

HOW WE MADE OUR PICNIC A SUCCESS.



“MAMMA—oh, mamma!” said my daughter Bertha, breaking suddenly into the room where I was sitting at work, one lovely morning in summer. “Mrs. Thompson has sent to invite us to join their picnic. May we accept? Do let us, mamma. I should so like it.”

“When are they going, dear, and where?”

“They are going next Thursday. Mrs. Thompson says that the weather seems settled, and is so beautiful just now, that it would be a great pity not to take advantage of it. You remember that charming wood near Mrs. Thompson’s old home? They are going there. They have drawn up a most attractive programme. First of all, every person is particularly requested to fortify him or herself with a thoroughly good and substantial breakfast before starting—”

“Which every person will feel particularly disinclined to do, you may be quite sure,” interrupted Frank, who seemed very much amused with Bertha’s enthusiasm.

“Now, Frank, don’t be disagreeable and make difficulties out of nothing,” said his sister. “Mamma, may we go?”

“You did not finish your programme, my dear. What other arrangements have been made, besides the one to advise every one to take a good breakfast?”

“Oh, after that each one is to provide for himself. There is to be no rule but liberty. Mrs. Thompson says she knows that we can hire a conveyance of some kind to take our provisions to the place where we are to have refreshment; and she only wishes to make one suggestion, and that is, that our preparations shall be simple and inexpensive, for she does not think we should any of us care to spend very much money. As Ada said, when I was speaking to her about it, we are not going to eat and drink, but to enjoy fresh air and beautiful scenery, and the pleasure of one another’s society.”

“Am I to be of the party?” inquired Frank at this juncture.

“Of course you are, Frank; I should never think of going without you.”

“Then,” said Frank, assuming an oratorical air, “I am sure you will excuse me, Bertha, if I speak my mind. I have been listening to you, so far, with a fraternal interest only, but now the question becomes painfully personal. What was it I learnt in my young days?—

“A little bird who all day long
Had cheered the forest with his song,
Began to feel, as well he might,
The keen demands of appetite.”

Consider, my dear sister. Fresh air and exercise have a tendency to make one feel hungry; beautiful scenery and pleasant companionship, in those circumstances, will not alone suffice for us. Do not, I beg of you, allow us to run short of provender.”

“No, we won’t run short,” said Bertha; “we will have enough to eat, but we must have it uncomfortably. That is the chief charm of a picnic. What one looks forward to, is to have one’s dinner jerked into somebody else’s lap, just as one was going to enjoy it. If we were to have every convenience, we might as well stay at home.—What am I to wear, mamma?”

“Of course, that is always a girl’s question,” said Frank.

“We will arrange that, my dear,” I answered.

“If I might be allowed to offer a little advice,” said papa, when he heard us talking over our arrangements, “I should say:—First, don’t forget to take a corkscrew; secondly, don’t forget to take some salt; and, thirdly—and this is the most important of all,” he continued, stroking Bertha’s hair—“be sure to take plenty of warm wraps, to wear when the heat of the day is over.”

The eventful morning dawned, to use the language of story-books. Bertha’s constantly expressed fear that the weather would change proved groundless, for the morning was lovely.

After a good deal of excitement, and one or two false starts, the young people set off; and then, and only then, silence reigned in the house. After they had gone, I sat down for a few minutes and mentally congratulated myself. “For once they have taken everything they will require,” I thought. “They have a corkscrew, they have salt, sugar, forks, knives, plates, spoons, provisions, glass, and wraps. Surely nothing has been forgotten.”

“Oh, mamma!” were the first words with which I was greeted on their return, “after all, we forgot the corkscrew.”

“But, my dear children, I put it myself into Frank’s knapsack—into that nice little inner pocket that fastens up so beautifully.”

Frank and Bertha looked at one another.

“I never looked there,” said Frank; “I searched the hamper and the knapsack, but I never thought of the little pocket. And everybody had forgotten one. We had to break the necks of the bottles, until at last it



(Drawn by M. E. EDWARDS.)

A PLEASANT PICNIC.

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was discovered that a gentleman of the party possessed the gift of screwing out corks with his pocket-handkerchief, and from that moment he devoted himself exclusively to that occupation, and afterwards presented his pocket-handkerchief to a friend, as a proof of much love and great esteem."

"Really," I said, "what a pity you could not find the corkscrew! I was congratulating myself and thinking that this time we had been clever enough to remember everything. At any rate you found the salt?"

"Oh, yes!" said Bertha, "it was beautifully wrapped up in white paper, and Frank thought it was sugar, and most politely showered it over Mr. Thompson's gooseberry tart."

