

"A Slow Sort of Country"

By MAY SPEED SEXTON

I wonder if Lewis Carroll ever thought much about inflation. Surely when I turned the well-loved pages of "Through the Looking Glass" just now I found a deft picture of my husband and me and thousands of other young American couples just like us, who spend all they make for the best living attainable and who look forward long and eagerly to that next "raise" so they can grab for the next rung in the standard of living.

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You remember, don't you, when Alice and the Red Queen had started across the giant chessboard and



were running terribly hard and fast? Alice panted, "Are we nearly there?"

"Nearly there!" the Queen repeated. "Why, we passed it ten minutes ago! Faster!"

After running quite a while longer the Queen allowed Alice to stop and rest, and Alice looked around her in great surprise. "Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!"

"Of course it is," said the Queen, "what would you have it?"

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else—if you ran

very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

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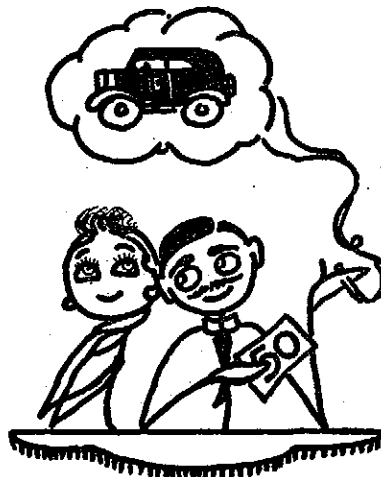
Most of us have been brought up on the good old American theory that here we have unlimited opportunity to work hard and get ahead, perhaps if not in any spectacular or sudden way then at least by the sure and steady raise-by-raise method. That's the way we were brought up—but now—

After two years of budgeting, balancing, juggling, shuffling, shifting, postponing, diagramming, and planning, after two years of stretching a sufficient income to seem comfortable, a substantial raise hove in sight.

For two years (since the last raise) the black side of us had been running a race with the red side of us, until all of us were out of breath. But now at last the "black" was lengths ahead, the race was almost over, and on our last lap the thought of that raise was fresh air in our lungs and cold water on our lips. Our banner read not "Excelsior" but "50 Beautiful Dollars 50."

Fifty more dollars a month! Now we could do some of the things we'd planned for so long, and have a little margin besides. Six hundred more a year! Yippee!

First there was the car—that blue



car—that wonderful car that was to take us on magic weekends out of the city. That car was to make us feel so easy and successful at last, that car towards which we had budgeted many a weary mile. The salesman said twenty-three dollars a month would take care of it, and it was almost brand new.



Then there would be fifteen dollars a month that we were to put away against the possible rainy day, or as we hoped for a real vacation. The next time summer rolled around we could grab our precious two weeks and not have to put it off for some vague "manana" when we could stretch the monthly salary for railroad fares and a few holiday clothes.

And twenty-three plus fifteen left a twelve-dollar margin to turn the hydra-headed dragon of first-of-the-month into a playful puppy. A few dollars for a play here and there, or for some little thing we longed for. Yes, we were happy people, another step forward, another rung up, but then—

"Honey," my husband reminded me, "we've got to put twenty-five dollars a month into tax savings stamps to meet that darned income tax next March or go to jail."

I gasped, I had forgotten. We'd always dreaded March 15th, but the sum was never too large. Now with the new raise and the new tax rates it seemed colossal.

"Oh Lord" I added, "I've just finished comparing my food bills with last year's, and now I know why I'm always borrowing from something else to keep house. In spite of all this whitewashed talk about an eight per cent rise in the cost of living, mine is up from thirty-five to fifty-five a month at the same stores and living the same way. Well, there goes the savings account that was to have bought us a magic carpet for vacations and a back-log! But cheerio, my dearie, we've still got our margin, at least seven dollars of the twelve left—and that will help."

"Oh no we haven't! That new ten per cent tax on practically everything makes our dollars worth just ninety cents, and that poor little seven dollars won't anywhere

near make up the difference each month. We'll just have to face it, dear—six hundred dollars more, but no raise. We're really back-sliding, and I don't know whether it's more discouraging or a comfort to realize there are thousands and thousands of young people all over this great land of opportunity today in the same position as we are, who've worked like mad for a raise, got it, and are now watching it disappear

down the rat hole of inflation."

"Seems to me the bug-a-boo of inflation has been creeping up on us a long time. I'm a pretty good planner for this little family of ours, but how can you plan when next month this famous American dollar of ours may not be worth even what it is today? Heavens, come to think of it, it's not worth an awful lot, is it? I always thought a dollar was a dollar, no matter what, but along comes Roosevelt and it's only fifty-nine cents. Then comes now and it's only about fifty-three cents. Looks to me as if George Washington is about to slide all the way off the face of the dollar."

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"A slow sort of country," said the Queen, "now, here you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."

