

Decorative Novelties.

AN odd, and indeed a childish fancy, it would seem, is the placing glass balls—to which are attached silken strings—in the boudoir and drawing-room or *salle de reception*. These balls which are intended to imitate soap-bubbles—and are so light that they float up or nearly up to the ceiling—are, however, to some extent a source of amusement when a variation of the temperature of the apartment causes them to descend, for, on floating near, they are found to contain little fiends—*diables*—of paper, cork, or feather, and little dancing figures dressed like Turks and like Russians. A French fancy has improved upon the London idea, which filled the floating glass "air-ball" with little stars of metal and paper flowers.

A very pretty fancy is the imitation, in ware, colored to look like fire-defaced iron, of the antique models for vases, etc. The hue is not unlike bronze, as to the main surface, on which run colors, such as appear on iron when it begins to cool after being exposed to the action of fire. The sides of these vases are formed so as to look as though indented by accident, and the whole affair is a very taking imitation of the antique.

One could not exhaust in many pages the enumeration of the different ways in which the present fancy uses animals, reptiles, and birds in biscuit ware, china ware—so called—porcelain, parian, majolica, and faience. Dolphins, frogs, monkeys, cats, dogs, mice, rats, snakes, insects of almost every description, but especially beetles, and dragon-flies, lions, tigers, elephants, leopards, the tortoise, the alligator, and the lizard, ducks, peacocks, swans, guinea-fowls, and pheasants; all these are used to serve in some way for what may be called *useful* ornamentation. By this is meant that each article has, apart from its beauty or oddity, a use. Each animal, bird, or reptile serves as a receptacle for cigarettes, perfumery, jewels, or cards; then novelty being in the whimsicality of the shape, the ludicrousness of such or such an object being put to such or such a use, or, as when a peacock is made a jewel-case, a certain quaint fitness in its adaptation to the purpose. The utter absurdity of a swan harnessed with ribbon drawing a boat full of cigars; the preposterous notion of a lion's back as a place for depositing cigar ashes; the inimitable nonsensicality of four upright frogs escorting a staggering monkey, whose strength is supposed to desert him, especially as to the knees, under the enormous weight of the jewels in the case upon his back; the risibility of a solemn-faced toad under a palanquin, being fanned by a white mouse, and drawn by four Muscovy ducks—the palanquin being so constructed as to serve for a glove-box—all these define my meaning.

But for beauty, exquisite beauty of design and execution, and of the modern style, a pair of vases lately imported leave far behind anything of like kind that has been seen lately. The surface is gray, and resembles satin in gloss; the ware is exceedingly fine glass—there are many superb novelties in foreign glassware—and the design represents birds of the most brilliant hues perched upon autumn foliage, also of glowing color. But the peculiarity which makes these vases a triumph of art is that, owing to the rounded form of the vases themselves and the management of the color, both birds and boughs appear to be completely detached from any under surface, and to stand off from the body of the vase, thus giving an effect as to light and position of which description fails to convey an idea. It is really startling. You see the design, and then you see the groundwork, but neither appears to be incorporate with the other. *Touching* is believing.

Some years ago, brass fenders, reaching up so as to cover the whole grate or wood fire, and at-

tached to the sides of the mantel-piece—an excellent precaution, both against children falling into the flames and ladies' dresses catching the same—were introduced here, and, though expensive to a degree, were adopted.

Foreign caprice now demands that the high fender shall be gilt, and some of the very elegant ones are ornamented with a design, fabric on fabric, as, for example, a silver-wire fender on which is a silver-wire design representing a salamander. Another design has three small mirrors set into the body of the fender, apparently to reflect the apartments and furniture. Another, and by far the handsomest, has a design of a vine laden with flowers, and so placed that the fire in the grate seems to form the bright and fantastic blossoms and leaves that creep to the very top. But, of these fenders, the very plainest is still a handsome addition to the furniture of the apartment.

Afternoon Teas.

IN London, five o'clock tea is an institution as universal, as the use of the beverage itself. It is made necessary, or, at least, has its excuse, in the late hour (8 P. M.), at which dinner is served, and its frequent substitution for lunch after a late breakfast, utilizes it in a way which people who are accustomed to a different mode of living, would hardly understand. Afternoon tea in England, consists simply of tea, and very thin bread and butter, or small biscuits. No table is set, but the tea is brought in upon a waiter with the cups and saucers, and the slight edible before mentioned. The lady of the house pours the tea, and hands a cup to any member of the family, or any caller who happens to be present, and the gentle stimulant is found very welcome to break the long gap before dinner.

