

A NOVEL GARDEN-PARTY.



of the many methods by which society entertains its friends and acquaintances during the season is garden parties, and there are very few people of rank and fashion, and even those standing on the fringes of society, who have not been present at many such. One of the conditions of accepting invitations is the possibility of appearing in elegant and suitable costumes, and of being able to afford a carriage if the distance be too long to walk.

Between these fashionable garden-parties, and the one I hope to interest you in, there is nothing in common save two small details, viz., invitations are issued both in one and the other, and, being an outdoor amusement, this form of entertainment must be given in the summer months. Among the upper classes money is often spent very lavishly on their garden-parties in order to make them a success. Not so in the one I am speaking of, where everything shows the absence of money; and yet nowhere in the world has a garden-party proved such a success as the novel one which is the subject of this article.

Down in the East End of London there are swarms of children in the streets, courts, and alleys, whose condition would make hearts sore indeed if they could realise it. The pinched faces, crippled limbs, ragged clothing of the majority of these little ones, together with the absence of everything that makes the happiness of the young, form a picture which appeals strongly to the kindly feeling of all classes of both sexes, but especially to women who are mothers and sisters, and who, one and all, would long to help and brighten these lives so shorn of all that makes life happy. But strong as the wish may be to do this, obstacles rise up, like giants, to bar the way; for these little ones may be counted by thousands even in one district, and what could one person, or even twenty, do to stem the torrent? And so the whole question is put on one side, while the endurance and the sufferings of the children, alas! still go on.

While we have been hoping and really meaning to do something for these little ones as soon as we could think out a plan, a friend has come forward to their aid; not with silver and gold, but with a heart filled to repletion with love to little children, and a determination, with God's help and blessing, to brighten their existence. This is not the place to speak of his work, which is full of interest and pathos; but we will merely say that his face and figure are well known in Whitechapel and Bow, and that at sight of him little tear-stained faces grow pretty with smiles; and no matter how dirty or miserable they are, they

run towards him, feeling sure of his sympathy and love. He is at once their friend, adviser, teacher, and playmate; he lives among them, and knows their lives intimately. I have never in my life seen anyone who loved little children as he does. He reckons among his friends some three or four thousand children, few or none over ten and most of them under eight years of age, and of these some two hundred and fifty are terribly crippled, who, until he sought them out, were hidden away from sight and absolutely neglected. Now they are learning what the love of a good man can do towards rendering their condition bearable; and as they are growing in intelligence, they are about to be led into the mysteries of shorthand and book-keeping, so that in time they may become useful members of society. Thinking of what he could do to take these masses of little ones out of the hot streets, courts, and alleys, and give them a day of fresh air and freedom in the country, he bethought him of the garden parties of the rich, and puzzled his brain night and day as to the possibility of copying them in one or two points at least. It must be a comprehensive scheme, for he must take all or none; it would spoil all his pleasure to know that one little sorrowful child among his friends was left behind. It would take too long to tell how he got everything in order for the carrying out of his plan; but he was successful, and therefore very happy.

Like the great people, he keeps a book with the name and address of every friend, and in his case of every little child who is called his friend, and between four and five thousand names are written down. He could not take all at once, so they were divided into companies, and to every child he sent or took an invitation written on a card, stating the day and hour at which he hoped to find them at a certain street. Here at ten o'clock they were to fall into line, give up their cards of invitation, and receive a cheap bright sash in exchange. If you had seen these hundreds of children how your hearts would have gone out to them; and had they assembled there at your invitation, you would not have exchanged your guests for the highest ladies and gentlemen in the land. Many of them were shoeless, coatless, capless, their faces pinched by want and suffering, but all lighted up with happiness as they stood there waiting for their sashes—for were they not Mr. Boyer's guests, and going to his garden-party? Some thirty of the older ones were entrusted with banners made of sateen, with mottoes, such as "Live for your children, and not for the publican." And now came the pleasure of being helped on and into the trams which were waiting to take them out of London, and would remain and bring them home in the evening. I think some hundred were conveyed by one tram. When all the precious freight was settled, off they moved amid the tears and laughter of the older people who had assembled to see them start. After about six miles' drive they arrived in Epping Forest, where preparations had been made, and where they were evidently expected. A large tent had been erected with the permission of the Forest authorities; sheds had been put up, in one of which a baker had been working up to a late hour the night before making scones. He was a man out of work, and was glad to be engaged for this garden-party.

At length the little ones were all safely lifted down and counted as they marched into the tent. Here a very short service was held and a few loving words addressed to them, and then each had two fresh-made scones and a little water; then some tickets were given to enable them to enjoy the games

provided for them, and before they are let loose the host says, "You mustn't go far from the tent, because there's a pond, and it's deep; so keep to the path. Anyone who forgets to obey will lose his scarf and his cake for tea; but I know I may trust my little friends." And he was right; they would not have vexed him for the world.

There were a number of bright mail-carts for their use which the host had had made at ten shillings each, and thus all were happy till early teatime arrived. And now came the milkman with cans of fresh new milk, enough for all to have a cup full with their large piece of cake; and this being finished, they all accompanied Mr. Boyer, and amused themselves in gathering flowers and picking berries and running races. Some of the little ones, who had never been into the country, seeing blackberries, grabbed at them stems and all, and then came with their little fingers all scratched to show them and be comforted. One little girl with her pinafore held very tight went up to the host and pulled him by the coat, saying, "See, Mr. Boyer, what a lot of gooseberries I have picked up!" Poor little dear! they were young horse-chestnuts!

At length the time came for them to assemble in the tent before returning home. Here a few loving words were again addressed to them, and then they joined in singing a hymn—which was not well pronounced—"I'm a follerin' to the Promised Land," was what they said. But what did it matter? They were happy, and before dark they were once again in Whitechapel, and safely given over to their parents without any accident save a few scratched fingers.

This was the first of a series which only came to an end when every little child, cripples as well, had had the same enjoyment. Who will say it was not a novel garden-party? And surely no guests ever returned home with hearts so brimful of love and gratitude to their host as did these.

In speaking to this man about the children, he said, "It means a lot to them to have someone to go to and tell out all their little troubles when their hearts are full."

A day or two ago a little girl who has a stall of pigs' feet in Whitechapel, called to him as he was passing, "Please, Mr. Boyer, come 'ere; I wants to know if you are goin' to take me to the country again this summer?" "Yes, I hope so."

"'Cause," she continued, "there's a little girl in our 'ouse, her mother do pay her so—will you take her too?"

"Of course I will," was the answer, and he proceeded to take down her name and address.

It seems a good deal of trouble and expense for a few days' outing, but think what these garden-parties are to the thousands of little ones who have no joys, no comforts, scarcely enough to cover them, and certainly not enough to eat.

These novel garden-parties took place last summer, and were made possible by the generous gifts of one or two friends. Is it too much to ask that all with little children of their own should spare something to enable this good man to give another series of garden-parties this summer?

Mr. Kirk, of the Ragged School Union, 37, Norfolk Street, Strand, W.C., would thankfully receive any contributions towards Mr. Boyer's novel garden-parties.

I should like to say that the mail-carts which gave so much amusement in the country, have done good service all the winter in Whitechapel and Bow, taking the cripples for little drives. The tent is the property of Mr. Boyer's little friends now, so that expense will be spared this year.