



AT A COLLEGE BREAKFAST-PARTY.



OXFORD life is like Freemasonry. Let the outsider make what inquiries he will, he learns next to nothing about it till he is initiated. Everything that happens to a young man on entering the University comes as a surprise, and one of the earliest is his first breakfast-party.

He has been "up" only a few days, and still feels a little restless and uneasy in his new independence, when, returning from an unprofitable lecture, to which he has been listening with all his ears as if it were an oracle, he finds upon his table a note from a senior acquaintance, which runs as follows :—

"ST. BONIFACE COLL.
"20th Oct.

"Dear Jones,
"Will you breakfast with me on Thursday at nine?—Yours truly,
"T. BROWN."

Jones replies that he will be delighted, little knowing what a task awaits him.

It has been observed that there is this much at least to be said for a University career; for three years of his life a man is certain of getting enough to eat. Before ten o'clock on Thursday, Jones has felt the full force of this statement.

He rises betimes, dresses with unusual care, and attends a somewhat chilly service in his College chapel. There is yet half an hour to spare, which he spends in familiarising himself with the intricate geography of the ancient city—for he has more than once suffered the humiliation of being directed to a College within a few yards of him. Luckily, St. Boniface is unmistakable; and, guided by the little golden flags which glitter on the grey pinnacles of that noble tower, he wends his way down Holywell and Longwall Streets—the cleanest and quaintest in the world—and arrives punctually at his destination.

"Mr. Brown's rooms? Yes-sir! Garden quad number three two pair on the right."

Jones is still too much of a boy to ask for more explicit instruction; his drowning intellect clutches at

the word "garden," and he makes for the first shrubs he sees. This lands him in the Warden's private grounds, from which he is delivered by the merciful interposition of the College messenger who happens to be going round with the letter-bag. He is conducted ignominiously through the cloisters, too conscious of his freshness to notice the sympathetically blushing creepers, the trim ivy, or the hideous gurgoyles peeping down at the tortoises as they browse on the velvet turf below.

At last he is safely piloted to his friend's door, knocks, and enters a lofty wainscoted room. His host greets him curtly, and introduces him by name and College to three other "men," who are lounging in the window-seat, throwing down biscuits to the deer in the park. After a little encouragement Jones comments on the magnificence of the elm-trees and the ample proportions of the room.

"Well," says Brown, "it ought to be a good size, for it does double duty. Half an hour ago it was a bed-room. Look here." And throwing open a door in the wainscot, he discloses an iron bedstead, bath, washstand, and toilet apparatus.

While Jones is marvelling at the minute space into which so many household goods may be stowed, three other guests arrive, and behind them appears the scout with an armful of hot plates which he deposits in the fender; a boy follows with tea, coffee, cocoa, and a tower of dry toast.

Now, a wedding breakfast makes no pretence to be anything less than a lunch; but the hour alone proclaims a College breakfast to be really such, independently of the almost incredible fact that lunch and dinner are partaken of in the same day. Viewed in this light, the quantity of food brought to table on such occasions is simply appalling.

The feast commences with two enormous dishes of whiting and soles. After the edge of appetite has been blunted on these trifles the serious business of the day begins. A couple of "spread eagles," *i.e.*, fowls squashed flat and embellished with mushrooms, face a mound of sausages enclosed in a rampart of mashed potatoes, and are supported on either hand by a regiment of boiled eggs and a solid square of beefsteak. These are backed up by a reserve of omelettes sweet and savoury, anchovy toast—more graphically than elegantly known as "dirty toast"—and "squish"—a synonym for marmalade. Fish, flesh, and fowl, with all their appurtenances, having been discussed, in a few

minutes the room is filled with incense offered to the nymph Nicotina.

By this time it is nearly eleven o'clock, and one or two of the party, before whom the bogey of examination looms at no great distance, have left for a lecture at

It is simply not the time or place for intellectual talk ; everything that savours of the "shop" is tabooed.

But what becomes of all the superfluous food ? There must be enough to feed a family.—Very true ; and it *does* feed a family. That intact beefsteak, that



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some distant College. The rest sit smoking for awhile and then separate to walk off the effects of such a breakfast and prepare for lunch at one.

But has there been no conversation to justify this tremendous consumption of victuals ?—Conversation there has been, but of the most limited description ; all about "torpids," "tubbing," "scratch fours," and kindred topics possessing no interest whatever for the general public.

Are the men, then, narrow-minded ?—By no means.

scatheless regiment of eggs, those mountains of unbroken bread, all find their way to the same capacious basket which transports into the bosom of the scout's family so many fragments of Brown's property, from the remnants of his daily lunch to the seven-shilling packet of wax-candles discreetly ordered the last week of term.

So perishes the glory of this and all such festivals, under a system calculated to promote the immediate comfort of all concerned except poor paterfamilias.