

Our "Tea" at Paradise Park

By CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS.

AN afternoon tea is not the sort of thing that the average man will walk a hundred miles to attend.

I do not deny that many most delightful women go to and are to be found at afternoon teas, while many a man out of a job or too wealthy to need one or too lazy to hold one down for more than half a day diurnally, flits from afternoon tea to afternoon tea, but as a general statement, that will admit of whatever qualifications the reader may wish to apply, an afternoon tea does not compare to either soccer or basket-ball, except that the push is sometimes as great in a given spot as at either of those games.

After we had lived in Paradise Park a year or two, and Mrs Dolten had accepted the hospitality of many women in New York who have the afternoon-tea habit—although I was saved from accompanying her to these feminine fests by pressure of business in the life insurance office that enables me to pay my bills—more or less tardily—she took it into her head that it was up to her—to use a modern phrase and thus help the language to live—to give a tea in return for all the green cakes and lemon-flavoured deceptions she had absorbed in many a fifteen-foot parlour east and west of Central Park.

I told her that I thought it would be a good thing, that I was rather proud of our handsome little house that I had been paying for two years, and that no one could enter its sun-kissed rooms and not wish she lived in the suburbs and had fresh eggs for breakfast from her own hen-yard, instead of paying sixty cents a dozen for—explosives.

"We'll give two, on the first and third Thursdays in February, and I'll send out a hundred invitations," said my wife as we sat in our roomy living room and watched the pine knots snap and crackle on the real hearth.

"Why not send out two hundreds, and so make sure that at least three or four will come out?" said I quizzically.

Mrs Dolten bridled. "Why shouldn't they come out? Haven't I gone the same distance to their teas?"

I looked at Mrs Dolten, and smiled benignly.



A pastime which never loses its freshness.

"Don't you realise that what is only fifteen miles into New York is at least thirty miles out of it? The funny papers have drawn the horrors of suburban life so graphically, although so falsely, that the average New Yorker would far rather go to London than come out to the suburbs."

"No would I," said Mrs Dolten, drily. "But I'm quite sure that enough will come to make the thing a success, and you'll be here to lend an air of reality to the affair. You know lots of people don't believe I'm married because they've never seen you."

"Well, my dear, they'll have to keep on imagining that I don't exist," I answered crisply. "Do you think for a moment that I would leave the delights of my

office to come out here and listen to you or any pretty woman ring the changes on cream and lemons? Oh, no; the afternoons you reward your city friends for coming fifteen miles up and beyond the Palisades by giving them green and pink cakes, grass sandwiches and tea, I'll work hard and happily at the office, and I'll dine in town too, because you won't have any appetite for dinner after nibbling at confections all the afternoon."

"Leonard, if you don't come home and give me your support I'll never speak to you again as long as I live—really."

She smiled in a way not only to belie her words but to make me willing to do anything to please her, and I weakly replied, "Dear, that is a bliss that I will not bring upon myself. You may count on me, and if you like I'll bring some of the men from the office."

"No, don't," said Felicia, quickly. "Why not, you know they're good friends of mine?"

Felicia rumped up her eyebrows. "Yes, dear, I know, but they're not afternoon tea men."

"Well, but neither am I an afternoon tea man, when it comes to that."

"No, but you know what I mean. The men in your office are very nice and kind, but they're not the kind—"

"In other words—er—my wife—is just a little imbued with snobbishness, isn't that it?"

Felicia put her hand on mine. "I wish you'd understand me, dear. Those men would feel very much out of it if they had to come here and meet some of the ladies whom I expect; but that isn't snobbish—it's just the truth, and respect for their feelings. They are very nice—"

"Yes, they are very nice, but let 'em keep their places, damn 'em. Isn't that what you mean? Being merely Americans with nothing but Americans back of them for several generations they are not the sort to meet your New York friends, many of whom have had money for nearly a whole generation—"

My wife withdrew her hand. "Now you're getting silly," said she.

Whenever I hit a living truth Felicia calls me silly, and I feel sure that I have rung the bell. Then I stop teasing her.

"All right, I'll tell the boys that you'd love to have them come out for tennis some afternoon when no New Yorkers are likely to be present, but if they'd just as soon get their tea somewhere else that afternoon you'll be obliged. But I'll come. By the way, is it a compliment to my social standing that you'll let your husband come to your tea?"

Felicia ignored my final sally. "I hope Mrs Sturtevant will come, because she seemed to take quite a fancy to you after the opera that night."

"Oh, was that the florid and towering lady with the feather duster in her back hair and very little else incommensurate her progress to her car? I shall never forget how graciously she spoke to me. It prolonged my life. I felt as if Queen Elizabeth had kissed my hand, and invited me to spend a week-end at Holyrood or whatever her castle was."

