

LADIES' TEA SHOP LONDON.

A. GORDON.

BY HORACE WYNDHAM.

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY Y. A. D. LLUELLYN.

OFFICIATING at the tea-table, a lady seems to be in her natural sphere, and it is for this reason probably that so substantial a measure of success has attended the efforts of those ladies who have elected to professionally associate themselves with this work.

For easily appreciable reasons it is in Bond Street and its immediate vicinity that the best-known establishments of this nature are to be found. The one which has the honour of being the pioneer of the movement is situated at No. 90, and is known as the Ladies' Own Tea Association, Ltd. Like many another flourishing firm, this has arisen from remarkably humble beginnings. Just seven years ago two ladies—the Misses Lambert and Bartlett—bethought themselves of acting as London agents for a friend of theirs who owned a tea estate in Ceylon. Accordingly they took a small room over a glove-shop a few doors from No. 90, where they occupied themselves with making the tea up into attractive packets and retailing these to chance customers.

To buy tea without tasting it, however, is very much on a par with that unprofitable transaction commonly known as purchasing "a pig in a poke." Accordingly a second room, where prospective clients might be enabled to test the virtues of the brand for which their patronage was sought, soon

became a necessity. Such a one was promptly acquired and fitted up with a number of little tables and easy-chairs, and made thoroughly comfortable. To such an extent was the privilege of using this room taken advantage of by customers that a few weeks after the inauguration of the business a move to larger and more commodious premises became absolutely imperative. Thereupon Miss Lambert and her partner were in something of a



THE LADIES' OWN TEA ASSOCIATION: THE PACKING-ROOM.

quandary, for Bond Street rents are practically prohibitive to any but the longest purses. Fortunately, however, a chance presently offered itself. The ground floor at No. 90 became vacant, and the founders of the Ladies' Own Tea Association, Ltd. (which by this time had been formed into a company) secured the premises for three months. So successful was the result of the experiment that the Association has remained in these premises for considerably over six years, despite the fact that the annual rental for their three rooms is £450.

In response to a few inquiries, Miss Bartlett told me that as many as two hundred persons sometimes come in for tea and light refreshments in the course of a single afternoon.

I asked if men availed themselves of the establishment to any marked extent.

"Very much so," she replied. "They are almost my best customers. Men are just as fond of their five-o'clock tea as are women."

A question about the staff employed in ministering to the wants of the Association's

patrons elicited the information that, with the exception of three women servants to do the rough work of knife-cleaning and plate-washing, etc., it was composed entirely of ladies.

"Will you give me some particulars?" I requested.

"Certainly," answered Miss Lambert. "We have a secretary and book-keeper, two directresses, two waitresses, and another lady who acts as cashier. We have no men at all—except as customers."

"And what are your working-hours?"

"From 10 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. Customers, however, seldom come in until 12.30. We don't do much in the way of luncheons though, as our business is one that is chiefly connected with afternoon tea."

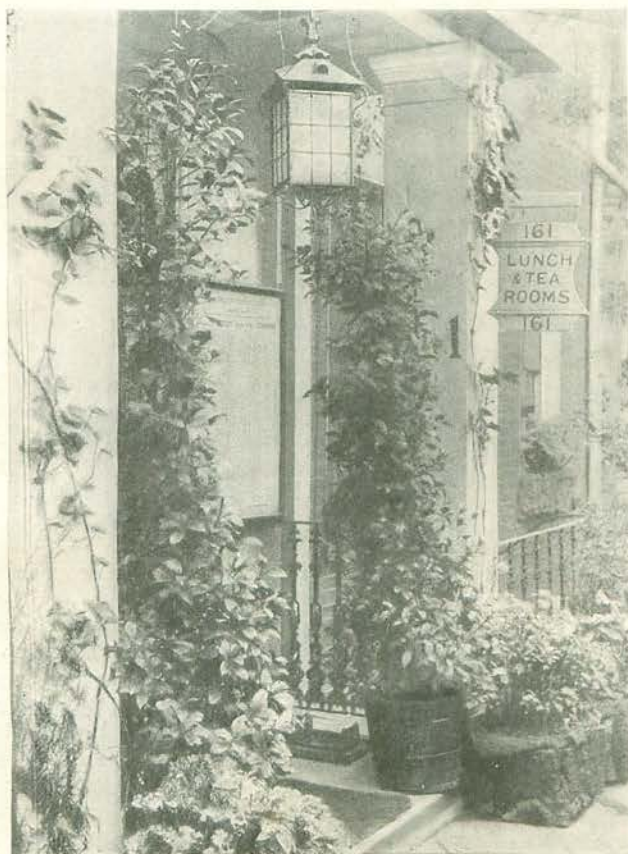
I put a question about the assistants.

