

SCHOOL HAMPERS.

By E. V. LUCAS.



THE other day, while aimlessly turning over the pages of a list of one of the great London stores, I came upon a description of the school hampers and Christmas hampers which the firm is prepared to despatch—more than prepared, one supposes, even pleased: for if there is one employment above another that should carry good humour with it, it is the preparation and despatch of a hamper. As I had always conceived hampers to be a home-designed product of the kitchen and store-room, their supply was an additional proof of the thoroughness of the stores system. I knew that conjurers were to be obtained there, and Ethiopian minstrels, and paper plates for picnics, and the kinematoscope, and I knew also that the transfer of a non-transferable stores ticket is one of the sins which the Recording Angel blots; but the hamper page was a true surprise. Forth-

with I determined, if ever a change of employment is necessary, to apply to Messrs. Blank & Co. for engagement as their hamper editor, or even to establish a hamper bureau of my own. In a world which is mostly disappointment and frustration, the life of a hamper editor must be radiantly agreeable.



"Ripping!"

Half the hamper page was devoted to school hampers and half to Christmas hampers, and really it was very good reading. Few novelists write so much to the point. Here, as proof of entertainment, is the first entry:—

SCHOOL HAMPERS AT 5s. CONTAIN—

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 2 lbs. currant cake. | 1 Jar marmalade. |
| 1 Ham and chicken sausage. | 1 Bottle sweets. |
| | 12 Oranges. |
| 1 Jar potted meat. | 2 lbs. mixed nuts. |
| 1 „ jam. | |

What expression of satisfaction is now most in favour at school I cannot say—"ripping," perhaps, or perhaps "jolly decent": I heard both terms lately, although they may have been survivals—but even a five-shilling hamper should merit it. The "1 Bottle sweets" is, perhaps, a questionable inclusion. Butter-scotch, toffee, and chocolate (the cream dug out and eaten first) are sound boyish tastes; but "1 Bottle sweets" has a feminine ring. The purist also would object to the phrases "1 Jar jam" and "1 Jar marmalade"—Pot is the word. And the oranges would, one hopes, at another season be replaced by apples. Yet, carp as we may, the five-shilling hamper is desirable.



"6 Mince pies."

Now see what another crown will bring—enough for any one boy.

SCHOOL HAMPERS AT 10s. CONTAIN—

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 4 lbs. currant cake. | 1 Bottle sweets. |
| 1 Ham and chicken sausage. | 2 lbs. mixed confectionery. |
| 2 Jars potted meat. | 6 Mince pies. |
| 1 Jar marmalade. | 24 Oranges. |
| 1 „ jam. | 2 lbs. mixed nuts. |

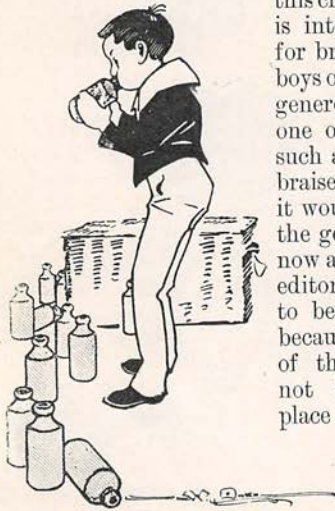
The "1 Bottle sweets" still persists, but "2 lbs. mixed confectionery" come in to rectify it. Come in also "6 Mince pies"—the list clearly belongs to the winter—and there is a lavish duplication of other matters. One of the "2 Jars potted meat" might well be anchovy or bloater paste—anchovy for choice, because it lasts longer; and I do not greatly esteem the "Ham and chicken sausage." Boys infinitely prefer sardines; indeed, the omission of sardines from all these hampers is a serious fault.

Add ten shillings.

SCHOOL HAMPERS AT 20s. CONTAIN—

4 lbs. currant cake.	6 Mince pies.
2 Ham and chicken sausages.	2 lb. box mixed crystallised fruit.
1 German sausage.	4 Jars assorted pickled meats.
1 Box braised beef, 2 lbs.	24 Oranges.
2 Jars jam.	3 lbs. mixed nuts.
2 „ marmalade.	
2 Bottles sweets.	

With a shining pound it is manifest that one may make a young friend very ill. Probably



“A dozen of ginger beer.”

this class of hamper is intended rather for brothers or for boys of conspicuous generosity. From one or two items, such as the “1 Box braised beef, 2 lbs.,” it would seem that the gentleman who now acts as hamper editor has an eye to bedroom feasts, because the theory of the hamper is not to take the place of school meals, but to amend them, to add a silver lining to them: and braised beef is a viand in itself rather than a concomitant. Hence, possibly, the nuts, whose shells are notoriously good to place on the stairs, where they crack beneath the feet of the approaching master and so give warning of danger. In default of nuts a small boy must endure the draughty duties of sentinel. To return to our criticism, the “1 Bottle sweets” has now become two, and the “mixed confectionery” has given way to “mixed crystallised fruits.” The principal lack in each variety of hamper is drink, unless the oranges are calculated to fill that office. Were I asked for practical comment, I should advise a dozen of stone ginger beer in the stead of sweets.