"Mr. Thompson did not quite like it," said Frank; "he had got a good slice of tart, and it was covered with cream, enough to make your mouth water, and it was the last slice too. I was very sorry, but I really did not intend it."

"Well, children, taking it altogether what sort of a day has it been?"

"Oh! it has been most charming," said Bertha. "Nearly everything went wrong."

"It has been a charming day certainly," said Frank; "the weather has been beautiful, the woods were simply delicious, but I must say the arrangements were a failure."

"How so?" I asked.

"It was understood that every one was to take what they liked—to please themselves, in short. The consequence was that there was no co-operation. Four of the providers thought that knives and forks could be hired, and brought none. One lady had the same impression about plates, and came without them. Another had been thinking that we should make a gipsy encampment, light a fire, and cook our own provisions; so she brought a most delicious little luncheon, but uncooked. There were birds trussed for roasting, rashers of bacon, fresh eggs, potatoes, but everything had to be taken back again."

"I am so sorry for that lady," said Bertha, "she seemed so disappointed, and every one seemed to think her idea so absurd."

"So it was," said Frank, "most preposterous. Who ever heard of cooking the provisions out of doors? Why, it would be no end of trouble!"

"But, mamma," said Bertha, "did not you tell us that you managed picnic dinners in that way when you were a girl?"

"Certainly I did. We used to have great fun, and we made up our minds to the trouble. We built a fire over a flat stone as soon as we got into the woods, and let it burn till the embers were quite hot. Then we raked it, made it up again, and wrapped whatever was to be cooked, first, in plenty of wet brown paper, which we had taken with us for the purpose, and afterwards in sand, and laid it in the cinders, and left it until we thought it was done enough. We always took a frying-pan with us, in which to fry bacon and poach eggs."

"And how did you manage about coffee, mamma?" said Bertha, "because Mrs. Thompson said she did not think it could be taken."

"Oh, we took freshly ground coffee with us, tied loosely in a coarse white flannel bag, and a coffee-pot. We found no difficulty about it."

"That is the kind of picnic I should like," said Bertha.

"I should not care for it at all," said Frank; "I do not enjoy performing as an amateur cook."

"It is great fun for a change," I said, "but to make it a success, every one should go in for it *con amore*. But go on with to-day's experience."

"One lady brought some cream, and did not cork it up closely, and the cork came out, and the cream had run into all the rest of the things. One hamper contained some very nice rolls and fresh butter—the butter had melted with the heat, and was more like oil than anything else."

"Oh, Frank!" said Bertha, "you are exaggerating.—Mamma, it was not so bad as that."

"Then," continued Frank, "we were the only ones who had taken salt; and there was no corkscrew."

"You seem to have been unfortunate indeed; I think there was room for a little management."

"How would you have done it, mamma?" said Frank.

"I would either have given the entire charge of everything to one person, or I would have had a small committee of ladies, and let them consult and work together."

"That would be an excellent plan," said Bertha. "Mamma, *you* arrange for a picnic and take the management yourself."

"Ah! Bertha wants another picnic," said papa, laughing.

"Yes, I do," said Bertha; "I like picnics, however they are managed."

"No," I answered, "I should not care to take the entire charge of it; it would be too much trouble. I do not at all object, however, to join five or six ladies in the work, and we will see what can be done."

Accordingly, picnic No. 2 was decided upon. And for the benefit of those who feel inclined to follow our example, I will, as nearly as I can remember it, give an account of the provision we made, and show how we divided the responsibility. Thirty friends were invited, and amongst these there were three or four members of seven families, as well as a few ladies and gentlemen who were allowed to join us "promiscuous" without taking their share of the work. One gentleman undertook to provide the beverages, and he solemnly pledged himself to take three corkscrews. We felt that this was a great assistance to us, and also that the work was much more suitable for a gentleman than it would have been for a lady. Our committee consisted of seven ladies, one lady representing each family, and we had a president, to whom each member of the committee gave a list of the money she had expended. This lady's husband paid all other expenses—railway fares, carriages, &c. The two accounts were put together, and the expenses were afterwards equally divided amongst all those who took part in the picnic, each person's share of the expense being handed to the president before the

party broke up. The ladies divided the work as follows:—

Lady No. 1 took the entire responsibility of providing and looking after the knives, forks, plates, tumblers, wine-glasses, spoons, dishes, salt-cellar, table-cloths, and dinner-napkins. These were packed by themselves, and were carefully counted twice over before they were put into the hamper, and again before being returned to it, after having been used. I know this lady hired what was wanted, as she said she preferred doing that to running any risk of having her own or her friends' possessions lost or broken. She got everything she wanted for about £1. She also took two pounds of good cheese, a piece of cream cheese, a block of ice a foot square, which was wrapped in a clean piece of old carpet, and a hammer and chisel to break it with. Inside the carpet, near the ice, was laid a pound and a half of butter in a tin box.