"They are the daughters of people of position," was the reply, "and come to me more for the sake of obtaining occupation than anything else, I fancy. Then, of course, the question of remuneration is undoubtedly a consideration. My head-waitress has twenty-

three shillings a week and two mornings off. The other, who only comes for half a day, has fifteen shillings a week. They both have lunch and tea on the premises, and I also provide them with their overalls."

Instinctively it occurred to me that this went far to solve the problem of "what to do with our daughters." Perhaps Miss Lambert read my thoughts, for her next remark was on the subject of conducting a similar business in other parts of London.

"A good many ladies come to me," she observed, "for information about conducting such an establishment as this. If I think them suited to the work I accept them as pupils and give them a course of tuition in the whole subject—book-keeping, buying provisions, arranging menus, waiting on customers, etc., etc. The period of instruction is usually one of three months. For this they pay me a premium and give their services. During the last year I have successfully trained a number of ladies, who have since started similar businesses elsewhere. The only provision that I make



MRS. ROBERTSON'S ROOMS: ENTRANCE.

is that they do not open an establishment within one mile of 90, New Bond Street."

At No. 161, New Bond Street, Mrs. Robertson conducts a similar business. Started some three and a half years ago, it rapidly gained a great deal of support, and is now firmly established in the public's estimation.

On the right of the hall is the luncheon-room, where two *table d'hôte* luncheons, at three shillings and two shillings respectively, are served daily. Meals can also be had here *à la carte*. When the season is in progress, it often happens that as many as seventy people lunch here between the hours of 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. The French chef who presides in the kitchens or the establishment has thus plenty of opportunity for the exercise of his art.

Going upstairs, one comes to the "Pink Room," where afternoon tea is a great institution. Dainty little tables, conveniently made for two persons, are scattered about at intervals, and music, supplied by a pianist and violinist, lend an added charm to the pleasures of "the five o'clock."

On the other side of the landing is a comfortably fitted-up library and reading-room. Adjoining this is the smoking-balcony, perhaps the greatest attraction of the establishment. Its arrangement has been attended to by Mrs. Robertson in person, and the result has been most satisfactory. Sheltered from the sun and wind by a glass roof and sides, it forms an ideal retreat on a hot summer afternoon. A scarlet awning overhead keeps off the glare of the sun, and the side wall that connects it with the main body of the building is artistically draped with Oriental hangings. An Indian matting forms the carpet, and the bamboo tables on which tea is served complete the Eastern appearance of this *annexe*. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the balcony is immensely patronised.

Having seen and duly admired the different rooms, I asked Mrs. Robertson to tell me something about the administration of the business.

"Well, I started with a very modest staff indeed," she replied, "but I've had to increase it of late."

I asked for detailed information. Mrs. Robertson supplied it.

"My two daughters and two other lady waitresses help me in the performance of the



THE SMOKING-LOUNGE AND -BALCONY AT MRS. ROBERTSON'S.

main part of the work," was the answer. "In the kitchens we have two chefs and a couple of women. The rough cleaning, etc., is done by a boy."

"Then you don't taboo men here?" I asked.

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Robertson. "We cultivate him as much as possible. He is our best friend: not only does he come and lunch here daily, but he brings other people as well. No establishment like this can thrive on its lady customers alone."

Rejoiced to find that the sterner sex had its uses after all, I asked for information about the day's work.

