

THE FLABBY MIND

BY VICTOR MURRAY

ANGELICA looked me straight in the eye as she asked the question: "Am I getting mentally flabby? Give me an honest answer." As a master of matrimonial diplomacy there was only one reply I could make. I made it with the necessary degree of warmth.

"But am I not getting narrow and old-maidish in my views?" persisted Angelica.

I again denied that she was anything but the bright, broadminded, intelligent young woman she had always been.

But Angelica was not satisfied. I did not expect she would be. When Angelica has something on her mind she is seldom satisfied until she has given it a complete airing.

"Modern women are learning the importance of keeping mentally fit," she said. "It is mental flabbiness which makes most women middle-aged while their husbands are still marching in the army of youth."

Angelica ignored my interruption.

"The dull routine of domestic life narrows a woman's mental horizon," she continued. "She is forced into the ranks of mental slackers before she realizes it. But a man is kept mentally alert by his contacts with keen minds in the business world. And what is the result?"

"What indeed?" I asked, dutifully.

"The result is a chasm—a mental chasm—which develops between man and wife. A gulf comes between them which is as wide as that which separates a statesman from a sewer digger."

As an obscure but earnest student of domestic relations, I realized the danger of agreeing that Angelica was a sewer digger as compared with my own statesman-like status. On the other hand it were not wise to contradict her if one were anxious for a quiet evening. I chose a middle course.

"What," I asked, "is this conversation leading to?"

I was told that in order to ward off mental flabbiness Angelica was going to give her brain regular exercise. Running a small house and gossiping with her friends did not give her mind the work needed to keep it fit. She was going in for mental calisthenics. She was going to read thought-provoking books, keep in touch with the League of Nations, study the tariff question, keep posted on international questions.

There was nothing for me to do but applaud the suggestion.

Eager to get started Angelica tucked her hair behind her ears—always a sign of intense activity—and took down a large, dark, volume from one of the bookshelves. She opened it at random and commenced to read. A frown of concentration appeared on her usually unfurrowed brow. The mental calisthenics had begun.

I held my newspaper high in case Angelica might glance up and imagine she saw signs of levity on my face. The silence was broken by Angelica.

"What does intuit mean?" she asked.

"You mean intuition," I said.

"I mean intuit," retorted Angelica. "That is what it says here."

"Must be a misprint," said I, unwilling to confess ignorance.

"Well it appears three times the same way," was her reply.

"Read the sentence," I suggested, "I can usually get at the meaning of a word by considering the way in which it is used."

Angelica read distinctly: "The things which we intuit are not in themselves the same as our representation of them in intuition, nor are their relations in themselves so constituted as they appear to us."

There was silence when Angelica stopped.

"Well," she said, "what does it all mean?"

My brain was working fast but ineffectively.

"Read it again," I said, "and be sure you pause at the commas."

Angelica did so.

"Oh, that is easy," I said, suddenly inspired.

"The author is merely pointing out that things are not always what they seem."

I was delighted with myself.

"Not everybody," I remarked, "has the ability to interpret a statement such as you have just read. It takes a keen mind to pierce the tangle of scientific jargon and get at the core of the matter."

Angelica did not share my enthusiasm about myself.

"Listen to this," she said, with a touch of the north wind in her voice, and went on reading:

"If we take away the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of our senses in general, then not only the nature and relations of objects in space and time disappear, but even space and time themselves."

ANGELICA stopped and looked up. Never before had I heard so many English words that meant so little as far as I was concerned. My feeling of self-esteem oozed away.

"Let's see that keen mind of yours get at the core of that one," remarked Angelica.

I decided to bluff my way out.

"The point is simple enough," I said. "But if I explain it to you the object of your studies will be lost. You are supposed to be exercising your brain. How can you do so if I do your heavy thinking for you?"

I smiled gently as I spoke. The smile was not returned. Evidently it was a little too gentle. Angelica became slightly peeved.

"You need not talk to me as if I were a school-girl," she said. "Besides, I do not believe you have any idea of what it is all about. You are just trying to spoof me."

The only thing I could do was to appear grievously hurt by such an unkind thought—so hurt that I could no longer take part in the discussion. I picked up my paper and looked as much like a martyr as possible.

"Very well," I said, stiffly. "If you doubt my word—"

I turned noisily to the sports news and flung

"The dull routine of domestic life narrows a woman's mental horizon," declared Angelica. . . . "But is it any wonder when there is nothing more stimulating than her husband's conversation," she concluded

one leg violently across the other to indicate intense anger under restraint. Angelica, as usual, refused to be intimidated by signs of wrath.

"If you know what it means I want you to tell me," she said, "because it sounds like a lot of gibberish to me."

"It may seem hard to understand," I replied, still wondering what it was all about, "but once you grasp the scientific viewpoint it is as clear as it is inevitable."

"Well, explain it," insisted Angelica.

"I am afraid it would be difficult for you to understand," I countered, unwilling to admit that I understood nothing about it.

"In other words you do not think I have brains enough to grasp it," retorted Angelica, daring me to say yes.

IT WAS not a matter of brains, I explained, it was a matter of scientific reasoning. Women were not strong on scientific reasoning. They lacked the ability to pursue a slow, methodical, course of careful calculations. They preferred to leap at conclusions.

"Well let me tell you something," said Angelica, lapsing into juvenile phrases as her indignation mounted. "Let me tell you something right now. (She always wants to tell me things *right now* when she gets excited). We women can figure things out just as well as men. That stuff about us jumping at conclusions is a lot of hokey!"

"A lot of what?"

"Hokey!" repeated Angelica, with emphasis, "Hokey, applesauce, balloon juice—there's nothing in it."

"Nothing in the balloon juice?" I inquired.

"No, fool, there's nothing in the argument. Women are just as clever as men. They reason things out the same way as men; only quicker. That is why men say women jump at conclusions."

"Is that so?" I said. Meanwhile Angelica warmed up to her argument.

"If men only knew how women laugh at them pretending to be so wise," she said. "Most women look upon their husbands as children. They have to try and stop them from doing things no women would think of doing."

"What, for instance?"

"Buying oil stock, sight unseen, for one thing—"

"Never mind bringing that up again. I have told you a dozen times it was just a gamble."

"Well how about buying raffle [*See also page 67*]

