

## EUPHEMIA'S NEW ENTERTAINMENT

Euphemia has great ideas of putting people at their ease, a thousand little devices for thawing the very stiffest among them with a home-like glow. Far be it from me to sing her praises, but I must admit that at times she is extremely successful in this--at times almost too successful. That tea-cake business, for instance. No doubt it's a genial expedient to make your guests toast his own tea-cake: down he must go upon his knees upon your hearthrug, and his poses will melt away like the dews of the morning before the rising sun. Nevertheless, when it comes to roasting a gallant veteran like Major Augustus, deliberately roasting him, in spite of the facts that he has served his country nobly through thirty irksome years of peace, and that he admires Euphemia with a delicate fervour--roasting him, I say, alive, as if he were a Strasburg goose, or suddenly affixing a delicate young genius to the hither end of a toasting-fork while he is in the midst of a really very subtle and tender conversation, the limits of social warmth seem to be approaching dangerously near. However, this scarcely concerns Euphemia's new entertainment.

This new entertainment is modelling in clay. Euphemia tells me it is to be quite the common thing this winter. It is intended especially for the evening, after a little dinner. As the reader is aware, the evening after a little dinner is apt to pall. A certain placid contentment creeps over people. I don't know in what organ originality resides; but

it's a curious thing, and one I must leave to the consideration of psychologists, that people's output of original remarks appears to be obstructed in some way after these gastronomic exercises. Then a little dinner always confirms my theory of the absurdity of polygonal conversation. Music and songs, too, have their drawbacks, especially gay songs; they invariably evoke a vaporous melancholy. Card-playing Euphemia objects to because her uncle, the dean, is prominent in connection with some ridiculous association for the suppression of gambling; and in what are called "games" no rational creature esteeming himself an immortal soul would participate. In this difficulty it was that Euphemia--decided, I fancy, by the possession of certain really very becoming aprons--took up this business of clay-modelling.

You have a lump of greyish clay and a saucer of water and certain small tools of wood (for which I cannot discover the slightest use in the world) given you, and Euphemia puts on a very winning bib. Then, moistening the clay until it acquires sufficient plasticity, and incidentally splashing your cuffs and coat-sleeves with an agreeably light tinted mud, you set to work. At first people are a little disgusted at the apparent dirtiness of the employment, and also perhaps rather diffident. The eldest lady says weakly deprecatory things, and the feeblest male is jocular after his wont. But it is remarkable how soon the charm of this delightful occupation seizes hold of you. For really the sensations of moulding this plastic matter into shape are wonderfully and quite unaccountably pleasing. It is ever so much easier than drawing things--"anyone can do it," as the advertisement people

say--and the work is so much more substantial in its effects. Technical questions arise. In moulding a head, do you take a lump and fine it down, or do you dab on the features after the main knob of it is shaped?

So soon as your guests realise the plastic possibilities before them, a great silence, a delicious absorption comes over them. Some rash person states that he is moulding an Apollo, or a vase, or a bust of Mr. Gladstone, or an elephant, or some such animal. The wiser ones go to work in a speculative spirit, aiming secretly at this perhaps, but quite willing to go on with that, if Providence so wills it. Buddhas are good subjects; there is a certain genial rotundity not difficult to attain, and the pyramidal build of the idol is well suited to the material. You can start a Buddha, and hedge to make it a loaf of bread if the features are unsatisfactory. For slender objects a skeletal substructure of bent hairpins or matches is advisable. The innate egotism of the human animal becomes very conspicuous. "His tail is too large," says the lady with the fish, in self-criticism. "I haven't put his tail on yet--that's his trunk," answers the young man with the elephant.

It's a pretty sight to see the first awakening of the artistic passion in your guests--the flush of discovery, the glow of innocent pride as the familiar features of Mr. Gladstone emerge from the bust of Clytie. An accidental stroke of the thumbnail develops new marvels of expression. (By the bye, it's just as well to forbid deliberate attempts at portraiture.) And I know no more becoming expression for everyone than the look of intent and pleasing effort--a divine touch almost--that

comes over the common man modelling. For my own part, I feel a being infinitely my own superior when I get my fingers upon the clay. And, incidentally, how much pleasanter this is than writing articles--to see the work grow altogether under your hands; to begin with the large masses and finish with the details, as every artist should! Just to show how easy the whole thing is, I append a little sketch of the first work I ever did. I had had positively no previous instruction. Unfortunately the left ear of the animal--a cat, by the bye--has fallen off. (The figure to the left is the back view of a Buddha.)

However, I have said enough to show the charm of the new amusement. It will prove a boon to many a troubled hostess. The material is called modelling-clay, and one may buy it of any dealer in artists' materials, several pounds for sixpence. This has to be renewed at intervals, as a good deal is taken away by the more careless among your guests upon their clothes.