



John Barry

Genuinely "Big" Business

by Grace McIlrath Ellis '22

The Homemaker's second editor returns to the pages of her first love to write about her last love, homemaking.

HOMEMAKING—regardless of how you look at it—is funny business! It engages more persons than any other occupation on record, yet has least organized voice. It is the sort of job for which variety of aptitudes is of first importance, yet its academic preparation leads—of some necessity, perhaps—to specialization. It requires a high degree of executive artistry for distinguished handling, yet it is a field in which promotions, awards of honor and—may I add—dismissals, are rarely made.

In final analysis, it is "big" business—possibly the **biggest** business. But for pictorial evidence of its still uncertain status, try orally listing yourself as "big business woman" at any round table where occupational introductions are in

order. Then candid-camera-shoot your fellow round-tablers' faces.

There seemed a feeling abroad in the land, for a time, that the statue to the Pioneer Mother was out of date. And that the woman on horse with baby cradled in arms should be supplanted by one of a brisk young woman, one toe at a perambulator, the other in an elevator. Be it said to the credit of womanly wisdom, no such statue has yet been made.

There can be laurels and liniment, both, in store for the woman who, having this biggest of all businesses in charge, has the effrontery—or courage—to take on another. Hats off to her. But no wistful envy, please.

To achieve any considerable amount of outside activity may take management of a high degree. And there's a generous galaxy of outside interests open to the home-economics-trained homemaker. Besides the customary run of non-profit community activities, there are fairs and institutes to be judged,

cooking schools and day nurseries to be managed. Part-time teaching is frequently available. And newspaper and magazine pages are usually open to the woman with something to say, and a concise and readable way of saying it.

Were I to take my home economics course again, I should try to ferret out every subject which in any way featured management. The modern pediatrician, home editor and manufacturer have stolen part of the edge which the trained homemaker once had over her lay sister. It is in the **application** of information, not the **possession** of it, that the home economist has an advantage.

The "Hec" courses, for which I find myself giving daily fervent thanks, are those which taught not only foods but meal management—not only the theories of child care but actual diaper and drinking cup manipulation.

Every homemaking student could

(Continued on page 20)

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"Big" Business

(Continued from page 1)

profitably make a time schedule and attempt to live by it. Not that, as a homemaker, she'll ever be able to catalogue her day so patly. Telephone, doorbell, playground squabbles and childhood ills can never be adequately scheduled.

But every successful homemaker has a somewhat automatic plan of work. It may have started as a time schedule. But it is liable to have developed into an habitual procedure for what might otherwise be annoying details. Details which really don't annoy, you see, because, like brushing your teeth, they've become largely reflex. And details which can be dropped at any moment to bind a finger, answer the phone or dash out to see the just-up tulip shoots, and then picked up again with no vain regrets for moments lost.

My own job—that of homemaking-journalist—is, so my friends tell me, one of the most ideal. It seasons with the salt of research what might otherwise be the most flavorless household chores. And allows me to turn leisure into profit, while at the same time remaining with my family and handling, myself, all those important jobs whose relegation so mentally harasses full-time-career homemakers.

It frequently seems to require all the discipline of the high-powered executive, while withholding the executive's privileges.

I can take the baby to the board meeting, in effect, or bring the conference to the dish pan. But I cannot refuse to iodine a gashed knee, to accept a neighborly offering of petunia plants or to admire the two-board aeroplane which the three-year-old has just contrived. Not even though the "right phrase" be hanging on the very verge of consciousness, never again to be available if it is not at this moment summoned forth.

The homemaker-journalist combination—like many another—is best tackled only by those who have an intense and continual curiosity, a sturdy sense of humor and the ability to concentrate in the midst of neighborhood bedlam. At the same time, one must have a sharp ear for whatever happens to be taking place on the playground outside. And to these, may I add, facility with the typewriter!

"To be a good homemaker," says Dorothy Thomas, "is harder than to be a good newspaperwoman. Harder and rarer."

To look toward settling the hard job first, is probably the better part of wisdom. Outside activities, for the most of us, had best be tacked on after the main job of home-managing has been pretty well brought into line, don't you think?

For homemaking, regardless of how you look at it, is genuinely "big" business.

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