

HOW WE ENTERTAINED OUR ELDERS.



HAT a funny idea, Dorrit!" "All Dorrit's ideas *are* funny, but this is not a bad one, and *I* am agreeable if a boys' party is to follow suit," was the response of Eric, our fifteen-year-old brother.

The funny idea referred to arose from a discussion on parties generally, to several of which we had been invited, and in Dorrit's opinion it would be a novel and pleasant experience to entertain guests entirely composed of elderly people—old friends of father's—who would appreciate the feeling which prompted the readiness on our part to devote ourselves entirely to them, by taking the place of our servant in waiting upon them, and providing amusement, to the best of our ability, for the remainder of the evening. As to the trouble and expense of catering, I knew that a little advice and help from our old friend, Nora Graham, would soon obviate difficulties in that direction, so after a chat with father, who fell in delightedly with the proposal, and at once issued invitations, I sought her immediately.

After a preliminary talk, Nora advised that "high tea" should be on the table at six o'clock punctually, few people caring for a heavy late meal, and those who preferred anything in place of tea or coffee could be accommodated.

"And after what will doubtless prove a pleasant evening, your friends will be ready for departure about twelve o'clock, so light refreshments, such as biscuits and fruit, will be the only necessaries after tea, and that shall be as nice as possible," said Nora; "and if any of the number have whims and fancies, we will try to indulge them."

I replied that of the nine invited I felt sure all would accept, which they did; and with the exception of Mrs. Malcolm, who had a weakness for shortbread, and Uncle Bob, who disliked even the smell of onions, I knew of no one for whom we need cater especially; though it was decided that everything should be of a kind suited to the digestive powers of people on the shady side of fifty, and that there should be no carving for anybody; the hot dishes being handed round, and the cold ones, in small quantities, plentifully dotted about the table.

The following was the menu decided upon:—

Scotch Woodcocks.	Oyster Loaves.
Neapolitan Medallions.	Chicken Sandwiches.
Almond Shortbread	
Compôte of Figs.	Apples in Syrup.
Ginger Cakes.	

In addition, there would be brown and white bread and butter, tiny dishes of whipped cream to accompany the fruits, besides biscuits, both plain and sweet, and small plates of grapes and other fruits placed the whole length of the table at each side; the centre-

piece which one so often sees being voted a bore, as it obstructs the sight, and is always difficult to reach at times when "help yourself" is the order of the day.

When *the* day arrived, the cold dishes were prepared in the morning by Nora and myself, and Nora cooked the hot ones while Dorrit and I waited at table.

The *Oyster Loaves* were similar in appearance to Dresden patties, except that the bread was cut an inch and a half in thickness with a round cutter the size of a claret-glass. The inside was scooped out, leaving a wall just thick enough to hold the mince. These cases were dipped into a mixture of two eggs, a wine-glassful of milk, and a table-spoonful of bread-crumbs, beaten together; they were then fried a pale brown, and filled with a mixture prepared as follows:—A score of large oysters were put into a small sieve and set over a saucepan of boiling water for a minute or two, to make them firm, and render the "bearding" process more easy. The beards were then removed, and put into a saucepan with the oyster liquor (strained) and a strip of lemon-rind, and simmered very gently for half an hour. This was again strained, the beards thrown away, and the liquor mixed with a table-spoonful of flour, two table-spoonfuls of cream, an ounce of butter, nearly a tea-spoonful of anchovy essence, and a little cayenne and nutmeg. The whole was stirred until it boiled, and poured into a basin *over* the oysters, which had been cut into small pieces.

