

deceptive dwellings, as likely as not to tumble about our ears one day when we least expect it, after costing us a fortune for repairs. A thorough examination of every hole and corner of a house before taking it is of course in some measure a preventive of evils to come, but it does not always avert them. Who has not, at some time or other, experienced the discomfort of a house which seems perfect in summer—cool, shady, and well-ventilated—and which, on the first approach of winter, gives evidence that its northern aspect is anything but wholesome; that the fires will not burn readily, and, when they do burn, the rooms will never get warm; while there are draughts from all the windows and doors, ominous patches of damp appear on the walls, and articles of dress laid by in trunks or drawers get mildewed and spoilt.

A frequent source of household worry, for which servants are not wholly responsible, is the spring epidemic of beetles, cockroaches, and sometimes of smaller pests as well, which resist all efforts at extermination, and which no amount of cleanliness can entirely subdue. In a seaside house on rather a damp soil, we were once for two successive springs literally eaten up alive by beetles; every remedy known was tried over and over again without success, and at last the kitchen (which was found to be their favourite resort) had to be pulled down, and boiling water poured in bucketsful upon the swarming black colony behind it, which violent measure set them to rest effectually for some time, though not for ever, as the next occupants of the house complained of being much troubled with what their cook called "beadles," both up-stairs and down. I will not touch upon the smaller household pests, as thorough and regular cleansing and scouring of the bedrooms (except in the case of very old houses) will render their existence impossible. But rats and mice are often to be found in dwellings where one would least expect them, and very difficult it often is to get rid of them. When rat-traps and the cat's exertions fail to drive them away, they may often be traced to some hole in the drains, which should be examined and stopped up. Perhaps drainage, in all its varied forms of imperfection, is one of the most serious of all household worries. It certainly needs constant inspection and supervision, and too much care cannot be taken to keep it in proper order, and to investigate without delay the source of any perceptible bad odour in any part of the dwelling.

I am coming now to a worry familiar enough to all housewives, and one of daily recurrence—I mean the worry of tradespeople calling for orders early in the morning, before one has collected one's scattered faculties or remembered what is in the larder. We most of us know the feeling of hopelessness when, having just finished breakfast, rather later than usual, and having an accumulation of morning business on our hands, including an important note to be written at once, our housemaid or parlourmaid comes in, saying, "Please, ma'am, the butcher has called for orders;" or, "Please, ma'am, the greengrocer's boy is waiting;" or, "Please, ma'am, is there any orders for the grocer?" How irritated and annoyed we feel at the necessary interruption, for which we ought to have been prepared; and how inclined to order the butcher, as a friend of mine once did, "To go away and never bother her again!" and leave dinner to the winds. This proceeding, however, being impracticable, the only way to confront these tiresome "Please ma'ams" in the morning is to adopt the methodical plan of writing down on a little housekeeping slate overnight everything that is likely to be wanted for the next day. If possible, it is well to see the cook the last thing before she goes to bed; but, as in many cases this would be a difficulty, the memory must be exercised a little, and the time spent in the evening would be time saved for the morning. I have heard of a lady who made a point of visiting her larder every night to see exactly what was there, and arrange her *menu* for the following day's breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Of course she was no favourite with her cook in consequence, but she found it an excellent safeguard against scraps being surreptitiously disposed of, as well as a great help to her memory. It is the little fidgeting things which are the most difficult to remember, and constant habit alone can accustom one's mind to dealing with them methodically and patiently without entirely setting greater matters aside.—*Queen*.

ÆSTHETIC TEAS.

Our ancestors drank spirits, our grandmothers drank beer, we drink tea. It is probable that our nature is largely modified by the articles of our daily diet; and the extensive fashion of tea-drinking cannot but leave traces on the history of morals. We are now becoming more sensitive, more highly-strung, more nervous—tea is exciting; our appetites, as a rule, are more jaded, more capricious—tea is a stimulant; our refined natures turn from gross and heavy feeding—tea is a delicate drink, can be served in pretty china, and among luxurious and artistic surroundings; we are intellectually inclined—tea is a solace to the brain; our poetry is full of the weak complaining passion, the outspring and yearning, the purely feminine constitution of the mind—tea is essentially a woman's drink. Thus, to the class who eschew realism and the plain practical bareness of ordinary life; who desire to be intense; who look upon a sickly, sentimental, cloying kind of art as the sole aim and object of existence; who sob, and burn, and quiver; and, though pale and haggard in

appearance, yet contrive to enjoy a very fair amount of pleasure and good health—to this large and ever-growing class, tea, with its concomitants of idleness, talk, and beauty necessarily appeals very strongly.

