



### HOW TO GIVE A CHILDREN'S PARTY.

"THE children are going to a party." I hope there are not many mothers and not many children, in the homes which this Magazine enters, who do not understand the meaning of this phrase. The young ones look forward to the treat for days before, with that ecstatic anticipation of coming joy which is felt only by the young. When the day dawns the hours seem as if they would never drag their weary length along, for it is felt to be worse than useless to attempt any ordinary employment or amusement. And when the party is over, what delight there is in talking about

it! How kind every one was, what fun they had, and how quickly it was time to come home!

But it is by no means an easy thing to give a successful children's party. It is easy to fill the rooms with eager children, and to spread before them unusual and rich food, but the result of this is oftener than not weariness, fatigue, and dissatisfaction to the grown-up people, and discontent, disappointment, and even illness to the children. What can be more ridiculous than to collect together a crowd of children, of all ages and dispositions, to exchange for five or six hours their well-ventilated nurseries for heated rooms and draughty passages; their simple food for indigestible pastry and sickly, unwholesome sweets; their ordinary warm clothing for low-necked sleeveless dresses, which leave exposed that most sensitive part of the human frame, the upper part of the arms and the chest; and then to allow them to sit up for two or three hours beyond their usual time for retiring, until the fashionable hour arrives for children's parties to break up, when, worn out with fatigue and excitement, the little ones are carried off to bed?

This is not the sort of thing I mean by a well-conducted children's party, and fortunately a great many sensible parents see the evils of which I have spoken, and set their faces against them. At the same time it is by no means necessary, for those who wish to give pleasure to their children without harming them either morally or physically, to debar them altogether from attending gatherings of the kind; and common-sense people, of whom there are a great many in the world, would confer a benefit on their friends and acquaintance if they would show them by their example how these pleasant little reunions can be managed in a common-sense way.

For one thing, it is very important not to invite a larger number of children than the size of the rooms will comfortably accommodate. This mistake is frequently made, and it is a very unfortunate one. It oftener than not arises from the desire of the hostess to pay off her visiting debts all at once, and so she asks



every child whose parents she wishes to compliment, and the consequence is that there is no enjoyment; the rooms are unpleasantly crowded, and filled with children who have no sympathy with one another, who have not even room to make acquaintance, and so become cross and bad-tempered, and ten to one ill-behaved.

It is a great mistake, too, to ask a number of very young children to parties. After sunset the little ones are best in bed. Every one knows they are invited with the object of pleasing their mothers, but sensible mothers would take a greater pleasure in seeing them warmly tucked up in their soft little cots, than in having them ever so much admired at unseasonable times.

The hours for meeting and parting must necessarily vary with the habits of the children; for even children's habits vary, and no hard and fast line could possibly be drawn. Nevertheless the custom, which is unfortunately too common, of keeping up children's parties until a late hour cannot be sufficiently deprecated. The only effect of it is that the children are upset in health and temper. They do not enjoy themselves any more than they would do if they met early and retired early; and they are unfitted the next day for both work and play. This practice has done more than anything else to make prudent parents object to children's parties.

It is of no use to expect that when the children have arrived they will amuse themselves. They will not. If left to do so, the boys will gradually collect in one part of the room, and, I am afraid, will sometimes conduct themselves rather roughly; and the girls will sit modestly and silently in another part, scarcely speaking a word. It needs a grown-up person possessed of both energy and kindness, and who has made up his or her mind that hard work will be required, both to begin the enjoyment and to keep it up. It is the best thing to draw up a programme beforehand, and to have all the details arranged; and it requires forethought and care to see that there is no hitch in them. Of course the most delightful plan is to have a special entertainment provided for the children—a conjurer to puzzle them, or a show of some kind for them to watch. It is not every one, however, who can afford to pay a professional person to undertake the management of it; and it must be properly carried out, or it is worse than nothing. What can be more wearisome than to sit in a darkened room watching an inexperienced amateur try to exhibit a magic lantern? An oily smell, suggestive of headache, fills the apartment; the spectators are anxiously waiting for the sight, when a black figure is seen to rush through the darkness, to seek somewhere for something which has been forgotten, and which is not found, and for want of which the pictures look like nothing but an illuminated haze, indistinct and unsatisfactory. The politer members of the company do their best to admire, but at the same time feel immensely relieved when the impracticable machine is removed, and an ordinary round game is called for.

Of late years Christmas-trees have become very popular at children's parties. They are exceedingly pretty, and when tastefully trimmed with glittering ornaments, and lighted up with small lamps or candles, have a very charming appearance. When more than this is attempted, however, I think they are a mistake. Ticketed presents for the children are often hung upon the tree, and corresponding tickets drawn for. I have scarcely ever known this plan successful. In nine cases out of ten the boys get the dolls, and the girls the cricket-balls; and one difference between children and grown-up people is that the former find more difficulty in hiding their feelings than the latter. The kind host and hostess give themselves a great deal of trouble, and put themselves to expense, and after all only succeed in making their guests discontented and dissatisfied.

If it is wished to make presents to the children, why not have a bran-pie?—that is, a large box filled with bran, in which is hidden a present specially designed for each child, and marked with his name, and which is sought for by the youngest guest present. Or let one of the grown-up people dress like an old man, and come in laden with the treasures. All sorts of similar plans might be adopted, but it is not well to leave the distribution of the presents to chance.

One of the most successful parties that my children ever attended was given by a clever and rather eccentric friend of mine. In issuing her invitations, she requested that the children might arrive not later than three, and be sent for not later than eight o'clock. When they arrived, they were shown into a large, comfortable room, and the hostess and a lady friend joined with them in playing at old-fashioned round games, which were continued after tea. About half-past seven the children were taken into another room, and invited to seat themselves round a large table. In the middle of this was a Christmas-tree, prettily lighted and tastefully decorated. A plate was set for each child, upon which was an orange, a piece of cake, and a few raisins, and by the side of the plate a small parcel containing a present. Upon the parcel was placed a doll's candlestick, holding a small wax taper, lighted. The children examined their presents and partook of their refreshment by the light only of the candles and the Christmas-tree, and their delight was unbounded.

There is one word that must be said to parents in speaking of children's parties. When children receive an invitation to a party, the object of those who give it can only be either to give pleasure to the children, or to compliment the parents. In return for this they have a right to expect that they shall be treated fairly. This cannot be said to be the case if the children when they leave home are not perfectly well. So many of the complaints peculiar to children are spread by carelessness of this kind; and what can be more annoying to a host and hostess than to find that their house has been the centre from which illness has spread to their friends?

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