

When we reach home we find that the fine coal dust has crept into our clothing and about our persons in such an insinuating fashion, that very thorough ablutions and a vast amount of brushing and shaking of garments are needed. Even after all our scrubbing we cannot soon get rid of the dark rings which have formed under our eyelids, and persistently remain, an evidence of our recent underground journey.

In spite of reading, I had very little idea of what a coal mine really is until I visited this one. Probably many of you, dear girl readers, may be like me in this respect; but I hope you may realise the doings in the pit more readily from this description. If your hearts and mine are more stirred to feelings of sympathy and goodwill towards those who labour in the recesses of mother earth, that we may have cheery light and warm firesides, I shall be still more glad that I descended that grim-looking abyss. And you, dear girls, will not be sorry that, in imagination, you have accompanied me in my "Underground Excursion."

WINTER ENTERTAINMENTS IN VILLAGES.



HERE are various kinds of entertainments suitable for a village; but in this paper I will confine myself strictly to the "village concert," as being easier for girls to manage—more within the resources which are likely to be at their command, and more sure of the success which is desirable at all times, but especially so in a first attempt.

It is very much the fashion to suppose that in the country the clergyman has nothing to do, and that he is the only person to organise "entertainments." He generally does it, because no one else will take the trouble; but if we consult him, as we should naturally do, we shall find him very thankful for our offers of assistance—quite ready to give us his countenance and help; but still more grateful if we will organise the whole thing ourselves, leaving him free for those weighty concerns of the parish which really belong to him.

In country places there is always difficulty as to where our entertainment shall take place. The school is generally fixed upon, because there is seldom any other available building sufficiently large; so we obtain the necessary permission to use it, and we fix the date of our entertainment in consultation with the managers. I know a village in Kent where a hop-barn has been utilised for several winters

as a concert room with the utmost success; indeed, so suitable is it, that now all entertainments are held there as a matter of course; and by degrees the various properties, lamps, carpet, platform, &c., have been bought, to be kept expressly for use on these occasions. All this presupposes a ready—I had almost said an eager—co-operation on the part of the owner of the east. Indeed, practical help in the matter of lighting and seating from some capable person who is on the spot is inestimable. As a rule, all these matters must be arranged by those who are getting up the entertainment, and they are a great additional trouble.

Before our girls decide to organise a village concert, they should consider well whether they can cope with these difficulties. If all the appliances be already at hand, they need not hesitate; it is only when giving an entertainment for the first time in a village, where nothing of the sort has been attempted before, that I would bid them consider it well. I do not think young people should run away from difficulties, nor ignore them; they should look them steadily in the face, and thus be able to judge whether they can reasonably hope to carry the matter through to a successful issue.

When you have quite decided to give a village concert, the first thing is to fix the date; and here I would remark that in the country the moon is a very important consideration; muddy lanes on a dark night are quite sufficient to keep large numbers at home.

Then as to hours. Doors open at 7, commence at 7.30, is very usual; but we must have regard to extraneous circumstances; if we have a railway-station within reach, we shall do well to fix our hours as much as possible in accordance with trains, in the hope that our neighbours in the adjacent villages may be tempted to come; if the trains are suitable, the fact must be mentioned in the programmes. The date and hour and price of admission having been fixed, the young people should prepare some large posters, which they can do themselves quite easily, saving expense and improving at the same time, somewhat as follows:—

AN ENTERTAINMENT

Will take Place

IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS, SEDGELEY,
ON WEDNESDAY, 30th JANUARY,

Consisting of

Music—Vocal and Instrumental.

Readings and Recitals.

Doors open at 7. Commence at 7.30.

To conclude at 9.30.

Admission is., 6d., and 3d.

Further particulars shortly.