No doubt tea-drinking is a fashion in all classes; from the washerwoman, who balances her saucer between her finger and thumb, and gulps down draughts of boiling liquid in the intervals of wringing and soap-suds, to the tousey-headed lady's maid, who apes her mistress in jersey and swaddled-up throat, and who is supposed to have developed an entirely new disease, formerly unknown to doctors, solely from over-indulgence in tea. But the peculiar phase of this sacred rite to which we refer at present is confined to those within the veil, or to the æsthetic clique. For many reasons, afternoon tea is best suited to them. People who talk of the nectar of the gods quite familiarly, as if it could be got round the corner like porter in a pewter pot for fourpence; whose greatest sorrows are a crumpled roseleaf; who are ethereal in their tastes and feelings, and would die if they lived in a room that was not hung with saffron or olive-green, and garnished with Morris chintzes, cannot well be imagined sitting down to a piece of boiled beef with suet dumpling, or even to roast lamb and green peas. Dinner composed of butterflies' wings and syrup of passion-flowers is not an easy combination; though we did hear of a repast the other day which was so delicious that the guests, after having eaten for an hour and a half, rose up hungry, and where nothing more substantial than a sweetbread was served; but, as a rule, tea-drinking possesses all the advantages and none of the drawbacks.

Let it not be lightly supposed, however, that an æsthetic tea merely means a few friends, a little hot water, and some teacups. It is a far more sacred affair—a kind of agape, or love-feast. It is given by the elect to the initiated, and one discordant element would break the magic circle. The rooms are always shaded. Darkness seems to cling, as in the Eleusinian mysteries, to the celebration of the mystic revels. Sweet scents, also, must pervade the air, for smell is the sense specially cultivated by æstheticism; the influence of colours on the nervous system being a branch of physiology highly interesting to those who have pursued it. Then, again, the tones must be low, subdued, and sad; harsh loud laughter and very buoyant spirits are vulgar. A kind of suffering melancholy hangs over the guests, as if they were rather assembled to mourn the dead than rejoice over the living.—Music, of course, is permitted, but it must be of the modern order,—passionful, soul-stirring, incomprehensible; the reciting of Swinburne's or Rossetti's poetry, or even that of some aspiring, long-haired, taper-fingered, waxy-complexioned member of the party, may be indulged in, but the poetry must never incline to gaiety or even to satire; it must be slow, sweet, and solemn, a rippling over of the heart's desire. Some houses there are of which the very atmosphere is impregnated with art; unfinished sketches and old prints litter the tables; an oil-sketch is propped against an easel; before it stands a bunch of flowers. Every guest uses expressions stolen from the colour-box; eyes are cobalt; tresses are burnt sienna; the type of face is Greek or Roman. All things are classified by technical names, much as the humblest sweetest-smelling little flower rejoices in a fine Latin appellation, and to the gardener is bulbous or umbelliferous, or coniferous rather than fragrant and lovely.—*World*.

A LIFE'S OPPORTUNITY.

BY FELTON LEA.

(Continued.)

"Why, Violet," said a cheery voice, and Noel kissed her white cheek. As he leaned over her he saw the tears dropping silently on the pillow. "I shall have to take you to task if you lie here much longer. Aunt Jane, what do you advise for this young lady?"

"Well, Noel, it is a pity Violet does not rouse herself. I think she frets over losing the baby," she added in a whisper, "and would be better for a change. I want her to go back with me to the Rector. You do not look very strong yourself," she added.

"I am not as strong as I need to be," he said lightly, then turning to Violet, said gravely, but with all his old loving tenderness, "Whatever sorrow or disappointment you have to bear, mind it does not make you selfish."

"Noel," she said catching hold of his hand, "am I getting to be that?"

"Only because you are feeding upon regret instead of living upon faith," was the faithful, loving answer.

"If you were always by to warn me of danger," she said tearfully, "mine would not be such a life of mistakes."

"My dear sister, it is not well to hold too securely to earthly supports; the best are but frail. Do you make sure of the One that knows no change and all errors—all disappointed hopes will help work for your highest good."

Knowing her sensitive nature, Noel would not let her think he was alluding to her life's burden, so he spoke of the loss of the child as if that were the lesson he would drive home. But it roused and gave a new life to her suddenly formed purpose to leave the unalterable past, and to win Brandon for the future by example instead of trusting to precept.

"What made you say you did not feel strong?" she asked anxiously, still holding tightly to his hand.

"Because I felt so," he answered laughing "I hope our intended visit to Carlyon will make me so."

"When do you go?" she asked wistfully.