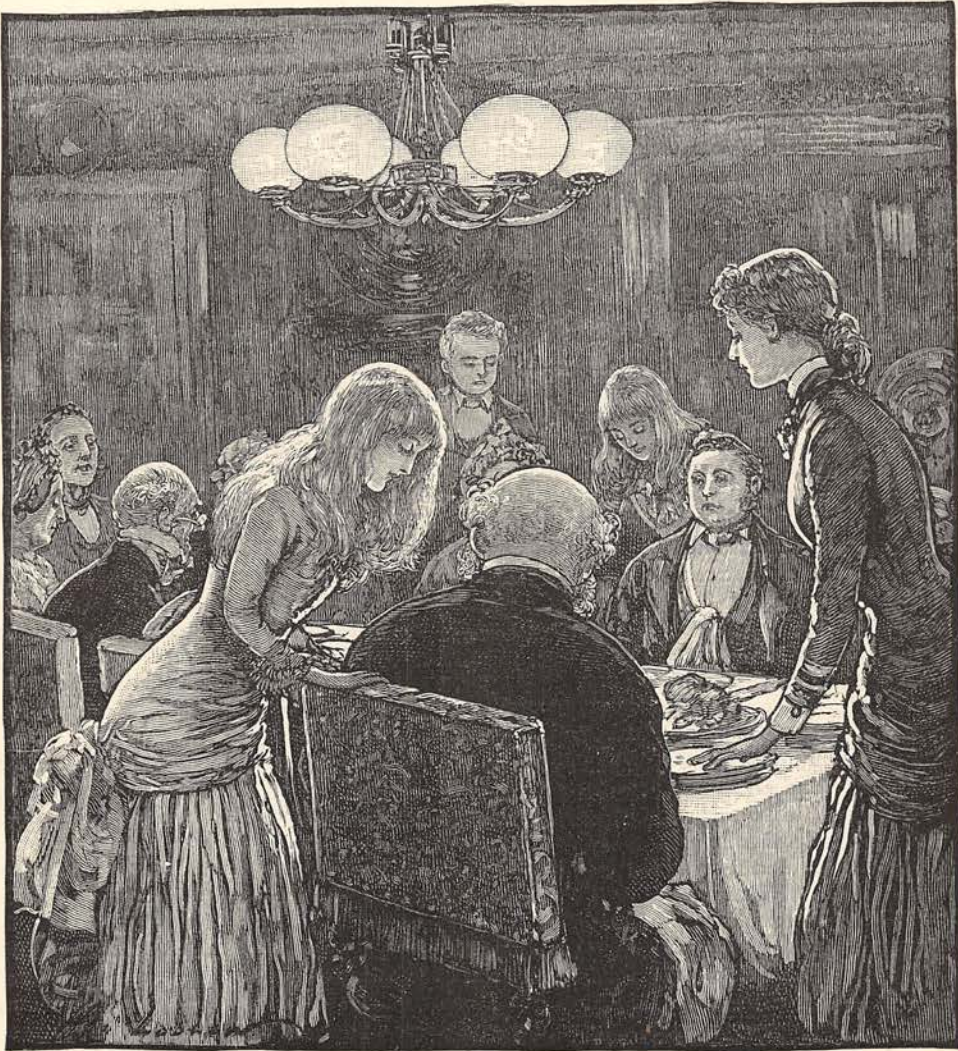
"There!" said Nora, "those will be enjoyed, I know; I might have made *Patties* with the same mince, but some people are afraid to eat pastry." The only garnish needed for the dish was a few sprigs of parsley.

For *Scotch Woodcocks*, three rounds from a two-pound loaf were toasted and buttered, then thinly spread with anchovy paste. Nine eggs were boiled rather hard, cut into slices, and laid evenly over the pieces of toast, each round being cut into four; a sprinkling of pepper, and a few drops of cream, followed by a minute's heating in the oven, finished them. "For any one who objected to the anchovy flavour, you might substitute another fish paste; but it would not then be *Scotch Woodcock* proper," said Nora.

Neapolitan Medallions proved new to everybody; they were exceedingly pretty, as well as delicious. To make them, a fowl was rubbed over with lemon-juice, tied in a buttered paper, then in a cloth, and boiled until very tender. The flesh was removed, and the bones returned to the saucepan with a pint of the liquor, and simmered until reduced to a quarter-pint. An equal measure of cream was brought to the boil, and mixed with it, together with all the whitest meat of the fowl, and a few slices of ham, both finely minced; the whole being seasoned with salt, pepper, a dash of nutmeg, a salt-spoonful of grated lemon-rind, a table-spoonful of *scalded* chopped parsley, and a sprig of thyme. This, while hot, was poured into a large meat-

dish, making a layer half an inch thick, and set aside to cool. When cold, a dozen rounds were cut from the layer, with the cutter used for the oyster loaves; each was laid on to a slice of cold fried bread, the same shape and thickness. Just before serving, each

and fully sustained her reputation, being universally appreciated. The recipe was: a pound of fine white flour, well dried and sifted; half a pound of fresh butter, a quarter-pound of pounded white sugar, two ounces of candied peel in thin shreds, three ounces of



HOW WE ENTERTAINED OUR ELDERS.

medallion was decorated in the centre with tiny bits of pickled gherkins, beetroot, and chopped capers.

The trimmings left from the rounds were pounded in a mortar with the dark meat of the fowl (all the skin being carefully removed), and an ounce or two of butter, nicely seasoned, and spread thickly on the bread and butter for the *sandwiches*, for which we used a small *round* tinned loaf, so there was no waste in the way of crust, as the rounds, when cut into four, formed triangular-shaped sandwiches.