For these bills, use large white paper, cartridge or cheap drawing paper; prepare a rough copy, see how many lines will be required, place them to come in the middle of the paper; rule them double of various widths, and draw a line down the centre. Now pencil your letters, commencing with the middle letter, which should be on the middle line, and work from it on each side. This will ensure that neatness and precision which are essential in such matters. One bill done in this manner is sufficient; the remainder can be copied from it. Having pencilled all your letters, which should be large and perfectly legible, paint them in colours according to taste. This last may be entrusted to the younger ones, who will take the greatest delight in the work, and bring out their paint-boxes with much eagerness.

From six to twelve of these large bills will suffice. Let them be finished and sent about in all directions as soon as possible.

Now we come to the programme for the

evening. That also must be arranged in good time, and cannot be done in a hurry. Indeed, those friends whom we intend to ask should have been written to, and their answers received before we decide whether we can undertake the entertainment. If our concert is the first which has been held in our village, an infusion of native talent is very desirable. But if ours is one of a series, then I think we should strain every nerve to import "new blood"; indeed, it is not much use to get up a concert with only the same performers, with whom the audience is already too familiar; there are some amateurs who are always favourites, always welcome, but they, alas! are few. We may do a great deal by judicious arrangement of the programme, and I venture to give one, as some sort of guide—

PART I.

1. Duet (Piano and Harmonium).
2. Song (Soprano).
3. Glee.
4. Song (Tenor).
5. Reading.
6. Trio (Vocal).
7. Song (Contralto).
8. Recitation.
9. Humorous Song.

PART II.

10. Duet (Piano and Violin).
11. Song (Bass).
12. Duet (Soprano and Contralto).
13. Catch or Round.
14. Song (Tenor).
15. Reading.
16. Song (Soprano).
17. Glee.
18. Humorous Song.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

The songs should not be of too ambitious a character. The people like simple songs that they can understand, and a few old favourites are always welcome. I have frequently heard such songs as "Robin Gray," "Jeannette and Jeannot," &c., rapturously applauded; while others which the singer prefers fall flat, because the audience hearing them for the first time does not grasp either the melody or the words. I need scarcely say that every word should be articulated with the utmost distinctness. In arranging the programme it is very necessary to insert the names of the artists, as well as of the songs and pieces, to prevent the same song being chosen twice over, to make the programme more complete, and to give the promoters powers of supervision.

These programmes must be printed—50 to send about; beforehand, 100 to be sold in the room, at one penny each; but whether sold or given, I consider them quite essential. They should be ready in good time, should contain full particulars as to hours and admission, and exact information as to trains.

The piano is a very important item, and, alas! generally very indifferent; few people care to lend one, so it must be hired, and it is seldom that we can obtain an instrument worth playing upon, for which reason a pianoforte solo is to be avoided. We can more easily procure a harmonium, and a duet with those two instruments is very effective, but of course they must be exactly in tune with each other. The piano should be rather below concert pitch, as easier for the vocalists; and the harmonium must be brought to the same level.

The accompaniments are also extremely important. Singers in public cannot play for themselves, as they must stand and face the audience, and a good accompanist is to the last degree essential, especially if the singer be at all nervous, on which point I shall have something to say presently. Accompaniments are too often left to take care of themselves, it being thought that anybody can play well enough for that; but it is not so, and I would urge our girls to be very particular about this. If a really good musician can be secured for this thankless and subordinate post, we have accomplished much towards success.

The length of the entertainment is another important consideration. It is a fatal mistake to have it too long. Two hours are plenty, and it is much wiser to leave off with the people

wishing for more, than that they should be tired out and longing for it to be over! I lay great stress upon this point, because it is such a common fault, and it militates largely against success, to say nothing of using talent which might be reserved for another occasion. Encores should be encouraged, or declined strictly with reference to time.

