

Setting Up House.

The Romance of a Furniture Shop.

By G. G.

A YOUNG man's first financial battle in domestic warfare is fought not after he has become married some time, and has become seized with the simple economic fact that two beings are harder to provide for than one, but before he fits his shoulders to the yoke of married life. The contest does not take place on the hearth; the battle ground is the furniture shops.

When man and maid have fully made up their minds that two can live on one's salary, they fix the day and look about for a house. Then follows the ordeal of buying the furniture to fill it. But modern young folk, if lacking experience in these matters, are wise in their generation. No palming off any sort of old, glued battens on them. They decide they won't but until they've had a look round all the shops, so as to compare the different prices and qualities. The woman has the keenest eye for quality, and talks glibly of fashion, style, and effect, but the male keeps close guard on the prices, and all through the tour a whirlwind of figures swirls through his brain as he makes lightning calculations of what his bits of sticks are going to cost.

The prospective bride breaks the first ice by asking the salesman to guide them to the show rooms.

"We want to look at a bedroom suite," she explains in a tremulous half-whisper, and drops her head to hide the blushes which suffuse her face.

"Something in oak?" queries the salesman.

"Yes, but not too large or expensive," the latter part of the sentence is uttered in an undertone.

"How will this suit you? a three-piece suite," and the man and wife to be are halted before a wardrobe sandwiched in

don't think it will be too big for our room, do you, dear?"

Her companion does not answer. He is too absorbed in trying to decipher the figures and hieroglyphics on a tag which is attached to the handle of one of the doors.

"How much for the suite?" he timidly asks.

"Well, with our 20 per cent. special discount off, and our usual two shillings in the pound rebate, the whole suite will run you into—let me see," and the salesman scratches his sparsely, thatched head and fixes his gaze on the ceiling as though searching for an inspiration. Then he speaks slowly and deliberately, and with the air of a man about to make a great sacrifice. "This three-piece suite will be £40 net!"

"What! How much?" This in a half scream, half sob from the husband-to-be.

"Forty pounds landed in your home. Do you think it'll suit? We have others a little more expensive, you know, if you'd care to look at them."

The young fellow groans out something about "not to-day, I'll look you up another time," and clutching the girl by the arm half drags her from the shop. Forty pounds for a bedroom suite! The shock is too much for a man who has been living on the dream that he could furnish his three rooms and kitchen for £25.

At the next shop they visit, the male goaded by the last bitter experience, and pricked by the attenuated points of his slender purse, takes command—a position he will perhaps occupy for short but stormy periods during the years to come—and with the assumption of an old campaigner informs the salesman

to hear: "I wonder what they're asking for this suite?"

His companion mutters something under her breath, and this gives the salesman the opening that he knew would come.

"Thirty pounds, and dirt cheap at twice the money," he exclaims with

felt constrained to resort in despair of finding anything adapted to his ready cash.

The total sum is £60, but certain rebates are stipulated if he is regular in his payments. He pays no attention to the crowd, even his fiancée is forgotten for the time being. He is lost in



Homeward bound with the day's purchases.

conviction, and breaks into a rhapsody of praise of the particular style and of the articles.

And so as they pass along, the man in whom the spirit of the bargain-hunter has been fanned into flame, inquires the price of every piece that catches his eye but he never once reveals his desire or intention to buy. As he leaves the shop, the possessor of an eightpenny doormat for which he has paid two half crowns, he reads a homily to his future wife on the necessity of concealing their lack of, or desire for anything if they want it cheaply.

"But that mat isn't worth five shillings," she protests.

"I know it isn't," and there is a tinge of regret in his voice, "but you've got to make a small sacrifice. You've to pay for your experience, you know. Anyhow, what's a dollar?"

He follows that precept in the next shop they call at where he purchases a brass curtain rod, and incidentally becomes apprised of the hard cold fact that the cheapest bedstead in the place is something over £10. That piece of information leaves a stiff lump in his throat. He has come prepared to pay a fair price for a bedstead, which he had worked out at £4, with an embroidered drape and mosquito net thrown in.

At another place he learns that a kitchen dresser and meat safe will cost him anything from £3 to £8. To find that out he pays 2s. 3d for a plaster image. The actual price is half a crown, but the salesman magnanimously knocks threepence off, as the ornament has lost an arm; the result of a fall.

"I don't know who it's supposed to be," is the cheerful explanation offered as the young people are walking out of the shop with it. "It might be Bobby Burns. You can say it is if you like, nobody will know any better. If you stand it on the mantleshaft with a vase a little in front of it, people won't notice that the arm is missing."

Three or four more sub-rooms are visited, and the couple make for home. The girl looks despondent and out of temper, and holds the statuette by the sound arm after the manner of a child who has sickened of her doll. In her other hand she carries the curtain rod like an alpenstock.

Her future lord walks dejectedly a few paces behind. The parrot he is carrying impedes his progress. Under one arm is a door mat rolled like a rug; a picture frame is slung round his neck like a yoke, and he has a roll of wallpaper in either hand. From a coat pocket protrudes the end of a small corner bracket, while in his top vest pocket nestles snugly a receipt for £5, the first instalment on three rooms of furniture on the hire-purchase system to which he has



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between a dressing table and washstand. "All solid oak and our own make," the salesman vouchsafes, "Made by hand, and ab—so—lute—ly no putty or glue used. Every board sound. Rings like a bell," and he draws back his hand as though to strike the back of the wardrobe a hard blow, but thinks better of it, and merely raps lightly on one of the panels.

"There you are, not a crack or flaw; did you ever hear a truer sound?" and he smiles complacently.

The doors of the wardrobe are mounted with mirrors, and the maiden peeps gracefully before them, studying her figure from every angle.

"It's just lovely," she gushes, "I'll hold all my clothes, and there's plenty of room in the drawers for my hats. I

that he wants a doormat, the cheapest he's got.

"A door mat? Will you come this way please." The salesman smiles blandly. He has met this sort of individual before.

He leads the way to that part of the building where doormats are kept. He doesn't go direct, but makes a circuitous detour of all departments. He moves slowly, pausing every now and again, as though in doubt about something, but really waiting for the questions that he knows will be put to him. He halts to flick a spot of dust from off a sideboard, which is arranged in dining-room order with a number of chairs and a table. Then, the young man addressing the now subdued maid, who is hanging half reluctantly on his arm, asks for her in tones loud enough for the salesman

thought. His mind is perplexed, bewildered. He is trying to figure out how long it takes the proprietor of a furniture shop to become a millionaire.

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