The *Almond Shortbread* was a speciality of Nora's,

ground almonds, and half a tea-spoonful of salt—all rubbed together until as fine as bread-crumbs, then mixed lightly to a stiff paste with a quarter-pint of milk and one egg, a spoonful being reserved for brushing over the top. This quantity made a round cake half an inch thick; the top was covered with blanched almonds, roughly chopped, and coarsely-pounded sugar, previous to baking for half an hour in a gentle oven.

A pound of figs, the very best obtainable, was bought for the *Fig Compôte*; dry, hard fruit being useless for the purpose. They were put whole into a jar, with half a

pint of water, the juice of half a lemon, and two ounces of sugar, and cooked in the oven for an hour; Nora remarking that, had the oven been fierce, she would have simmered them on the range, as they would not "plump" if cooked quickly, but would become hard and shrivelled. They were laid in small dishes when cool.

For *Apples in Syrup*: a dozen American pippins, rosy in colour and uniform in size, were wiped and cored, without being peeled or divided. A syrup of half a pint of water and half a pound of sugar was then made, into which the apples were dropped, with a few cloves, a piece of ginger, and the rind of half a lemon. An hour's gentle boiling was sufficient to make them tender and shiny-looking, the stew-pan having been covered the whole time. These were served in deep glass dishes, the syrup poured round them, and a spoonful of whipped cream placed on the top of each.

The *Ginger Cakes* required a pound of flour—dried as for the shortbread—into which Nora rubbed six ounces of butter and two ounces of lard, six ounces of sugar, four ounces of crystallised ginger (not that in syrup) cut small, a pinch of ground ginger, and a suspicion of salt. This was mixed stiffly with three eggs and *about* their measure in milk, Nora informing us that cakes into which the fat is rubbed dry must be mixed less soft than when it is beaten to a cream. The mixture was poured into well-greased patty-pans, and the top of the cakes coated with roughly-pounded loaf-sugar. Twenty minutes in a moderate oven baked them beautifully.

After the meal, which was thoroughly enjoyed if empty plates are a fair test, some of our friends indulged in chess and draughts, and others in round games, followed by music, vocal and instrumental, each gentleman competent to play having been asked to bring his pet instrument; and as Uncle Bob had a weakness for the flute, and Mr. Skidmore was passionately fond of the fiddle, while any one could tell from Mr. Carter's round cheeks that he was in the habit of blowing the cornet, we had a pretty fair orchestra. Our brother Rupert and Hugh Flynn (to whom Nora was engaged) possessed respectively very good bass and tenor voices, and as we girls each tried to sing a little, I need hardly say that there was plenty of vocal music to the fore.

Acting upon a brilliant suggestion made by Eric, we had decided to wind up the evening by having a couple of *tableaux*; the lively youth aforesaid was stage-manager and overseer in general, and for the past few days had been indefatigable in turning his artistic ability to account by manipulating pieces of cardboard, tinsel paper, &c., into grand scenic effects, and providing a truly gorgeous costume for himself.

We had screened off one end of the room for the purpose, and our first *tableau* represented that well-known scene taken from the favourite fairy-tale of our childhood, illustrating the triumph of Cinderella over her wicked sisters. Dorrit posed as the heroine, and, when the curtains were drawn, was just proudly pointing to the perfect fit of the slipper. Eric, as the herald, had on a properly-interested expression; and Nora and myself, as the two sisters, assumed the most vinegary aspect of which we were capable.

Our second *tableau* was rather more ambitious—we had chosen the casket scene at Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice*. I must say that I think our characters were very effectively grouped, although I was not one of them, but performed softly at the piano (which was placed behind the curtain), and sang snatches of song to represent the "music in the distance." Hugh Flynn was Bassanio; Rupert, Gratiano; and Eric, as an attendant, was still able to wear his gorgeous herald's dress. Nora, as Portia, looked very stately, and yet expressed the right amount of anxiety, while Bassanio's consideration of the caskets was capitally rendered, and Dorrit made a very nice Nerissa. The curtains were drawn amid rapturous applause, and we were fully repaid for the little trouble we had taken in getting up the *tableaux* by the pleasure which they had given to our friends.

At length—and very quickly the time had passed—we had to "speed the parting guests," one and all declaring that they had spent a most enjoyable evening. Even Eric, who had certainly rendered us much assistance, and had in consequence been promised that, all being well, he should receive *his* friends on his birthday a couple of months later, was bound to confess that should the same success attend our efforts then he would vote us "jolly good girls."

L. HERITAGE.



FAIR MARGARET.

NATURE had treasures unseen yet;
 For flowers all
 We can recall,
 Of garden trim or rivulet;
 How you outvie them, Margaret!
 Even at their best, when dewdrops make

Them sweeter, fresher, for your sake
 With heedless eye
 We'd pass all by
 And all their loveliness forget,
 Which vainly by your side were set,
 Fair Margaret.