To learn the news that a hamper is awaiting one in the hall is a supreme school joy. For the moment it can render the heaviest imposition null and void, just as the cessation of toothache in the condemned cell effaces for a brief space the dread of the hangman. Of the behaviour of boys on receiving hampers much has been written. Ann and Jane Taylor’s “Plum-Cake” and “Another

Plum-Cake” are among favourite nursery apologues, and Mrs. Elizabeth Turner has worked the theme with admirable thoroughness. In a moving trilogy she vividly presents the three methods in which a large plum-cake may be dealt with. First comes Harry. Harry was greedy and stingy.

When it arriv’d, the little boy
Laugh’d, sung, and jumped about for joy;
But, ah, how griev’d I am to say
He did not give a bit away!

He ate, and ate, and ate his fill;
No wonder that it made him ill.
Pain in his stomach and his head
Oblig’d him soon to go to bed

Then comes Peter. Peter was stingy, too, but stingy to himself as well as to others—in short, a miser.

And sometimes silently he’d go,
When all he thought engag’d below,
To eat a *very little* piece,
For fear his treasure should decrease.

When next he went (it makes me laugh),
He found the mice had eaten half;
And what remain’d, though once a treat,
So mouldy ’twas not fit to eat.

Lastly, William. William was free-handed, virtuous; William behaved nobly.

“Come round,” he cried—“each take a slice;
Each have his proper share of ice!
We’ll eat it up among us here;
My birthday comes but once a year.”

At this point, lo! a blind beggar, to whom William incontinently yielded his own slice and a penny besides. The poem ends—

I need not ask each youthful breast
Which of these boys you like the best;
Let goodness, then, incitement prove,
And imitate the boy you love.

How can the youthful breast demur? William, William it is who, of course, comes out at the head of the poll.

Quite as interesting a study to the psychologist is the conduct of the other boys when one of their school-fellows receives a hamper. But there are pleasanter matters for inquiry. Poor human nature!



“The hamper is not for food alone.”

The hamper is not for food alone; it is also the travelling compartment of live stock. Dogs who travel without a ticket usually do so in a hamper. Cats are conveyed by that means from Blackburn to Torquay, and the next day but one, dishevelled and footsore, creep into the Blackburn kitchen once again, and thus win attention from the *Spectator* and Mr. Tegetmeier, of the *Field*, who occupies the same attitude to the homing instinct that Mrs. Prig did to Mrs. Harris. It is strange that no one ever meets a cat under the dominion of the homing instinct. It would be quite unmistakable, because of the bee-line which it takes and the rate it has to travel at to deserve the notice of Mr. St. Loe Strachey. As Mark Twain wrote of the jackass rabbit—"Long after it is out of sight you can hear it whizz." I suppose a homing cat never stops for a mouse. Carrier pigeons are conveyed in hampers to the place where their flight is to begin; but not all birds are so lucky. I was never so surprised in my life as when the naturalist's man from whom I bought a cockatoo last winter thrust the screaming thing into a deal box hardly bigger than itself, and hammered nails two inches long through the lid. Then he sawed off a corner for ventilation, wrapped up the box in brown paper, fastened it noisily with string, and slammed it on the counter before me. Five hours later, after a weary and cold railway journey, a very angry and very dirty cockatoo was liberated by two frightened men in wicket-keeping gloves. And, according to the latest accounts, the bird has not recovered its temper yet.

The stores-supplied hamper is, I take it, designed to meet the requirements of the bachelor uncle who has no kitchen where he may prepare one. It therefore has notable uses. But the hamper, as most boys understand it, is a home-made blessing. More than one friendly intellect has contributed to its plenishing. The maternal mind is, of course, the fountain and origin of good, but cook has had her say too. Cook knows



"Cook has memories!"

Master Tom's tastes as well as anyone, perhaps better. Cook has memories . . . hence the cold plum-pudding. And at hamper time a certain reason for the existence of sisters becomes evident: they can make toffee. The "1 Bottle sweets" is unknown to home-made hampers, but a bottle of raspberry vinegar has sometimes found its way therein. I have also a recollection of dough-nuts. Quince jam was of old a stimulating surprise. But the crowning triumph of any hamper is, of course, the cake. That is the nucleus; all else is accessory. One of a boy's earliest acute perceptions is of the inferiority of all cake made outside his own home. I remember a boy at school whose cake

was but plum-bread. I remember another whose hampers contained a sickly confection of rose-leaves and honey. And yet another who was supplied with a tin of cocoa and a parcel of coarse brown sugar, the contents of which were mixed (sometimes, I regret to say, in the palm of the hand) and eaten as an ant-eater eats ants—a departure in tuck which soon became a fashion, and possibly flourishes to this day.