

THE CULT OF THE TEA-TABLE.

A reply to the Shade of Mr. Jonas Hanway, who wrote in dispraise of tea 160 years ago.

A whole world of romance lies hidden in that potent word! The magic of it recalls a host of memories, too. Some of those that are bidden come as pale ghosts of the past, out of the limbo of forgotten things. Some come by the byways of tradition, and many more among the highways of history. Here come Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale, for instance, in the van of the shadowy host. They were well-known tea devotees in their day. With a little stretch of the imagination we can see them drinking their favourite beverage at the Thrales' House at Streatham. All the time that the learned doctor is drinking his twenty-five cups of tea "in rapid succession," which history records, he regales his admiring listener (for she is one of the Blue Stockings) with his didactic conversations, relieved occasionally by blither strains, such as the following:—

"And now I pray thee, Hetty dear,
That thou wilt give to me,
With cream and sugar, softened well,
Another dish of tea.
"But hear alas this mournful truth,
Nor hear it with a frown,
Thou canst not make the tea so fast
As I can gulp it down."

We see them again enjoying the hospitality of Mrs. Montagu, known as the "Queen of Blue Stockings," at her house in Portman Square. And here we meet the venerated shades of many others of that ilk. This period—the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century—was the heyday of the Blue Stockings, and their mixed assemblies were famous. They comprised the intellectuals of that day. Here we meet Hannah More, the Greek scholar Elizabeth Carter, Fanny Burney, Mrs. Vesey, Horace Walpole, Edmund Burke, &c. The hostess arranges the chairs in a semicircle, in order to facilitate the flow of conversation, because conversation of an intellectual character is the main purpose of the assembly. As a matter of fact, while some of the conversationalists were brilliant, others were remarkably dull. We doubt if any of them—met together for the purpose of being brilliant—would have achieved their set purpose had it not been for the inspiring effects of the "fragrant tea," which they all drank on these occasions. Only the rich could give tea parties in those days, because of its cost. What the precise cost was at this period we cannot say, but the price at the time it was introduced into England, about the commencement or middle of the seventeenth century (writers differ as to the exact date) is said to have been from £6 to £10 a pound! The renowned *conversations* of the Blue Stockings' tea parties appear to have begun and ended in themselves. One good purpose they had, however, namely, to promote social intercourse by other and better means than that of card-playing, which was

the prevailing custom of mixed assemblies in those days, and which inspired Hannah More to write in her poem to "Bas Elen":—

"Long was Society o'errun
By whist, that devastating Hun."

Where is the contemporary shade of Mr. Jonas Hanway? He was a man of parts; philanthropist, writer, inventor; and yet we do not find him among the guests of Mrs. Montagu! He is busy at home inventing the umbrella and writing an indictment of tea. With such zeal does he attack the favourite and fashionable beverage that Dr. Johnson empties the vials of his wrath upon him. For this reason we may surely assume he has been shut out from the select society of the tea-drinking intellectuals. Mr. Jonas Hanway, with all your cleverness, you are no scientist, you have not studied the make-up of tea—you know nothing about the benign alkaloid known as caffeine—or shall we call it theine, seeing that we are speaking of tea, it means the same thing? You do not know, O prejudiced and ignorant man, that it is "a nerve stimulant of the purest kind." You are a traveller, Mr. Hanway; you have been to Russia; why did you not go further East, where tea-drinking and tea-making are fine arts, and were practised there hundreds of years before you were born? Do you know? No, how should you, you are too ignorant—that in Japan tea has been ennobled into a religion of aestheticism, which is called *Teaism*. You have shown by your dulness of perception that you have no sense of the refinement of taste, and the beauty of tea. The Japanese would scorn you as a man "with no tea in his constitution." In the course of your essay on tea you have said some foolish things, you know; your descendants have forgiven but not forgotten your untruthful remark that men seemed to lose their stature and comeliness, and women their beauty through the use of tea. Had you been a guest at the Salon of Mrs. Montagu, you would not have observed any lessening of her beauty or that of others of her sex, neither would you have discovered any decrease in the stature of Dr. Johnson and other male guests. Maybe it was for the purpose of hiding your diminished head that you invented the umbrella! Well, then, get underneath it and don't trouble about the rain; it is not so bad a thing as prejudice or ignorance. Mr. Jonas Hanway, we must be fair to you, however. You lived in less enlightened times than ours, and yet many of us are just as ignorant and just as prejudiced as you were. We, too, write and talk of things of which we know nothing. We forgive you therefore. We really are very much obliged to you for inventing the umbrella, we use it almost every day.

The cup of tea! "The cup that cheers, but not inebriates!" That glorious institution, how did we live without it! Ah! that belongs to the dark ages! The modern nurse is probably the most appreciative tea-drinker in the Western world. She is, in fact, *trained* on tea; she studies

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