One word as to nervousness. Some performers suffer painfully from this, and it certainly is a very trying ordeal to sing before a large audience; either one suddenly seems to have no breath, or the melody has entirely departed, &c. There is no cure but practice, and some singers never overcome it entirely. I have found it a great benefit in such cases for the singer to sing the song two or three times over with the accompanist in the concert-room before the doors open. This plan enables her to pitch her voice better; she is accustomed to the sound of it, and less likely to lose her presence of mind when the time comes. Also a singer who is known to be nervous should be placed as early as possible on the programme; the longer she waits the more nervous she becomes, and at last is quite unfit to sing; whereas at the beginning of the evening she would have performed her part with comparative ease. A word also as to dress. When I first had to do with village entertainments, I fancied that thick winter morning dresses were the more suitable; but I have come to the very decided conclusion that evening dress for ladies and gentlemen is the right thing. It is much pleasanter for a lady to sing in a garment that is loose about

the throat—much more becoming; and I am convinced that a village audience thinks much more of those performers who wear something different from the everyday costume to which their eyes are accustomed.

I must not close this paper without reference to expense. Entertainments are generally given with an idea of benefiting some charity; but it seems to me that our primary object should be "winter amusements for the people." If we can combine the two, well and good, but on no account sacrifice the latter for the former. If we are starting entertainments, expenses will meet us at every turn, and it will be as much as we can do to make both ends meet; but if we have most of the appliances at hand, and the room rent free, we ought to have a balance. On these occasions people are very kind, and ready to lend lamps, &c., and we can often save expense in this way. The borrowed articles must be taken care of, and returned immediately, a matter in which young people are apt to be neglectful. The strictest accounts must be taken care of, and returned immediately, a matter in which young people are apt to be neglectful. The strictest accounts must be taken care of, and returned immediately, a matter in which young people are apt to be neglectful. The strictest accounts must be taken care of, and returned immediately, a matter in which young people are apt to be neglectful.

As amusement for the village is our chief aim, the admission should not be too high—1s., 6d., and 3d. is ample for an entertainment of this kind. We want the people to come, and it would even be better to admit them free than have an empty house. There is, how

ever, no necessity for free admission, so that we adapt our scale of prices to the purses of our audience, and experience has shown me that 1s., 6d., and 3d. will suit all classes.

Some supervision is needed in seating the people. On the whole, I think, it is better to have tickets of three colours, to represent the three kinds of seats; the tickets to be purchased at the entrance and given up to the gentleman in charge of that particular block of seats to which the ticket belongs.

If the audience pays at the door indiscriminately, it is seated indiscriminately, and it becomes a case of "first come, first served." The pushing, noisy lad who has paid threepence is in the shilling seats, to the great disturbance of his neighbours; and the modest, quiet girl, who has paid a shilling for a front seat, finds herself among the turbulent spirits at the back. The matter of seating is really very important, and should be managed by men who are very reliable.

I have said nothing about decorations and other small matters, for I have, I fear, already exceeded the limits assigned to me.

In conclusion let me commend this work to our girls and their brothers; they will find in it a large field for usefulness, an encouragement (too often needed) to keep up their accomplishments, an unfailing interest for winter evenings, and above all the happiness of doing good.

These hints are the result of a long and varied experience in village entertainments, and I trust they may be useful.

GENTIANELLA.



LAURA LEIGH.
A TALE OF HIGHBRIDGE PAPER MILLS.

By the Author of "Cora; or, Three Years of a Girl's Life," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

VINCENT ASHTON had an unquiet night, and the next morning he roved about the house like a restless spirit, seeking hard to get a glimpse of Miss Leigh, but altogether failing to do so.

Laura, in the meantime, had taken her seven o'clock breakfast with the children in the nursery, and instead of having the usual early walk with them, had, at Mrs. Herbert's request, remained at home to devote herself altogether to little Gerty, who was still rather ailing, and very peevish and exacting.

Then had come the long hours in the schoolroom, when Gerty, instead of doing lessons, had been allowed to sit on the hearthrug with her picture-book.

Mr. Herbert and Vincent Ashton were engaged to luncheon at the vicar's on this day, so the time sped on rapidly without bringing about any interview between him and Miss Leigh.

"THERE WAS MUCH TO BE SAID ON BOTH SIDES."