

NEW IDEAS FOR TEAS.



TEAS have, for a good many generations now, been an important feature in our social life, and the descriptions of the tea-drinking in Mrs. Gaskell's delightful *Cranford* make one feel that even we do not make as much of such gatherings as we might. The teas in *Cranford* were not mere polite "four o'clockers," to use a new French coinage which they have adopted from us, but sociable meals of a sufficiently substantial character to carry the guests round until the next morning, with a sandwich or two and, maybe, a glass of home-made wine before leaving to help keep out the night air.

A good many folk who cannot invite people to dinner or supper can entertain their general friends to tea, and the

thing is to think of some diversion, some general scheme of entertainment that shall knit the company together and give point to the gathering when it is on a somewhat larger scale than usual.

A good many people are very scornful at the mention of the word "game," and yet games, of sorts, afford a good deal of fun if people will only throw themselves into the game with zest, and leave self-consciousness behind for the while. I have known a good deal of amusement got out of "rhyming." One starts a line in the metre of some well-known poem, and the next person has to add the next line, following the metre and the subject started, and so it goes on, each one contributing a line, or maybe two, if the couplet form, familiar in the poems of Pope and Goldsmith, be adopted, and the rhymed couplet is one of the easiest to manage. As for the subject itself, it should be something occupying people's thoughts at the moment, say the Coronation, the approaching holiday-time, or other matters in which all can take an interest. One of the party should write down the lines as they are given out, so that the poem of many poets can be read in its entirety, and very quaint and curious verses result from this kind of collaboration. The great thing in all such games is for the hostess to encourage her guests to make an effort. With our cold and lymphatic temperaments we want a good deal of stimulating into action, but once get us under weigh we go at quite a pace, and it is astonishing what an amount of talent seems to rise to the surface. There are other *mauvais quarts d'heure* than the one before dinner, but get over them and things brisk up, and before long everyone is gathered into the social net, and the impetus necessary can be given by the hostess or host.

A very successful "tea" was given recently, at which the writer was present, where the hostess required her guests to caricature any three of those present. Several protested "that they could not draw to save their lives," but paper and pencils were handed round and each one had to do his or her best, and some very laughable results came from the pencils of those who could not draw to save their lives. When each guest had drawn three portraits the papers were collected and then passed round for all to record their votes upon, by putting either naught or one, two or three, according to the merit of each drawing, those securing the greatest number of marks winning the prizes. These were two small pocket-books or metal mem-books with spring-hinged

covers which are kept closed by the pencil. A "booby" prize of a piece of india-rubber was given to the lowest score. This idea of a caricature tea was, so far as the writer is aware, an original one of the hostess, and it certainly went well. It put people in touch with one another, and by the time the drawings were finished and the tea itself came to be drunk, not one of those terrible pauses occurred which bring the hostess the crushing feeling that her gathering is slow and her guests are being bored instead of amused. As a detail it was found that shrimp paste sandwiches and cress sandwiches met with great favour, so it is evidently a good plan to provide something other than sweets for teas, for these soon cloy, whereas brown-bread sandwiches with bloater paste, cress or cucumber give the palate a zest for some of the sweets.

"Penny" teas are a novelty and afford amusement, and also exercise the ingenuity and give people something to do in their leisure time. The idea is a simple one—to show the greatest effect obtainable at an expenditure of one penny in materials, time and labour not being counted. I suppose more paper can be purchased for a penny than any other manufactured product, and it is astonishing what can be done with three-farthingsworth of paper and a farthingsworth of glue. The first prize at one such tea was given to a lady who made a model of a grocer's shop, every article being contrived out of brown and coloured paper. It would be permissible to purchase two or four separate pennyworths of materials and then take half or a quarter of the purchases for use, though it would be as well in that case to bring the surplus with you, so that the hostess can satisfy herself that the actual cost of the work submitted does not exceed one penny.

Wire, again, is cheap, and skilful fingers with a pair of pincers could contrive some artistic toast-forks and other articles out of a pennyworth of wire.

Wood, again, is cheap, and some good models and toys could be contrived out of, say, a halfpennyworth of wood, a farthingsworth of glue, and a farthingsworth of colour to decorate the wood with.

Out of a halfpennyworth of wire and ditto tissue paper an artistic lamp-shade could be contrived.

Those who can paint might buy a penny box of paints, and on the paper in which the box is wrapped paint a landscape or head. Such a picture would be a veritable *tour de force*, as the colours and brushes in a penny box leave much to be desired.

Those who have culinary skill could show what can be made for an expenditure of one penny. I imagine a farthingsworth of rice, a farthingsworth of sugar, and a halfpennyworth of milk would make a pudding. The cost of firing would not be counted, but if something ought to be allowed for this, then the rice and sugar should cost a farthing, fire a farthing, and milk a halfpenny.

Don't be scornful, gentle reader, at such suggestions, for after all a difficulty so many hostesses encounter is what to do with people when you have gathered them together? and it is one way out of the *impasse* to suggest all doing the same thing at the same time. And even if the "thing" be as trite or ordinary as those above, it will at least serve to start the social machine; it will do something to overcome the inertia that affects us too often; and don't let your enthusiasm be damped by the critic, who is, as Byron said, "ready made." The croaker is soon silenced when he sees that you are not to be turned aside from your purpose by his cynical *douche*. The hostess, with a little tact and the courage to carry her programme through, can do much to make her gatherings delightful half-hours instead of dreary interludes in which the guests say spiteful things about her and her friends.

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