

# THE POSSIBILITIES OF ENTERTAINING.

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*Illustrated by D. B. WATERS.*

SUCH a limitless vista is opened out by the title I have selected that, appalled at the task, I am almost tempted to erase the word "possibilities" and substitute "limitations." To handle limitations with any interest or success is, however, reserved to a master hand, and on consideration I think it better not to court comparison.

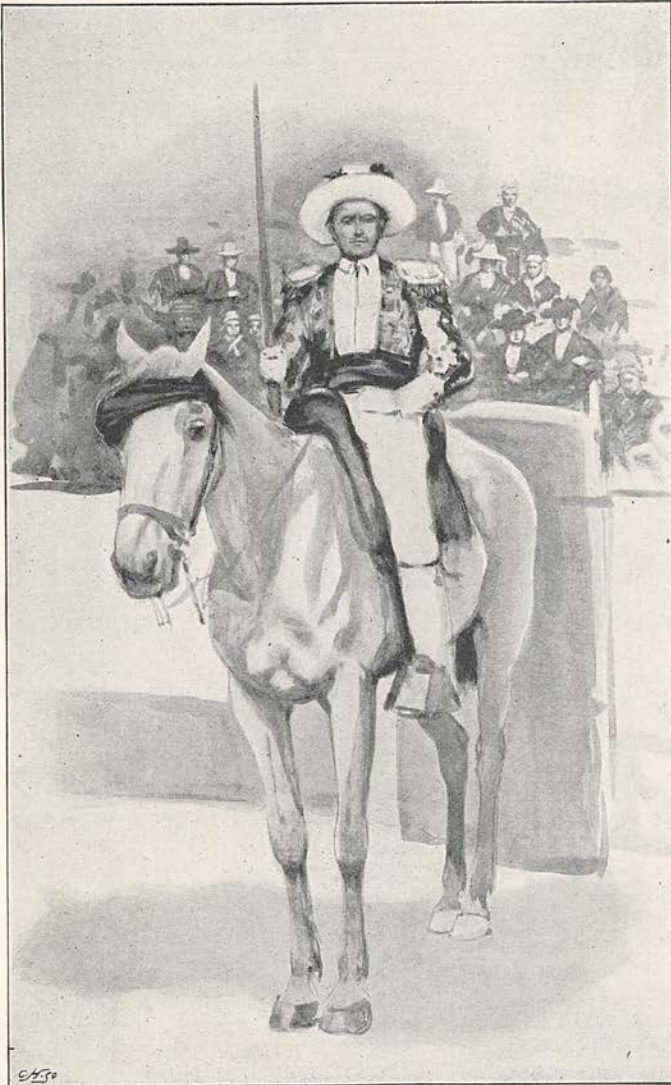
There is no more tantalising attribute of the art of entertaining than its uncertainty. Most things, we are told, have their price. Amusement certainly has, and a very heavy price, too, sometimes. But the payment is not always possible by the mere signing of a cheque, for thousands may be spent in an evening for the entertainment of those who nevertheless may be bored to excess and uninterested in anything save the possibilities of an early de-

parture. On the other hand, the most trivial expenditure, under a combination of happy circumstances, may conduce to the diversion of the most fastidious.

There are not, perhaps, two individuals whose ideas wholly coincide on the subject

of amusement. What is pleasing to one is boring to another. Personal diversions, like national amusements, depend very much on the characteristics of those who indulge in them. Bull-fighting, with its cruel accessories, appeals to an excitable Southern nation in a way which it is difficult for Northerners to realise.

There is no doubt that a man's pleasures are to a great extent an index to his character. Nero enjoyed watching the sufferings of the Christian martyrs; he fiddled when Rome was burning, and we may presume that it



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amused him to do so, otherwise it is difficult to realise the reason for such an act of supreme lunacy. It amused Cromwell to

class I should prefer to entertain, I should unhesitatingly reply, "Kings for choice." I am quite aware that such an answer would



"The five-hundred-pound bride cake."

indulge in horse-play with another regicide as together they signed the death warrant of King Charles. Endless is the list of those who, like them, "hated all innocent enjoyments." On the other hand, some of the greatest intellects have sought out simple and harmless pleasures.

On the whole I am inclined to think that great men are easier to amuse than small ones. If I were given a selection as to the

place my name on the list of snobs, which in itself would further my ambitions in the direction of entertaining royalty, for what

could possibly entertain a king more than a snob?

Kings and queens are so easy to entertain. And by kings and queens I mean the whole race of men and women who, whatever their calling, reign paramount above all others in their own sphere. Gladstone, Irving, Patti, Tennyson, Leighton, Tolstoi, Ruskin, Bismarck—these and a score of other names occur to one instinctively as the subject of royal rulers claim our attention. Who shall deny to Kipling his right to reign supreme in the interpretation of the subtle language of the Indian jungle, or the spirit of the barrack room? Are there any who grudged the Laureate's crown to England's great poet who "crossed the bar" and left a nation mourning him?

