



HOW I MANAGED MY PICNIC.

It was a week to my birthday and I had not yet decided how to celebrate the great anniversary. My parents had

always allowed us children the privilege of having some sort of treat on these occasions, but this year, being the first since my leaving school, I was very desirous of inviting some of my young friends to spend

part of the day with me, and of entertaining them in a manner worthy the dignity of a grown-up young lady, no longer a school-girl.

Many ideas on the subject had suggested themselves to me, and been banished as unsuitable for one reason or another, and at present I was wavering between a tea-party in the garden and a picnic. As I sat pondering the matter my brother came into the room.

He is a year or two my senior, and possesses largely all those habits of teasing and jeering peculiar to brothers. He had been known, however, when in certain rare and happy moods, to do me some really "good turns"; so, hoping to find him by chance in one of these delightful humours, I ventured to ask his advice.

"Tom, dear," I said, "what—er—what do you think of picnics? I want to have an excursion to some nice pretty place, and having tea gipsy fashion, you know—in fact, a picnic; what do you think of the girls and me having one next Thursday? Don't you think it would be nice?"

The creature fell back in his chair and laughed aloud. "Why, Gerty," he cried, "the idea is really too amusing. Have you so soon forgotten that ghastly entertainment given by the Somers's last year, and when dinner time came everybody had brought cold chickens, and there was nothing but teaspoons to carve them with? Oh, yes, have a picnic by all means; you'll have a jolly time of it no doubt, particularly when it begins to rain, as it is certain to do. Only don't expect *me* to come, that's all."

"'Nobody asked you, sir, she said.' I'm not going to ask anybody at all, except some of the school girls."

Being rather of a contrary disposition, I determined now that it should be a picnic, if only to show Tom that they can be well managed.

That affair of the Somers's certainly was a failure. There were twenty guests, and each had been asked to bring a contribution to the feast. We had driven in breaks to the place decided upon, and had a very pleasant morning. But, as Dr. Johnson aptly remarks that the loveliest view possible is improved by a good hotel in the foreground, so the success of a picnic depends a good deal, though it sounds gluttonous to say so, on the arrangement of the luncheon. Of course, everyone must go prepared not to mind having salt put on one's tart instead of sugar, or to find sugar and salt forgotten altogether. One must smile and appear to enjoy it when the salad is emptied upon one's lap, and drink with a relish though the beverage is sprinkled with expiring flies and spiders. Trifling accidents of

of fruit, some salad, or such like slender provision. Several had indeed brought a cold fowl, and it was not until we were waiting to be served that, as Tom said, the dreadful discovery was made that knives and forks had been omitted altogether, though there was a plentiful supply of spoons. Mrs. Somers had intended each of her guests to bring sufficient for his or her own luncheon, and had herself provided only for her own family and the guests in her house. Happily she had over calculated their appetites, and was able to offer some little provision to the other hungry ones. So I believe in the end every one made a tolerably good lunch, though Tom declares that he and the other gentlemen had to satisfy the cravings of hunger with salad and ginger-beer corks.

But the most painful part of the luncheon was when someone discovered a leg of lamb which had been overlooked, and produced it triumphantly. But we might as well have been without it, so insurmountable was the difficulty of carving it with a teaspoon. Salt had also been omitted from the list, though this is a very trifling thing, and many people do not take any when there is plenty to be had; yet when they know there is none they feel the greatest craving for it, and the meal seems very unpalatable indeed without it.

With the remembrance of this unsatisfactory repast fresh in my mind, I resolved to be very careful that nothing was forgotten, and, above all, that there was plenty to eat. So I went straight away to have a consultation with my mother as to ways and means.

"Well, dear," she said, "the first thing to decide is, I think, where to go to; and I do not think you could do better than Vudley. You could ramble about the old castle before lunch, and afterwards go into the woods to get some wild flowers to bring home. And there is the waterfall only a short distance from the castle, so you will not be at a loss for amusements."

"But, mother, how shall we get there? It is too far to walk, and we cannot all get into the pony carriage," said I.

"I was just thinking of that, dear; but I think five of you might drive, and the rest will have to go by train to Vudley station, which is not more than half a mile from the castle and woods."

This settled, I flew off and issued my invitations, nine in number, asking my friends to be at our house by half-past nine on Thursday morning, unless it were wet or showery, in which case the picnic would be postponed to the first fine day.

Many were the consultations mother and I had as to what we should take for luncheon. I had very much set my heart on the popular idea of boiling a kettle and making tea; but as mother pointed out it would involve so many more implements and so much more trouble that I willingly gave it up, and was not at all sorry afterwards that I had done so.

Several times, when we thought our bill of fare very complete, one of us would be seized with a new and superior idea, quite upsetting the former arrangement. First we settled to take a joint of cold lamb, a bottle of mint sauce, a jar of dressed salad, rolls, butter (in a preserve pot with ice), two fruit pies, and a jar of Devonshire cream. This we thought complete, when an amendment was suggested by Tom, who could not refrain from taking a lively interest when eatables were in question, though he poured scorn and derision on the idea of my having a picnic at all.