No. 2 provided a ham, a rolled tongue, a pair of fowls, and some fruit. She undertook that pepper, salt, and white sugar should be forthcoming when wanted, and also that they should be sent in separate bottles—each one distinctly labelled.

No. 3 brought a large piece of pickled salmon, a veal-and-ham pie, four fine cucumbers, a bottle of vinegar, a bottle of oil, and some fruit. The bottles were to be well corked, and the corks securely tied down with strong twine.

No. 4—a large piece of roast beef, a pigeon-pie, two fruit-tarts, a bottle of mixed mustard, with the cork well tied down, a good quantity of scraped horse-radish, and some fruit.

No. 5—a pair of fowls, six lobsters, twenty-four lettuces, two large bottles of salad dressing, securely tied down, four dozen rolls, and some fruit. The lettuces were washed, thoroughly dried, and shred before we started on the morning of the picnic; the shells of the lobsters were not cracked, because we knew that could be done with the hammer brought with the ice.

No. 6—a quarter of lamb, a bottle of mint sauce, securely tied down, four fruit-tarts, four baskets of small salad washed and dried, and some fruit.

No. 7—a pair of fowls, two cabinet puddings, three jellies, two blanc-manges, two large bottles of stewed fruit well sweetened, a dish of stewed Normandy pippins, and four tins of Devonshire cream. This lady had been intending to bring two bottles of ordinary cream, but as the Devonshire cream was sent to her by a friend at the last moment, she kindly brought it instead. The puddings, jellies, and blanc-manges she brought in the moulds, and they were turned out at the last moment.

This completes the list of provisions. If our allowance seems over-liberal, it will be explained by the fact that we expected the appetites of our friends would be sharpened by exercise and the fresh air.

We did not provide for tea. If we had done so, we should have taken four times the quantity of butter,

together with cups and saucers, tea-pots, tea, bread, cakes, biscuits, and jam or marmalade. There are few places where water cannot be obtained, so it is not often necessary to take it. If there are cottages near the spot chosen for the picnic, the payment of a few pence will most likely remove all difficulty about having it boiled. Where there are no cottages it will be necessary to take a large kettle, and light a fire.

Three-quarters of an hour before luncheon was wanted, the ladies of the committee quietly withdrew from the rest of the company, having first chosen two gentlemen who were to assist as aides-de-camp.

The cloth was spread on the grass in a shady spot, and round this were put waterproofs and shawls on which it was intended the company should seat themselves, in Oriental fashion. The luncheon was prettily laid, with a napkin, two knives, two forks, one spoon, and three plates for each guest, and before commencing operations it was announced that these were to suffice. The provisions were all laid upon the table at once, and looked very appetising. At the last moment, to our great delight, Bertha and a young friend of hers appeared with two or three large bunches of wild flowers which they had gathered for the purpose, and these, when prettily arranged in glasses, improved the appearance of the table wonderfully.

When all was ready the company were summoned, and our friends heartily enjoyed the refreshment which had been provided for them. To our great satisfaction we found that not a single article had been forgotten. Thanks to the ice, the butter was solid, and the water and wine cool and refreshing. The vinegar, cream, oil, and mustard had not escaped from their bottles, nor the salt penetrated to the interior of the gooseberry tart. All our friends declared themselves both satisfied and delighted.

As soon as the repast was over the crockery was collected, and counted, and everything was returned to the hampers. Certainly our picnic was a great success.

A bill of fare for a picnic, as for everything else, may be varied to suit the fancy, tastes, and pockets of the guests. A few sandwiches, a little bread and butter, some hard-boiled eggs, and cake will be sufficient for many; or, instead of these, a few sardines, bread and butter, cold meat cut in slices, and stewed fruit or similar refreshment. Thus the trouble and expense will be reduced indefinitely. At the same time it would be very foolish for a number of persons to penetrate quite into the heart of a country district, where in all probability they would be unable to buy what they wanted, without making some provision for necessary wants. Any one who has tried the two plans will know that not only is the benefit to health derived from fresh air and exercise greater when the demands of hunger and thirst are satisfied than when they are not, but they will confess also that a good dinner is no mean assistance to the true appreciation of the beauties of nature and the delights of social intercourse.

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