"Silly! Mrs Sturtevant has loads of money, but she's as simple—"

"Yes, she was a good sort. Jolly and probably perfectly willing to crack jokes at her grandfather the grocer's expense. I hope she'll come. She'll lend the proper tone to the affair, and I'll take her out and show her the chickens."

Felicia started. "Don't do anything so foolish!"

(It will be seen that Felicia is lacking in humour. I had no real intention of leading the dowager duchess of Sturtevant—or whatever her title is—out to my humble hen-house. Yet I'm quite sure that she with all her money cannot buy an egg that is fresher than one just laid by my Rhode Island red pullets.)

"All right, but what'll you do to amuse the duchess?"

"No one is ever amused at a tea."

"Gospel truth! But what am I to do? I'm no ladies' man. I can't talk life insurance to them, can I? I might explain our annuity scheme to the duchess."

"You'll just behave yourself and be nice and kind, and you needn't think about anything else. I'm quite sure that if you had been brought up in a different environment—"

"I'd be quite a gentleman. I've always thought so, but what can the son of a college professor hope to be in a republic like this?"

To report no more of our conversation, which, as will be seen, was of the usual husband-and-wifely tone, let me state that Mrs Dolten sent out the cards for the teas, that the first Thursday dawned clear and balmy—quite a May day in fact—the sort of "May days" that we get in late June—and when I left the office I felt quite sure that it was the sort of

"And guests coming from New York? You know Mrs Dolten was to give a tea to-day."

Mary nodded her head reassuringly. "Oh, it's not likely they'll come. Days like this the city's good enough for any wan. I wish I was there."

I hurried to Felicia's bedroom and found her very pale but quite composed. She felt that perhaps it was typhoid; but she was not alarmed, as typhoid cases were light this season, and she never took any disease very hard. She hoped I'd do the honours and express her regrets. Jennie Trowbridge was coming in from next door to pour tea.

I shook my head decidedly. "No, the



I recognised them as from the city.

weather to made sidewalks swarm with nursemaids and perambulators, and lure city folk suburbward to see what might be picked up in the way of real estate. For there is a decided lean toward the suburbs, and "back to the land" is getting to be a bromide.

I got home a little after three o'clock and found that my hens were all scratching around the front steps. The maid had left the hen-yard gate open and the fowls were taking advantage of the summery air to hunt for grubs—twelve sumptuous Rhode Island red pullets and a grandiloquent rooster. Picturesque, but not the proper sight for the dowager duchess Sturtevant. It might do for my hopeless fellow clerks who lived in the suburbs themselves, but it was not the usual concomitant of a really swell tea. So I chased them all back to their yard and then collected the eggs, a pastime which never loses its freshness—oh, if eggs but had the same Cleopatra power—a suburban delight that all the lobster hunting in the Great White Way could not atone for, were my hens to be taken away from me.

I had thought to arrange the rich, brown eggs in a pretty dish and set them on the centre table as something rather unusual in these cold-storage days, but on my way in at the kitchen door I reduced the eggs to a liquid mass strewn with shells and my pocket was out of commission—to say nothing about the general appearance of my bran-new sack coat.

The afternoon had not begun well.

Our cook met me in the kitchen with a sympathetic shake of her head and said: "Mrs Dolten is after takin' sick an' the doctor was just here."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. He says she must be kept quiet an' not see any wan. He's not sure what's ailin' her, but he'll know to-morrow."

tea's off. I'll have Eddie Trowbridge stand up at the corner and when they step off the cars I'll send them back to New York."

My wife was horror-stricken and would have fallen back on the pillow if she had not already been there. "You'd not do such an inhospitable thing! Now don't cross me, dear, because the doctor said I must be kept quiet. Get your things and dress in the spare room and I think I'll fall asleep. I haven't been feeling good for much lately, but I hoped I'd get through to-day. And this morning I felt so miserable that I called up Dr. Briggs and he sent me to bed."

I offered Felicia my sympathy, but I was not greatly alarmed. I know Dr. Briggs, and if ever there was an alarmist he is one. I have had heart disease, pneumonia in both lungs, neuritis, and half-a-dozen complaints since he moved to Paradise Park on the death of Dr. Grayson, and yet I have not been housed a week by all the diseases put together. First, he half scares a patient to death and then by his abiding good nature he brings him back from his low estate and cures him in a jiffy.

When I was all dressed I peeped in at the door and found that Felicia was not asleep, so I showed myself.

She uttered a faint cry. "My dear, go and take off that tie and those gloves at once. Really a cut-away would be enough, but you do look well in a frock coat. But take off the gloves and put on your green tie—that poplin one that sister brought you from Dublin. It's very becoming to you."

After I had made these changes—"How am I to know these dukes and duchesses, and how soon do I ply them with tea?"

"Under the circumstances," answered Felicia, "you can ask their names. No, I forgot. Mary will tend the door and she will announce each one—"

"In a rich brogue that will give 'em