There is no doubt that the power of entertaining should not be dependent upon the state of the exchequer, but there is equally no doubt that to a great extent it is. Those who lay themselves out as entertainers have a very natural tendency to secure for their guests "a new thing," a process which is praiseworthy but costly in the extreme. The expenditure lavished upon "Mrs. L.'s little dance," and "Lady C.'s cycling breakfast," the £2000 spent on flowers at a recent wedding, the £500 bride cake, the 30,000 francs' worth of presents at a cotillon, the private trains, yachts, balloons, motor carriages, cycles, coaches, steamers, houseboats, hunters, etc.—not to mention the more ordinary means of locomotion which now form the addition to many smart houses—and the stations, cycle-tracks, boathouses, stables, etc., which these necessitate, are enough to make the humbler individual bent on sociable hospitality slink back into his or her shell, appalled at the hopeless competition.

For these I have a consoling word. Let them not despair. It is possible for one's guests to be bored to extinction in the largest houseboat on the river, and yet to amuse themselves freely in a leaky old punt. I have seen a bishop thoroughly enjoy a game of "animal grab," and I have heard the Governor of one of our Colonies join contentedly in the chorus of "Three Little Pigs." It amused him very much, and created a great impression on his hearers, as he only got one correct note on an average out of every half-dozen. I have seen an attorney-general—yes, since you will have it, Sir Richard Webster—draw pigs with his eyes shut—lively, active-looking pigs, with tails like a well-made cork-

screw, and eyes dotted in with a precision that almost hinted at previous practice—for of course, as everyone knows, though there is an art in drawing, blindfolded, a pig, to place his eye in the right place requires science, distinct science. Thus it will be seen that entertaining does not always cost fortunes, and with a game that has so many chances the rich and poor may alike make their bids with a fairly equal prospect of success.

Entertaining oneself is perhaps less difficult than amusing others, but it is a bad habit to fall into if we are ambitious to pose as good hosts. One of the most original experiments in the form of self-entertainment that ever came under my notice was the following: A friend of mine, with a talent for music and mischief combined, while on a visit to a bishop, disguised himself as a negro minstrel, hired a donkey-cart, and with a banjo "slung behind him," went off to the local races. Here he made a good harvest, chiefly from personal friends, and after an exciting day, was returning to get rid of his disguise when he came face to face with his host. Summoning all his courage, he dashed through a verse of a plantation song in his best style, and then politely held out his hat for a contribution. It may be that the prelate in question was more than usually genial—I think he was—or it may be that the bishops make a rule of always contributing to the collection; in any case, his lordship gave the musician some coppers, and it is difficult to say who entertained the other most. The quondam nigger-minstrel has since become a prime minister and a friend of princes; but if this should meet his eye, let him rest assured that I shall not divulge his name—so long, at least, as his politics remain as sound as they are now.

"How to entertain" would be an impossible title to do justice to; but I cannot help coming to the conclusion that we are all more likely to succeed by putting forth our best efforts of intellect and most amiable qualities of character ungrudgingly. Thus we shall be less likely to court failure. We all know the man who says, "Wretched dinner: beastly bad cigars!" just out of earshot of his host or hostess. But he cannot be counted a person to entertain; he is merely a creature to be fed, and his proper sphere is a restaurant, where he can—and usually does—quarrel about the bill and bully the waiter. But these are exceptions.

Tea is such a usual accompaniment to

English milder forms of entertainment, that it is difficult to realise that in any part of the United Kingdom it should be impossible to procure. On the occasion of the visit of the Sultan of Johore to Woolwich Arsenal,

told off to escort him if he would care to have some refreshment, and he replied that he would like some tea. After a long period of waiting, a soldier servant appeared on the scene with two cups and a vessel closely



“Wretched dinner: beastly bad cigars!”

a most amusing scene took place in this connection. The Sultan arrived somewhat unexpectedly with a suite of about a dozen gentlemen. After visiting various parts of the Arsenal, he was asked by the two officers

resembling a bedroom hot-water jug, the latter containing tea. One of the officers gave a hurried injunction to “get some more cups,” whereupon the man answered, “That’s all you’ve got, sir,” and retired, only to be called back and asked why he had not brought any milk—to which he responded in an aggrieved voice, “You don’t ’ave none other days, sir.” The situation may be better imagined than described. The two hosts were ready to sink through the floor with confusion, for even if the Sultan were content with one saucerless cup of milkless tea, the twelve gentlemen of the suite could scarcely be expected to share the other. But the worst was yet to come, for after another painful interval the servant, somewhat ruffled no doubt at what appeared to him injustice, returned to say that he hadn’t any money. As fate would have it, neither of the Sultan’s hosts had a single copper handy! But the Sultan, after a little search, produced twopence and handed over the amount with a bland smile that absolutely prohibited

the supposition of anything unusual. Presently more cups were borrowed and the milk duly procured; but it was the Sultan who saved the situation—wherefore, as I have said, let us for choice entertain kings.