

## ERIC'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.

A SEQUEL TO "HOW WE ENTERTAINED OUR ELDERS."

BY LIZZIE HERITAGE.



ERIC having been promised, by Dorrit and me, that we would do our best to provide an evening's recreation and refreshment on the occasion of his birthday, it will readily be believed that, for once at least, his memory did not fail him, and that for us to forget the day—so long as he was near—was an impossibility.

The question whether he preferred a party of the youthful "lords of creation" only, or a few of the fair sex as well, was jokingly put by Dorrit, who once heard him vote "all girls a bore." The answer that it would look odd not to have "a few of the fellows' sisters," was sufficiently affirmative to justify us in sending invitations to the favoured few. A discussion then followed on the relative merits of a sit-down supper, and the arranging of the refreshments on a long table, so that all might help themselves in the intervals between the performances—but I am premature in mentioning performances just yet. The result was, all the gentlemen present at the discussion promised to do their duty in ministering to the creature comforts of the fair sex, so the "refreshment table" proposal was carried unanimously.

"Don't spare the drinks, girls," was the boys' request; "we shall be thirsty after all the work mapped out for us;" so I purchased a supply of "fruit syrups," clove, pineapple, ginger, lemon, orange, raspberry, lime, and currant, all being included in the assorted dozen, the remains of which would be consumed by us during the warm weather. I also laid in a stock of aerated waters—soda, seltzer, &c.—for mixing with the syrups; but my particular little luxury was a block of ice, which I knew would render the afore-mentioned beverages still more refreshing; tea and coffee, and some home-made wines, making up the drinkables.

The savoury edibles consisted of *Lamb-Sandwiches*—a change from the cold lamb one so often meets with—*Lobster Salads*, and *Marbled Chickens*.

For the first-named, thin slices of meat were cut from a leg which had been roasted and left until cold; the slices divided into dice before being laid on the bread and butter. A little *thick* mint sauce was spread on the fellow-slice, and the sandwiches were completed.

The *Lobster Salads* were made very small, in tiny glass dishes the size of the top of a tea-cup, and plentifully dotted about the table. Lettuces, radishes, cucumber, and beet-root, cut small, were dressed with oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper, then mixed with the flesh of the lobster, also finely cut; this three-parts filled the little dishes. Some mayonnaise sauce was then poured over, and sprinkled with lobster coral, run

through a sieve; the whites of the eggs—left from those boiled for the dressing—were cut into rings and laid in the centre of each, and very pretty they looked.

For *Marbled Chickens*, two were boned, laid upon the table, and spread first with a layer of boiled tongue in slices, then with nicely-seasoned veal forcement, and lastly with slices of boiled ham. Each was rolled up, tied with tape, and simmered—with the bones, herbs and vegetables to flavour nicely, and sufficient water to cover—until tender. The gravy was well seasoned, and reduced to a pint by longer simmering; it then received the addition of an ounce of dissolved gelatine, and, when *nearly* set, was poured over the chickens, which had been unbound and cut into slices ready for serving, though they were placed together as if uncut, so as to present a nice appearance. The dishes were garnished with parsley, sliced lemon, and beet-root.

I took care that there should be various kinds of cheese, besides salad, and brown and white bread and butter.

The sweets were fresh fruits in season, as many as my purse would allow, and that old-fashioned, delicious dish, *Gooseberry Fool*; but instead of all cream for mixing with the fruit after cooking, and rubbing it through a sieve, I used half cream and half milk, sweetening with condensed milk, which gave it a very rich taste.

The indispensable *Birthday Cake* was a moderately rich one, with citron, cherries, and chopped almonds, instead of raisins or currants. The top, too, was coated with rough sugar and chopped almonds, prior to baking in a shallow square tin, so that the cake could be cut into fingers.

Would a birthday be a birthday without a *pudding*? I thought not; so, as the weather was too warm for the rich plum-pudding generally served on such occasions, I made two *Festive Puddings*—from a recipe given to me by Nora Graham, that young lady being unable to help me to prepare the supper, though she and Hugh promised to join us in the evening. And in my heart I felt I had profited by her previous instruction sufficiently to enable me to manage on this occasion with Dorrit's help only. The mode was as follows:—Two moulds, holding a pint and a half each, were lined with sliced sponge-cake, next a layer of fresh ripe strawberries, and a layer of hot custard, and so on, cake, fruit, and custard, until the moulds were full. The ingredients for the custard were a pint of milk, an ounce and a half of gelatine, the yolks of four eggs, and four ounces of sugar; half a pint of cream, and the juice of a lemon, being stirred in *off* the fire. These, when set firm and turned out, resembled moulded creams in appearance, and were much appreciated, as, for this occasion, sugar and cream were served with them.