Haunted by the conviction that we should forget to take knives and forks, he suggested a couple of cold fowls, ready cut up, in place of the joint; and, as this would save me the trouble and responsibility of carving, to which I was but little accustomed, it was agreed upon unanimously, and mother went off to give cook her orders.

In a minute I heard her voice calling me from the kitchen:

"Gerty, dear," she said, when I went in, "cook has just been saying how would you like a dozen little meat pies, instead of the chickens? I think you would find them very convenient, and you will not then have to consider who must put up with the drumsticks in helping the fowls."

"Yes, mother, it will be a great improvement. As I could not eat four or six drumsticks myself, I should have to inflict them on several of my guests, which would not be polite, would it? I think the pies a splendid idea."

Finally our luncheon hamper contained the following:—One meat

this sort are unavoidable, and indeed add to the excitement and novelty of the meal. But when, as at the Somers's picnic, there is really not enough to eat, and one's appetite is sharpened by a long morning in the fresh air, it is certainly damping to the spirits.

Most of the guests had thought they were only expected to provide some small accessory to the meal, so had brought a basket

pie each, and two or three over in case of anyone's appetite being inordinately large; a dozen and a half rolls, a jar of salad ready dressed, a cucumber, a jar of butter packed with ice and wrapped in flannel, a jelly in the mould to be turned out when required, one raspberry and one gooseberry tart, and a jar of Devonshire cream. The sugar and salt were put in bottles and well labelled, and by way of beverage we had a dozen bottles of assorted drinks, such as lemonade and gingerbeer, of course in a hamper by themselves, which also contained two corkscrews. I may mention that the meat pies were not taken out of their tins till we were ready to eat them, which insured their carrying well.

In the hamper we took a tablecloth, and a knife and fork and spoon for each person, with one or two of each extra for serving; two plates each, and a few tumblers, and one dish for the salad and cucumber. This was everything we could think of, and it proved to be everything that was necessary, which was a great relief to me.

The important day arrived at last, and was, as we had hardly dared to hope, bright and

spot shortly before that time to lay the cloth and spread the feast under the welcome shade of a large old oak; and very pretty it looked when all was ready. We had originally intended to lunch in one of the old roofless halls of the castle; but its ivy-clad walls, though picturesque when looked at with a poetic eye, appeared to us too thickly populated with spiders and earwigs to make close proximity to them pleasant for any length of time, so we preferred to remain under the shadow of the trees outside the edifice.

We spread shawls, upon which to sit, all round the tablecloth, and at each person's place, by their knife, fork, and roll, was laid a little bunch of flowers, which we flattered ourselves, to quote Mr. Spriggins, "imparted an air of botanical elegance to the scene." Having collected our party together, which we did by means of repeated performances on a loud and ear-piercing whistle, borrowed for the occasion to take the place of a dinner bell, we seated ourselves as gracefully as might be, and prepared to fall to upon the banquet.

But before sitting down I suggested that we should sing our usual school grace, so with

When we had finished, and whilst still reclining round what had once been a sumptuous repast, but was now only a wreck, one of my friends rose to her feet, and in most appropriate and flowery language, proposed the health of "their noble and honoured hostess," by which she meant me. I responded, and, though very short, and somewhat faulty in construction, I fear, my maiden speech was received with rounds of applause. After a little more eloquence from other of the guests, we packed up the plates and dishes in their hampers again, and then, digging a hole with a stick, we interred all pieces of paper, bottles and other remnants of the feast that were to be left behind.

Some of those present rather made fun of this proceeding, but I insisted upon it, as I have often thought it such a shame to leave paper and all sorts of unsightly odds and ends about, to disfigure the place where a picnic has been.

We spent the rest of the afternoon in rambling about the woods, which were radiant with flowers and ferns, and musical with birds' songs. After a visit to the waterfall, we found the dusk was beginning to creep on, and that



warm, and my friends assembled in due time. The driving party had to start shortly before those who went by train, so carefully stowing our hampers underneath the seats of the pony carriage, with a bundle of rugs and cloaks, we despatched them, to meet again at Vudley station, whence we proceeded all together, "ride and tie," to the spot we had fixed upon to spend our day.

We explored the ruined castle and its grounds, and at one o'clock assembled for what was, I am afraid, really the event of the day. I and one other girl had gone to the

loyal hearts and true, we sang, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." And I do believe that with the music of our fresh young voices our hearts blended harmoniously. God ever keep them so!

Our meat pies were highly appreciated, as indeed were all the viands. I found that we had just hit the right quantities required, and there was neither too much nor too little of anything, though I had thought mother had provided too bountifully. But, then, I had forgotten that a whole morning out of doors is highly conducive to hunger.

we must turn towards home, very much to our regret, for the day had passed away too quickly for us all.

I must mention that, when dragging our hampers from under the carriage seats before lunch, I discovered a smaller one which I had not seen before. It was found to contain a good supply of splendid strawberries, and had been put in by Tom, as his contribution to our much-abused picnic.

That boy really has some good points, after all.

DORA HOPE.