

London Letter.

AN OLD-FASHIONED WINTER -1890-91,

I have always had my own private suspicions as to the good old days so loudly vaunted by my elderly friends and relations. Suspicions due partly perhaps to the sceptical tendencies of the age, but partly founded on my own observation and experience. Have you ever lived for instance in an old house? I have spent some weeks in one both in summer and in winter, and I fail to see where it makes its points in comparison with one of my own age "with every modern appliance." There are long ghostly corridors down which the wind "soughs" with a blood curdling rustle in the long wintry evenings: enormous bedrooms the corners of which are masked in horrid gloom: the ceilings are low, so low that my best beaver never survives the first week; the windows rattle and the ivy strings flap across the panes—altogether its a fine situation for an uneasy spirit or a disappointed human who wants to hug his misery, but for myself I find it too exciting. I always thought coaches would suit my constitutional indolence and love of the picturesque better than railway cars, and I rather prided myself on being a follower of Ruskin's thoughts in this respects, until one day I came across an old fellow bent nearly double, and was told that for 50 years he had never seen the sky since one fatal evening he had travelled on the top of one of those old coaches in the rain leaning against a bale of hay sodden and soaked like himself. Think moreover of the two pronged steel forks, that willow pattern that haunted my childhood's dreams, and those primitive and barbarous notions as to the proper function of the birch twigs. But I didn't mean to write of these things, but of the good old-fashioned winter in former years in my ignorance and trustfulness I sighed for such a winter with thoughts of tobogganning, skating, curling, sleighing, but I little knew for what I sighed: for the Gods have sent us this year a specimen of that same old-fashioned winter, and so I have become a pagan for evermore. I have three chief complaints to make, and these minor ones against this spirit of the departed years, there is too much snow, there is too much wind, and there is too much fog: anyone of these is bad enough, but together they form a very trinity of woe.

I had always understood that our hardy forefathers buttoned up their coats and strode out in keen enjoyment of the frosty air, well I tried it and pretended to myself that I liked it, but my guileless nature is unsuited to hypocrisy and so a thick fog came on and I found myself on a common many miles across, and ten miles or so from home, that was my first experience, and I used up most of my accumulated stock of bad language in trying to find a way out. Then I remembered that in those bad old days they used to get up skating and sleighing parties, and have no and of fun pic-nicing in mid-winter. Well, I deluded some friends into joining with me in this second experiment, (they count me their friend no longer), and we drove out in waggonettes to a large pond: and a bitter east wind waltzed up to see us start and insisted on racing us all along the road and won, hands down, every time. Never mind, said I, we shall soon get warm skating: Rash youth, I little knew what fate had still in store for us. That pond had thawed a little the night before and the beasts of the field had walked over it in every direction and their footprints had remained in the ice, and oh! we did enjoy skating over them. My friends soon abandoned the attempt and got warm by playing Aunt Sally with snowballs. I did not get warm for they were kind enough to pretend that I was their sainted relative in question. For three weeks since then we have not seen the sun; fog and snow, snow and fog and the awful

prospect of the thaw to come: trade stopped, amusements impossible, doctors alone cheerful, population decreasing, tempers spoilt. —oh! is there no demand in your country for a good old-fashioned English winter, no reasonable offer refused! you may have it for nothing if you'll only cart it away! G. E. G.

The first Drawing Room of the season will be held by the Queen in person on Wednesday, March 4. This will really be the most important of all the Drawing Rooms which will be held during the year, for at it the Queen will go through the ceremony of formally receiving the representatives of the Powers. In consequence all the leading diplomatists, their respective staffs, and the ladies belonging to the various embassies and legations, will attend in order to make their bow to the Queen. On this occasion, moreover, the representatives of each nation will present any additions to their staff or any distinguished compatriots of theirs who may happen to be visiting London in the spring.

The regulations for a Drawing Room are drawn up every year by the Queen herself, and may be obtained at the Lord Chamberlain's Office in the Stable Yard of St. James' Palace. They contain most precise directions with regard to style of the dress (which must be *decollete* after the fashion of full ball dress), the length of the train (which must not be under a certain limit, though it may be as much over as the wearer pleases), the number and mode of wearing the feathers in the hair, and other details, which must be observed precisely by all who attend the Drawing Room, unless they wish to run the risk of being peremptorily requested to withdraw.

The Drawing Room is really a survival or modern development of the old custom of the Sovereign to dine in public, and to allow all properly qualified persons having sufficient quarterings or powerful protection to come and go about the palace at their pleasure during the dinner. These privileged people could also attend the royal reception which was held later on in the evening, and could gamble at *le jeu du roi*, which was literally a public gaming-table, kept for the king by some great nobleman who was honored with the king's confidence. In the reign of Charles II. the proceedings at Court were so low that they became a public scandal.

There was no very marked change, however, except in decorum until the reign of George III., when the King's evenings were attenuated to a reception, to which the Court were admitted, while the Royal Family amused themselves by playing cards. These receptions gradually diminished in number, and were, at the end of the reign, transferred to the morning, a practice which was confirmed by George IV., and during the present reign, has developed into the Drawing Room. Since the death of Prince Albert moreover, the Queen has almost completely retired from public life, and, in consequence, some four or five annual Drawing Rooms have taken the place of the more frequent and less formal functions of the earlier part of the reign, and the result may be seen in the overgrown dimensions of the crowd which swarm to the palace on each of these occasions.

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