"As a rule," was the reply, "we commence business at noon and close at 7 p.m. People have been known, however, to ask for breakfast at 10.30. a.m. It is not until the afternoon though, that they arrive in any force; then they simply come by the hundred. As you may imagine, my waitresses are kept fairly busy."

"Do you find any difficulty," I inquired, "in obtaining assistants?"

"Not the slightest," returned Mrs. Robertson [emphatically]. "As a matter of fact, I am simply besieged with applications from

prospective candidates for these posts. Every day brings me letters by the shoal from girls who want to serve in the tea- and luncheon-rooms."

I asked if any schemes for still further increasing the attractions of the Country House were in the air.

"Oh yes," was the answer; "we never stand still here. I am always making improvements of some sort, and my next venture is to take the shape of a *table d'hôte* dinner. A wine license, however, will have to be obtained before arrangements can be completed."

It is difficult to conceive a better situation for a ladies' tea-shop in London than that in which "The Bungalow" has been established. This is at No. 21, Conduit Street, W., a locality which possesses natural advantages of a particularly substantial nature. Midway between Bond Street and Regent Street, it consequently obtains the patronage of the *habitués* of each of these thoroughfares. This is considerable, as is proved by the crowd who throng the charming rooms from luncheon to tea-time daily. Indeed, at certain times of the year it is often difficult to find a vacant seat here at four o'clock in the afternoon. Every table seems to be occupied twice over, and were the establishment twice the size it would scarcely suffice for the needs of the numerous customers who are anxious to patronise it.

The decoration and arrangement of the interior are fully in accordance with the name of the house. The word "bungalow" naturally suggests Eastern ideas of comfort and adornment, and thus the Oriental hangings and rugs, etc., together with the trays of Benares ware, and Chinese vases and screens, etc., that are found here strike the visitor as being singularly appropriate. Some tall palms and a number of bowls of flowers also materially add to the general attractiveness of the rooms. These are three in number, and open one into the other.

In response to my inquiries I learned that "The Bungalow" had been in existence in its present quarters for about four years. It was in June, 1899, however, that the business came into the hands of its present owner, Mrs. Fenton Greenall. Previous to her taking over the reins of management, the establishment had been conducted by the Hon. Mrs. Charles Forester (then Miss Mackenzie). Mrs. Greenall told me that she acquired the business for the sake of her two daughters, who assist her by waiting on her numerous customers. In the height of the season, however, additional help has to be obtained. I asked if any difficulty was experienced in securing this, and learned, as I expected, that this was by no means the case.

"I get a perfect host of offers every day,"



THE LUNCHEON-ROOM AT MRS. ROBERTSON'S.

was the answer. "Most of them come from ladies who, having had luncheon or tea here, think it would be a pleasant occupation for them. As they know nothing whatever about the work they offer to perform, I am naturally unable to avail myself of their services. I assure you the art of waiting in a tea-room has to be learned."

"For how many hours a day are you open?" I inquired.

"Practically we are at work from noon till seven o'clock in the evening," replied Mrs. Greenall. "Early lunchers arrive about half-past twelve or one o'clock, and from four o'clock to half-past six we are extremely busy serving teas. Sometimes we have eighty or ninety customers to attend to in this interval."

I asked if they were all members of the softer sex.

"Oh dear no!" was the answer; "a great many men come here every afternoon. It is chiefly, however, for tea.

AFTERNOON TEA AT "THE BUNGALOW."



"Do you let them smoke?" I asked, thinking how an added charm would be lent to a cigarette in these pleasant surroundings.

"Certainly — in this upper room, after luncheon is over. I even go the length of keeping a brand of special cigarettes for the use of my men customers."

"I am sure the privilege is appreciated," I returned. "Do you also provide music?"

"No," answered Mrs. Greenall with decision. "I always think that music is out of place except in a concert-room. I'm convinced, too, that the majority of my



A CORNER AT "THE BUNGALOW."

At this time quite a number of them drop in to meet their friends, who may have been shopping in the neighbourhood. Men are just as fond of afternoon tea as are ladies."

customers take the same view of the case, as whenever I've mentioned the matter they have always told me that they much prefer to be able to hear their friends' conversation."