

HOW AMERICAN GIRLS ENTERTAIN.



It has been said by more than one distinguished American that the art of entertaining is carried to its highest point of perfection in England, and that hospitality as dispensed by the typical British hostess leaves nothing to be desired. This is high praise indeed, and it is to be hoped that we may continue to live up to so flattering a reputation. At the same time it were folly to suppose that even here we have nothing to learn from other nations, and more especially from America, where lavish and open-handed hospitality is an ingrained national characteristic. It is with a view of affording English girls a glimpse at how their charming transatlantic cousins "do the honours" in their own country, and of emphasising

maybe certain points in which we, at home, might well follow their example, that I would tell briefly of some personal experiences that recently fell to my lot, more particularly in the southern parts of the United States.

Some short while ago it was my good fortune to form one of a mixed party of astronomers, who made a scientific pilgrimage to the Southern States to observe a total eclipse of the sun. Forming as we did the only English expedition for this purpose, and having moreover introductions to the leading American astronomers, we were everywhere received with the most unbounded kindness and hospitality; and had thus an opportunity in a short space of learning more about the art of entertaining as understood by Americans, and especially by American girls, than a much longer stay under ordinary circumstances could possibly have taught us.

The spot whence we were to observe the eclipse was a little townlet of North Carolina, planted in the midst of wild luxuriant pine-forests and cotton-fields, and inhabited by a few hundred "whites," chiefly interested in the cotton industry, and a larger number of cheery, childlike, light-hearted negroes, whose forefathers had been slaves on the plantations where their descendants now worked as hired labourers. Within half an hour of our arrival at this out-of-the-world little nook, we received formal calls from the Mayor of the town and the "Judge" (late a Senator of the United States, and the principal landowner and chief man of the district), bidding us heartily welcome, and offering all assistance in their power. And these dignitaries had scarcely taken their departure before the Judge's daughter, on behalf of her mother, came with special messages and invitations to the ladies of our party.

In the most charmingly frank and friendly manner she explained how the girls of the town and their mothers possessed among themselves a most flourishing Book Club, and how this institution was holding a special meeting at her house the following day in our honour, and at which we were particularly invited to be present. Naturally we at once accepted so kind an offer, and next afternoon found us arrayed in our best clothes, eagerly awaiting what we felt would be a pleasant and completely novel experience.

The house of our hostess was barely half a mile distant, nevertheless two carriages, each drawn by a pair of horses and driven by a negro driver, stood waiting for us outside the hotel door, provided by our friends to convey us to our destination. Arrived at the house, a "frame" one, surrounded by a broad shadowy verandah, overhung with creepers, we were met at the gate by a bevy of girls, who, waiting for no introduction, made themselves known to us instantly with the utmost frankness and cordiality, putting us completely at our ease in a moment, and making us feel at once as if we had known them all our lives. "We are real glad to see you," they assured us with genuine heartiness. "Come right in," and they led the way to the cool and most tastefully furnished drawing-room ("parlour" they called it), where the whole party, to the number of some

thirty or so, were soon accommodated with chairs round the walls.

The girls of the Book Club were distinguished from their guests by badges of coloured ribbons, and our first friend and her two sisters acted as mistresses of the ceremonies, though their mother was also present. Males there were none. After a few minutes devoted to the business of the club proper, exchange of books and the like, and a short interval of conversation, our hostess produced a basket of blank cards, the size of ball programmes, daintily tied with the club ribbons, and, handing one to each of us, American and English alike, along with a pencil, announced a "Competition."

We had already heard how the Southern American girls, scorning the English trivialities of mere "tea and twaddle" at their "At Homes," always introduced a competition of some novel form, in which all the guests took part; and we waited eagerly to hear the terms of the contest. Briefly we were each to write upon our cards the best joke, or most amusing anecdote we had ever heard, or rather, could at the moment recollect, a certain limited time being allowed for this purpose. The cards were then to be read out, and the whole party were to decide upon their respective order of merit. Further, since American humour is proverbially different from English, and since, moreover, as we subsequently learned, our American cousins have a theory that English girls, like the proverbial Scotchman, "joke with deefficulty," we were divided into two classes, Americans and "Visiting Ladies" (as they termed us), and our witticisms judged separately. I am bound to say that in the event our hostesses' belief was more or less justified as far as that particular competition was concerned, for whether due to their national brightness, or their greater familiarity with such contests, the Americans' productions, taken as a whole, were vastly superior to our own. Nevertheless our kind friends received our rather feeble efforts with enthusiasm, and the proud winner very literally "took the cake," receiving a magnificent and highly sugared specimen of that comestible, the handiwork of our hostess herself.

Nearly all American girls are good cooks, delighting in the preparation of all kinds of dainty and attractive dishes. We soon had an opportunity of bearing personal witness to their skill. The competition ended, several female domestics, negresses in brightly-coloured dresses, entered with a number of small tables which they set before us, and then presented us each with a clean serviette. They then handed round a number of small cakes of different sorts, each sweet, soft and very delicious. These they handed all at once, without allowing us time to dispose of one before another was offered; but we were informed that Southern etiquette demanded that we should take of whatever was passed, whether we wanted it or not, and our plates were soon piled with dainties of all descriptions. Meantime we drank tea, though not our eastern idea of that beverage, for it was iced and flavoured with lemon. And a very delightful drink it made in that hot climate, and one much to be recommended for summer parties at home. The tea was brewed very weak to begin with, well sweetened and served perfectly cold. No milk was added, but a piece of lemon placed in each cup, and a cherry, or some such fruit of the season floating on the top. Made in this way the character of the tea is of course utterly altered, but the result is certainly pleasant and refreshing. The meal terminated with delicious ice creams, in the manufacture of which all Southern girls are adepts.

