

Are Women Really Mean?

(CIRCUMSTANCES OFTEN COMBINE TO MAKE A REALLY GENEROUS AND OPEN-HEARTED WOMAN APPEAR "STINGY.")

Women are constantly accused of being wasteful and extravagant. But they are more often taunted with being "stingy."

The question is how much is training and how much is temperament?

It is extremely doubtful that girl babies are born thrifty and careful, while their infant brothers come into the world generous and open-handed.

On the contrary, it is more likely true that the instinct to economise which so many women undoubtedly possess is mainly a matter of training. In nearly all households the scraping, economising, and "doing without" falls on the feminines.

The public school boy gets far more pocket money from his parents than his sister—also at a public school—receives.

If a rich, generous uncle "tips" his nieces and nephews, the boy gets a sovereign, when the girl has to content herself with ten shillings. The young man at Oxford or Cambridge receives an allowance wildly beyond the dreams of a Girton girl of the same social standing.

Girls are always being taught to deny themselves, to do without the things their hearts crave. Boys, on the other hand, know if they run into debt, and lavish generously on schoolmates and "chums," money their parents can ill afford, that pater will "pay up" with a "boys will be boys," or that mater will manage to provide the money somehow.

From the moment of his birth allowances are made for the boy's tendency to extravagance. Girls, on the other hand, are so cramped as to pocket money and allowances, even in well-to-do families, that it is no wonder they often grow up into stingy women.

"I don't like my boy not to be able to pay his way on the same footing as his friends," is a sentiment heard constantly from fathers. But the sentiment stops short at the boys.

The least tendency to extravagance in girls is treated with a severity which should only apply to one of the seven cardinal sins.

My long observation of boys and girls leads me to think that the latter are far more generous than the former. A girl will nearly always deny herself in order to give. I have never yet met a boy who will do this.

The apparent open-handedness and generosity of a boy to his schoolmates is very often mere ostentation. He shows off by exceeding his weekly allowance and then writes a begging letter to his mother, who usually supplies the deficit.

If a girl shows off by spending more than she can afford, she doesn't edge from her mother or anybody else. She goes without things for two or three weeks, till her pocket money balance is all square.

In fifty per cent. of a schoolboy's apparent generosity he is playing to the gallery, and "forks out" lest his fellows shall call him a stingy brute.

The boy known at school as a first-rate chap, ready to lend or give, is often frightfully stingy to his sisters, because he is not afraid of their criticism. The opinion of the "other fellows" at school counts.

What girls think it doesn't matter. All through life it's the same.

Economy a ways begins at home. If a man's business is doing badly his daughters must wear last year's frocks, his wife must manage with a maid less.

The sons and father go on in much the same style as to clubs, cigars, and amusements.

But the chief factor in making women appear "mean" lies in the circumstance that very few women are spending their very own money.

In most cases their expenditure is more or less from a trust fund.

And no honourable person likes to spend other people's money quite so lavishly as though it were their own.

Added to this, there is usually somebody in the background to whom a woman has to give an account of how much money has been spent. Even though

a husband be the most generous of men, he knows exactly how much his wife spends in a year.

He is a sort of monetary conscience behind her own. And this fact tends to make her more "careful" of pence and pounds than she would be were nobody to check her accounts.

A man may every now and then launch into all sorts of extravagances, secure in the knowledge that his wife will never discover it unless he chooses to confess.

"I never told my wife how much that little trip cost me, or how much I lost on that speculation which turned out so badly," is a confidence one often receives from husbands.

A wife, on the other hand, unless she have a separate income, can never indulge in an extravagance without being "found out."

Dine out or go on a little excursion with a married man whose wife is not one of the party, and note how well he entertains his guests, what a big tip he gives the waiters, and how open-handed he is all round.

Join a similar party in which the wife shares, and you will be struck with the different style in which things are done. You get hock where previously you had champagne, and so on through the sliding scale of hospitality.

The reason is obvious. A "check" is present in the wife, who will know exactly how much the little dissipation costs.

A wife always has this check upon her.

And it is just this consciousness at the back of everything which makes a woman expend threepence when a man will "go the whole sixpence."

Odd Reasons for Choosing Wives.

An art student from North Dakota, living in the Latin quarter of Paris, in the house of an amiable but impoverished woman, fell in arrears for his rent for more than eleven years. Taken vigorously to task by his landlady, he told her frankly that there was absolutely no prospect of payment, whereupon she as promptly declared that he must either pay at once or get out. Confronted with two such awful alternatives, the former impossible and the latter most disagreeable, he discarded them both and in a second of inspiration proposed matrimony. He was accepted, proved to be a good provider, and made his wife happy.

A Mr Plumb of Huntington, Conn., having an unusually fat daughter whom he was anxious to see well married, was much grieved to learn that the young men of her acquaintance all showed a preference for lean sweethearts. He published an offer of five dollars for every pound the girl might weigh on the day of her wedding, the money to go to the young man who married her. An attempt was made to conceal the true avoirdupois of Miss Plumb, and strangers who read the advertisement imagined that she was a midget. A Mr Haring, who made inquiries, finding that she weighed 400 pounds, promptly proposed, was accepted, and soon after came into possession

of both the substantial maiden and her dowry.

A London philatelist, envying some curious specimens in the album of an elderly feminine acquaintance, offered a dozen times to buy or exchange for the coveted treasures. Unable to secure the prizes in such ways he finally proposed matrimony, and so came into possession of the lady and her stamps.

John Henry Maedler, the astronomer, whose favourite study was the moon, having learned that Frau Witte, the wife of the state councillor, owned a wonderful model of his pet lunary, spent years trying to gain possession of it. As her husband was living he could not marry the owner of the model, so he married her daughter, and at the death of his mother-in-law the coveted moon became his.

A Yorkshireman whose poor relations pestered him continually married the worst scold in the county to have a guardian who would protect him from the importunate legacy hunters. The venomous and incessant vituperation of the woman had the desired effect.

The late Augustus Hare tells of a one-legged woman who became the third wife of a prosperous widower. One day while searching the closets she came upon two cork legs, each labelled with the name of a different woman. In fear and rage she went among the relatives of her husband asking questions. But they pacified her by saying that both his first and second wives had also been obliged to wear an artificial limb, and that the husband's married life in each case had been so happy that he had sworn never to marry any but a one-legged woman.



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