in detail! Not a woman of my acquaintance but has had her own little story of contriving to tell. All of them cut down extravagances with a ruthless hand. "I used to allow the family a tin or two of whietbait every month, but I simply had to do without this summer." Or again, "Are you still buying pork sausages? I gave them up months ago, and really the mixed ones are very nice indeed." Or yet again, "I am just longing for a bit of really good cheese. I used to enjoy the occasional scrap of Gruyere or New Zealand Stilton, but I've had to be very stern with myself. When I see it, I just say, 'No, I won't be a glutton,' and I shut my purse up tight." Another woman has regretfully cut out the Sunday chicken, and yet another has gone through the summer without once indulging her family with the occasional ice cream or box of sweets. Little things, perhaps, but they mean in the mass a great deal of self-denial and restraint.

And this cutting down of extravagances, and "doing without" involves an enormous increase of work and thought. For the luxuries have had to be replaced by cheaper food, whose cooking is by no means so simple a matter. "Bunny" has been a god-send to many a household of late. He has not yet risen beyond sixpence, and he makes a very respectable dinner. With the addition of a little bacon and onion and herbs, he makes a delightful brown fricasee. With milk and breadcrumbs, he becomes an even more delectable dish. He may be stuffed and baked, or buttered and broiled. And what is left of him, cold, may be minced and seasoned to make a delightful filling for tomatoes au gratin. In one household of four, a rabbit with a little bacon and onions and tomatoes, has thus often provided two enjoyable meals. Cheaper joints of meat, too, have been in greater demand than usual. Not a few housewives have had recourse more frequently to the despised neck of mutton, and have discovered that it makes a very sweet and toothsome haricot. The occasional substantial joint has been responsible for very little waste. Even the

last morsels have been husbanded, to be turned, with the aid of the mincer, into rissoles and curries and savoury stews, and into shepherd's pies, beloved of children. It is surprising how far a very little meat can be made to go in this fashion; and even the very smallest scraps of "left over" fish have been found an acceptable addition to "potato balls" for father's tea. Fortunately, quite a large dish of these "made" meat dainties can be concocted with one egg; but they have necessitated the careful husbanding of all dripping and fat.

Vegetables have been the greatest trial of all, for to "dearness" scarcity has been added, and it has been well-nigh impossible to provide them in any variety. One result has been that lettuces have come into quite general use as a boiled vegetable, making a pleasant substitute for spinach. Another result has been the discovery of new ways of serving the same vegetables. Mashed potatoes, for instance, are quite glorified by the addition of an egg, the white first stiffly whipped, and the mixture baked a light golden brown. Turk's cap, mashed and treated in the same fashion, is converted into something like a firm, savoury custard. Rice has had quite a revival as a substitute for vegetables, and green bananas fried in clarified fat have been added to the vegetables in use in some homes. Haricot beans, with an egg to help them out, have been found to furnish half-a-dozen different dishes; and lentils are by no means to be despised if some little trouble be taken with the cooking. But all these devices have undoubtedly been a tax on the housewife's ingenuity, and on her time and her energy.

It has been a season for the use of the cookery-book. Volumes have been searched most eagerly, from end to end, for "one

egg" recipes, because contrivance, in cooking, almost always necessitates a freer use of eggs. A good "batter" recipe which requires only one egg, and a small quantity of butter, and is mixed with warm water instead of milk, has been in constant use of late in one family for the cooking of fish, for fruit fritters, and for Yorkshire pudding, whilst a young girl from the same house, enjoying afternoon tea with a friend, recently exclaimed at the extravagance of a big home-made sponge cake. "I haven't seen one for ages. Nearly all cakes are forbidden in our house now. We have to have little 'cookies,' or gingerbread, because it takes only one egg, or scones. Many a housekeeper has registered a resolve of late to keep her own hens, or at least to buy fresh eggs when they are cheap, and to preserve them for the season when they are scarce; and many another has realised that "no meat" breakfasts are better suited to the digestions of her household than the former reckless consumption of meat at every meal. Perhaps it is not altogether a bad thing that these occasional demands are made on woman's ability for management, though in the present crisis it must be admitted that her resources are being very heavily taxed, and that she may make a legitimate demand for sympathy and support.