



*The Hon. Lady Fortescue.*

I HAVE come to the conclusion that the most valuable gift a woman can possess is adaptability—the power to adapt herself to any circumstance, situation or person. It is the wooden women who make failures of their lives and the India rubber women who achieve success, whether matrimonially, financially, professionally or socially.

Man was created first, and woman—being a mere rib of man—was placed in an inferior position from the beginning, and to make herself felt in any way she was obliged to employ her wits. She had to adapt herself to the man, and use her ingenuity in small things as in great.

Eve began it. When she discovered that she was inadequately clothed she set to work at once and made an apron of leaves for herself and her husband. I am perfectly certain that the idea was hers. Jezebel, realizing that her reign as the king's favourite was over, painted her face and tired her head and looked out of the window, hoping so to attract the usurper Jehu that he would let her occupy the same position in his household. Her little feminine ruse met with but small success, as the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet testified, but at any rate it was a gallant effort. And since the beginning of time we have been forced to adapt ourselves. Take the life of any little girl. In the nursery she must appear to be docile and obedient to obtain the favour of her nurse. If she wants to be included in the games of her brothers she must be ready to impersonate any of the lower animals at a moment's notice; to field for him while he joyously bats a cricket ball into the gooseberry bushes; to be the human victim of his cannibal king, and suffer ingenious forms of torture before being devoured. The maiden who best surfs these trials of fortitude is the most popular. When she attends a dancing-class she discovers early that she must always adapt herself to the trampling of her partner and allow him to use her as a battering-ram to drive his way through the crowd. If she in any way attempts to guide *him*—that is bad dancing.

And so through life. When she emerges from the schoolroom chrysalis stage and bursts forth as a butterfly *debutante* into the great world, she must eternally adapt herself to her male companions. At dinner-parties and dances she must discover what subjects interest the men she meets, and, if she is to be a success, feign enthusiasm for their particular pursuits. When she marries she finds out that, if the house is to be a place of peace and her life with her husband harmonious, she must eternally mould herself to him, understand his moods and treat them sympathetically. If he be a learned man there will be hours of silent abstraction when his mind is meditating, and she will find that those are not the times to complain of the cook or ask for a cheque for household expenditure.

When, at last, he rouses himself from his reverie and desires a little gay conversation, she must be careful not to be in an absent mood herself.

Fortunately, perhaps from long heredity, it is easier for a woman to adapt herself than a man. She is 'more plastic, more receptive of ideas, and, from necessity, women have developed through the ages into natural actresses.

A learned psychologist has recently told us that human beings are divided into two classes—the givers and the recipients. The givers are those who possess "the urge not to store but to scatter, the innermost spur not to conserve but to spend"; the recipients are those "who tend to conserve all that they have and to add all that others may give.

Of course we all know of women who are natural recipients, who are exacting and selfish, consciously or unconsciously taking all they can get—"vampires" they have been unkindly called because they suck the very life-blood of their friends and leave them sapped of all vitality. But although there are many selfish women in the world, I am inclined to believe, upon reflection, that selfless men are rarer. It is but seldom that one meets a man who is a giver; more naturally, men are recipients. It is no fault of theirs, poor dears, and they should not be blamed, for since Adam was created first, man has been of first importance, and woman his slave. Feminists rave, but facts are unalterable, and if, in our hearts, we did not accept this truth, why from the first dawn of our intelligence do we seek to propitiate the lords of creation and adapt ourselves to them? Why do we try to attract them, study their moods and caprices, make them appear to themselves of such paramount importance? And to-day we even pay them the compliment of aping their appearance, adopting their vices and competing with their work.

They are a little bit nervous about this state of affairs. Why? Because they fear that their superiority is questioned and their domination doomed. Women have ministered to their wants for so long, have adapted themselves into the ideal wives, mothers and companions until men expect nothing less than perfection of order and selfless service in the home. When a wooden wife fails to adapt herself with the plasticity required of her by her lord, he is hurt and surprised, having been taught by tradition to expect her to be made of India rubber.

And it is quite surprising how many women there are who cheerfully play the part assigned to them and how hard they strive not to fall short of the ideal of their men. To most of them the task is comparatively easy, for adaptability has become almost second nature, and women are, as I have said, more generally givers than recipients since that fateful day when Eve gave Adam the traditional apple—and was afterwards blamed for the consequences.