After tea came music. A piano stood in one corner of the "parlour," and at our special request our friends sang us some of their own sweet Southern melodies, "Old Folks at Home," "My old Kentucky Home," and the like; and favourite of all, their national anthem of the South, "Dixie's Land." This they sang with a vigour and enthusiasm quite indescribable, for the Southern girl is nothing if not patriotic, and as they gave their wild inspiring chorus of "Look away! Look away!" we were aware that the

darkies too were clustering round the open door and joining in the war song, fraught with a hundred stirring memories of the past. It was a highly appropriate circumstance that a little memento of the occasion, presented at parting to each of us "visiting ladies," should take the form of a dainty card, bearing the words of "Dixie's Land," with the Southern flag beautifully painted in colours, and the name and date of the occasion. These cards, we learned, were the clever work of one of the girls present that afternoon, and we scarcely knew which to admire most, her skill with brush and pen, or the kind thought which had prompted so graceful a souvenir.

Our second experience of Southern hospitality was a picnic. The place chosen was a truly ideal one; in the heart of the tangled pine forests, where a huge flat mass of bare rock protruded its way among the trees, and a tiny streamlet gurgled and splashed in miniature cascade, or formed deep cool pools among the boulders. To reach this spot necessitated a drive of some three or four miles, and our party were conveyed thither in light "buggies" driven by the brothers and male cousins of our hostesses. The provisions, of course, were carried in similar fashion, but since the vehicles were light and the track extremely rough, indeed only by courtesy could it be called a track at all, being considerably more uneven than the surrounding country—the weight had perforce to be reduced within the strictest possible limits.

This our girls, evidently old hands at this form of entertainment, managed by leaving behind every conventional adjunct of a meal that could possibly be dispensed with—plates, dishes, spoons, forks, and knives. It was wonderful how cleverly they had arranged the repast, which was of a thoroughly substantial nature, to allow of this departure from the ordinary. There was cold fried chicken—the staple dish of the south—jointed in such dainty pieces that it was possible to eat it in one's fingers, without offending the most delicate sensibilities; and slices of cold ham, which the American girls at least balanced

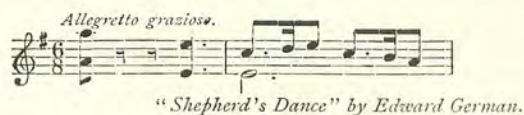
with great skill upon biscuits—or "crackers," as they style them—there were also fruits, cakes and buns of all descriptions, and a "pie" which is really a kind of Swiss roll baked in a circular shape. For drink we had tea, but as this was cold and brought all ready sweetened and flavoured in great jars carefully packed in ice, all the paraphernalia of kettle, fire, and tea-pot were done away with. Very pleasant recollections are ours of that sunny afternoon when we wandered among the giant pines and by the rill, plucking huge handfuls of flowers, only known to us in beds and hothouses at home; or sat, a laughing party, on the great flat rock, making merry over a picnic, which was nearer the real interpretation of the word, and therefore, so much the more delightful, than any we had known in the old world.

These two entertainments may be taken as fairly typical of many another similar gathering in which we took part in hospitable America. We learned many things by our friendly intercourse with our girl-friends, both in the Southern and Eastern States. We learned, for example, by the humiliating experience of arriving two hours before time, that "tea" may not represent the conventional "five-o'clock," but the evening meal at seven. We learned not to begin our food till the carver also was served; we learned to admire "clam chowder," "pop-corn" and "ice cream sodas." But most of all we learned to appreciate the frankness, naturalness, brightness, of our hostesses, their power of putting their guests at ease, their skill in devising new amusements, in never letting the interest flag for a moment, in giving themselves up entirely for their visitors, in their large-hearted hospitality to the stranger within their gates. It was surely impressed upon us that if only we girls of England were but half as determined to give our American cousins "a good time" here when they cross the water, as they, in their turn, are to afford to ourselves in America, there would be less talk of "misunderstanding" between two great nations which of all others should be most united. GERTRUDE BACON.



THE VISITS OF MORGAN.

A PASTORAL.



My father's country rectory stands among some of the loveliest of Welsh hills in that part of Wales (the south) happily (for us) ignored by the tripper and the station placarder. The parish is somewhat unique, embracing twenty miles of mountains, bare but for their grassy covering and the beasts that browse on their pastures, with an occasional and lonely farm. At each end is a village, or rather a collection of scattered dwellings and a small church.

My friend Mary Worth came to stay with us in the spring. As often, my father having business with his curate at that end of the parish called Capel Nannddu (pronounce it as you like, reader—it won't hurt me), he took a contingent of us on picnic intent.

In our wanderings Mary (tall, young, stately, a happy combination through sensible bringing-up of ancient and modern, early Victorian and twencent) threw herself with ecstasy into the business on hand. And small wonder—coming from the sights and sounds of a great commercial city into the music of the mountains, coming to that fairest view in Nature's big picture-book—the everlasting hills.

We wandered after lunch "up the mountain side" to a small farm owned by one Morgan. To us enter (or rather *vice versa*) a lamb, small, white and beautiful exceedingly.