Small dishes of pastry, some "fingers" with a layer of jam, and tartlets filled with stewed fruit, together with biscuits, sweet and plain, interspersed among the larger dishes completed the *menu*.

I must mention my plan for keeping the ice from melting, as it created no little amusement. I knew that *the* thing was to exclude the warm air, so, as we possessed a large eider-down tea-cosy, I used it for covering the ice, which was divided into small pieces and put into an oval dish. "The idea of keeping ice warm!" said one, and a general laugh followed; but when I explained that in some hospitals it is customary to set the vessel containing ice on a feather pillow and lay a second pillow over the top, my little device was praised rather than ridiculed.

As we knew we could not accommodate more than eighteen, we had decided to send invitations to fourteen outsiders, there being four of ourselves (Rupert, Eric, Dorrit, and myself) to make up the number. At a family conclave held three weeks previous to the all-important event, we voted that we would try to strike out in a new direction for providing entertainment for the evening. Eric was inclined to have nothing but games, but Rupert protested that it would not answer unless we had "singing or something of that." However, on one point we were determined, we would *not* have the usual excuses from guests who, when asked to sing or play, invariably say that they are unprepared, that they have not brought their music, that they have colds, &c. &c., all of which may or may not be true.

We thought it would do if we arranged a programme, and let each guest know beforehand what he or she was expected to do towards the general entertainment. We knew that this could be done very easily, as all whom we intended to invite were intimate friends of ours, and would be perfectly willing to fall in with our scheme; the songs, recitations, &c., would be far more appreciated in the intervals between the round games than they would be if listened to in monotonous succession, as is so often the case; and, by winding up with a charade, we felt sure the evening would not want in "go."

Having ascertained from our friends that they were willing to take part, Nora, Dorrit, and I, after much deliberation, drew up the programme, which consisted of music and popular readings and recitations.

For a charade, Dorrit had suggested that we should use a composition of her own, which some unappreciative editor had returned some years before. Eric

grumbled at first, saying that it was too easy, and "he wasn't going to learn that stuff" (poor Dorrit's effusion being written in a kind of doggerel rhyme), but when it was pointed out that our object was to amuse rather than puzzle our guests, and that the characters could easily introduce impromptu scraps of conversation throughout the charade, he graciously fell in with the idea.

So at twelve precisely the curtain rose on the first act, which was easily guessed by our audience to represent "Arm." We had altered this slightly from my sister's original effort, as we brought in the word in every conceivable way, not forgetting to put the "h" before it in one instance. *The* hit was when Hugh, Rupert, and Eric posed as three raw rifle volunteers, endeavouring to shoulder arms. The second act represented "Chair," and we did it as follows:—Hugh, got up as a pompous elderly gentleman, was discovered seated with his family around him; said family being represented by Nora (who made a splendid matron), Rupert, Dorrit, and myself. Our supposed father then informed us, as he flourished a roll of paper, that he would rehearse the speech which he intended to deliver at the next local Science Meeting, where he was to take the chair; so he began, "Ladies and Gentlemen," when he was interrupted by Eric, dressed as a regular Sairy Gamp, who entered in a truly inconsistent stage-fashion, and, with a bob, introduced herself—

"Please, sir, my name is Betsy Gam,  
And I goes out a charing;  
A poor hard-working soul I am,  
As seldom gets a airing"—

and went on to vociferously demand employment. We had hard work to get rid of Betsy, who stated her wants in a very spirited fashion, and, as Eric was very good in putting in bits of his own, the curtain was drawn amid much laughter. Space forbids me to give the third act, "Arm-chair," in detail; suffice it that a young couple are surprised by the damsel's outraged father, who, on hearing that the young man has come into a fortune, bestows his blessing on them, and his arm-chair! Nora singing Eliza Cook's well-known song completed the scene.

After a slight refectation, our friends departed—thoroughly satisfied with their evening; and if any doubts as to the success of our party *aid* remain, they were dispelled when Eric announced, with a gratified sigh, that "he didn't care how soon he had another birthday."

