



by
The Hon. Lady Fortescue.

DECEMBER is the month of decisions. We must decide about Christmas presents, an exhausting task, demanding—if one is kind and conscientious, and really anxious to please those who are to receive gifts at our hands—a certain knowledge of psychology. We must understand the tastes and character of those we desire to please, or we may add to the herd of white elephants which each one of us possesses in a secret menagerie.

The presents from husbands to wives and from wives to husbands are easy enough. A wife has but to rush forth to her favourite shop and buy some long-coveted object, some long-left want, and then return to her grateful husband, exclaiming triumphantly, "Look what a lovely hat (or fur-coat, or diamond necklace) you have given me for Christmas, darling!" So saving the lucky man all trouble and anxiety.

She can then concentrate her mind upon her husband's needs. Those vests of his are getting threadbare—and, luckily, he has an account at his haberdasher's; or she can ask the builder to come round and replace that tile on the roof of his study, which is letting in the damp, and so save her man's books from damage and give him a nice little Christmas surprise. Men love to be saved drudgery of that sort, and builders generally send in their bills quarterly, and by that time-----OK! husbands and wives are easy to please, but friends are far more difficult.

However, these decisions must be made, and it is better to make them early and so avoid being stifled or trampled to death in London's great stores during the last weeks of December.

And then we must make up our minds where to spend Christmas, Duty tells us that we should either spend the festive season with our relatives, sharing the inevitable turkey, plum-pudding, mince-pies and indigestion, or invite them to share these delights with us. Inclination bids us examine the fascinating advertisements of various Continental resorts. A gay season in Paris, with *bals-masques*, exquisite feasts at *chic* restaurants on gala nights, evenings to be spent at the Comedie Francaise or the Opera, with just a little shopping during the daytime; it would be so foolish not to take advantage of the condition of the franc, wouldn't it?

Then for the young and strenuous what better to spend a few weeks among the Swiss mountains or in the Austrian Tyrol? How alluring are these pictured ladies, clad in attractive trousers and sweaters and caps, skiing joyously down steep declivities, or skimming over the ice supported by handsome young men in correct winter sports attire. The wild thrill of the toboggan, the bliss of the bob-sleigh! Shall it be Switzerland?

And for the older victims of the uncertain climate of the island, what charm there is in dreams of Southern France and the Italian Riviera. To those embittered souls who

have endured the chill damp of this English autumn, with its premature chilblains and warning rheumatic twinges, there is rapture in the remembrance of that magical air of the Riviera—so dry and bright and crystal-clear! Of a sea blue as gentians; of a night-sky jewelled with wondrous stars; of fields of carnations and violets, and groves of orange trees starred all over with scented blossom and fruit, like little golden lamps—(so lovely of them to fruit and flower together)—of lazy, languorous hours spent, lying like a lizard in the sunshine, with senses soothed by the beauty of scents and scenes around one!

Or, for the more adventurous, there is always a Casino within reach, where the taste for a little innocent gaming may be indulged, where jazz-bands play by day and night inviting youth to dance, where one's superfluity of naughtiness may be spent. What about the Riviera?

For those pursuers of fascinating advertisements who have plenty of money it is easy enough to toss a coin—heads or tails, the best out of three, and then do the opposite—to help their decision. They can afford the icy thrills of Switzerland or the glowing sunshine of the South, they have only to make up their minds which it shall be.

But those whose shillings must be carefully counted are at least spared these difficult problems. They console themselves with remembered stories of callous Customs officials spilling intimate items of the wardrobe upon the ground in their frantic search for contraband goods; of overcrowded Blue Trains where no *wagons-lits* or *lib-salons* were available and it was necessary to coil oneself into an S or a Z to avoid the legs of the fuggy Frenchman opposite, who resolutely refused to allow the windows of the carriage to be opened one inch throughout the stifling night; of shoes blistered and burst by red-hot floor radiators; of inadequate water-supply in the lavatories, so that shaving operations, if attempted at all, must be conducted with the aid of a bottle of *Vichy Celestins*.

Oh! there is something to be said after all for the good old English Christmas spent by one's own fireside.

And to those who find this annual festival rather an occasion for boredom than for rejoicing, who associate it in their minds with an avalanche of quarterly bills, with Christmas boxes and further expenditure in the form of inevitable presents, there is an infallible recipe for happiness which anyone can follow.

Collect all the little children of the neighbourhood and give them a good time. Joy can be purchased for so very little—a few toys, a cracker or two and one's undivided attention. Forget the years that have passed and become a child again, play foolish games, be thoroughly undignified for once. And in the joy of the children you will regain your lost youth and some of that "first fine careless rapture" which was yours when all the world was young.

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