In this country, the dinner hour being earlier, and lunch a regular meal in the middle of the day, at least in large cities, the reason for the afternoon tea does not exist; but it has become very fashionable, within the past few years, to give afternoon receptions, at which tea is served, instead of the grand evening entertainment, which was considered obligatory ten years ago.

An evening party involves an amount of cost in a large city, which had become a tax few were able to bear. An abundant and elegant supper must be provided, several pieces of music engaged, floral decorations obtained, and enough people invited to get rid of all social obligations for a whole year to come. The greater the crush, and the less chance of seeing the hostess or exchanging a word with a friend, the greater the success; and with infinite expenditure of money, labor, and pains, the result afforded the smallest amount of satisfaction.

The afternoon reception, or kettledrum, as it is sometimes called, which has largely taken the place of these elaborate entertainments, costs much less, and is greatly more enjoyable. Tea is always a feature of the refreshments, and though there may be chicken salad, oysters, sandwiches, and the like, still, they are not essential, and are rarely partaken of. The majority of guests confine themselves to a cup of tea, or an ice, which will not interfere with their appetite for dinner. Of course ladies preponderate greatly at the afternoon teas, and it is possible that the growing dislike of gentlemen to attend a mere crush, without any chance for social interchange or enjoyment, has been one of the causes why these day entertainments have so rapidly grown into favor. Perhaps, also, the fact that ladies can go alone without a carriage, and in simpler toilette, has also had an influence. At any rate, the kettledrum or afternoon tea is now an established institution, and one of the most agreeable forms of social entertainment.

New Years Receptions.

So many ladies have adopted the method of receiving one day in every week, that it rather interferes with the time-honored observance of the first of January as a reception day. Still it ought to be remembered that in these informal day receptions, ladies mostly participate, gentlemen not having the time to take from their business for matters so unimportant. There is no reason, therefore, why they should interfere with the day set apart solely for the use of gentlemen, nor is it likely that anything but failure on their part to honor it with due formality, will cause its abandonment.

Regularly as the New Year comes round, announcements are made that the first of January has ceased to be regarded a social festival, yet, no sooner has the day actually arrived, than dwellings are swept and garnished, ladies put on their freshest toilettes, set tempting little tables, and receive more callers than ever before.

Still the form has greatly changed within the past twenty years. Tables are no longer elaborately set with substantial viands, but with light refreshments of a simple character. *Bouillon*, coffee, cake, sandwiches, pickled oysters, and glazed fruits, have taken the place of the boned turkeys, the hams, the pies, the chicken, and the tongue of former years. Many ladies, indeed, receive without offering refreshments at all, but this is rather a cheerless way, for, even though it has become quite common for gentlemen to refuse to partake of any, reserving their appetites very sensibly for a regular lunch, or dinner, at the house of some intimate friend, it is still desirable, or at least hospitable, to have something to offer, and serves as an occasional refecton not unacceptable to the ladies who are receiving, as they rarely have time for a regular meal, if their circle of acquaintance is large.

The most agreeable way of receiving on New Years day, and one that is becoming very common, is for several ladies to meet together at the house of one, and receive in company. The hostess has her house put in order, more or less decorated with vines, plants, or flowers, and prepares or orders beforehand the delicacies which are to furnish the refreshment-table. A small table is set the previous evening, if necessary—that is, if there are not trained servants to attend to it early in the morning—and upon this are placed plates, spoons, dishes, napkins, and whatever will be required, except the eatables. Of course there are many things which cannot be done until the morning of New Years day; and it is, therefore, necessary for those who have to depend upon themselves, to rise early enough to make their sandwiches, cut and fill their baskets with cake, arrange the fruit, and perform any other necessary duties in addition to the regular breakfast routine, and the important one of dressing for the occasion. All this must be done, and the hostess must be ready to receive her guests by half past ten o'clock at the latest; though it often happens that callers do not begin to put in an appearance before eleven. If the lady visitors are bright, intelligent, and helpful, and especially if one or two of them are musical, the day may pass delightfully, both for the hostess and her guests.

In small establishments, it is a very good way to have a turkey cooked the day before, and this with mince and pumpkin or apple pies, cranberry sauce, celery, and mashed potato, makes a very good dinner, to which a caller may be invited who is sufficiently intimate, if he happens to come in at the right time, and which can be prepared without embarrassing the operations of the staff of domestics, which is usually busily employed in waiting upon the door, and performing other incidental work.