

Eve, who could not help loving a gentleman, but who is still your loving daughter. You will miss me at first, but mother you always said I was born to marry young. And oh, I am so happy! and I am going to study hard to be a wife my husband will never feel ashamed of, for of course I have heaps to learn. But do not fear, dear father and mother, I shall always love you dearly, and see you as often as I can.

"EVE."

Noah read this letter slowly and deliberately in a low, measured voice, but when he had finished it he laid it gently down, and burying his grand face in his brown hands, he sobbed as if his heart would break. Mrs. Oldman sat as if turned to stone, not so much by the news Eve's letter contained as by the effect it had on Noah; never in her life had she seen him so overcome. He had wept over the coffins of their little children, but not as he wept now; that weeping was but as the gentle overflowing of a peaceful river; this as the passionate heaving of a tempest-tossed sea, as violent and sudden as the storms which sweep over the broads. She dared not speak or stir lest Noah's strong emotion communicated itself to her, and tears of sympathy with him rolled down her cheeks; for herself she could not weep, her heart's desire was granted, Eve was married to Arthur Clifford, and with her marriage a load was taken off her mother's mind.

Presently the storm ceased, Noah's sobs died away almost as suddenly as they had begun, and then falling on his knees he exclaimed, "Thy will be done," and remained for a few minutes engaged in silent prayer.

Then he rose, and taking his wife's face in his hands, looked down fondly at her, and said—

"It is a sore trial, Mary; God give us grace to bear it; but I never thought Adam would have served me this trick."

"Adam! Adam Day! My poor old dear Noah, what are you thinking of? It ain't Adam she is married to; Eve cared no more for him than I do; he was a brother to her, but no more!" exclaimed Mrs. Oldman, rising to her feet in her excitement.

"Then who is it?" said Noah.

"Who should it be but Master Arthur, to be sure?—Squire Clifford—as she says in her letter; they have always loved each other, and there never was a prettier sight than to see those two together when they were little children.

You always said he was to marry Miss Grace, but I knew better—I have seen it a-coming for years; they were made for each other if ever a couple were; he tall and dark, she small and fair; he no great scholar, she clever, with more brains in her little finger than he has in his curly head; he idle at his books, she never so happy as when she is studying. God Almighty meant them to come together."

"Silence, wife! you don't know what you are saying. Almighty God never meant my little Eve to marry a gentleman, nor to deceive her parents," said Noah, sternly.

"And why shouldn't she marry a gentleman? Master Arthur ain't a penny too good for our Eve, and much as you think of Adam Day, he is no equal for her, who is as much of a lady, bless her, as Miss Grace up at the rectory, and cleverer and prettier too; though if you come to goodness, why, one is an angel and the other is nought but a human creature, with faults like the rest of us."

"Woman! You are daft; and so puffed up with pride you can't see an inch before you. No more of this; I forbid you to mention the subject again until I do. I am going to the rectory," and Noah walked gravely out of the house; but he had only gone a few steps when he turned back, for his conscience smote him for leaving his wife with such sharp words on his lips.

Mrs. Oldman was standing where he left her by the kitchen table, sobbing gently, and drying her eyes on the corner of her apron.

Noah took her plump, dimpled hands in one of his, and putting his arm round her substantial little figure, laid her comely head, with its soft brown hair, not yet silvered by time, on his breast, and kissed her silently.

"Oh, Noah, Noah, I am a wicked woman! You'd never forgive me if you knew how wicked," she sobbed.

"Mary, if you have had anything to do with this morning's work I forgive you, as I forgive her and him, from the bottom of my heart."

"I haven't! I knew no more than you, or at least very little; but oh, I am a wicked— But dear me! here is Parson and Miss Grace!" And Mrs. Oldman straightened her cap, and slipping away from her husband, blushed like a girl as she curtseyed to the Rector and Grace Leicester, who now entered the ark.

Mr. Leicester was always a grave-

looking man, but he looked preternaturally grave this morning, and Grace was paler than ever, and seemed frightened and upset.

Noah was the first to speak.

"Good morning, Mr. Leicester. I see you know what has happened, and you cannot regret it more than I do."

"I don't know all, Noah; I wish I did. I have just found a letter on my study table from my ward, Mr. Arthur Clifford, telling me that before I read it he would be the husband of your daughter Eve, who, with all respect to you and her, is scarcely the person I should have wished to see his wife," said Mr. Leicester.

"Certainly not, sir. I entirely agree with you, and I can truly say I am as grieved to see my daughter married to a gentleman as you can be to see Mr. Arthur married to an eelman's daughter. If I could undo the marriage, sir, I would, but those whom God has joined together let not man put asunder," said Noah.

"But they are not married yet; Arthur says, 'I will telegraph the moment the marriage is celebrated, which will, I expect, be about half-past six o'clock.' It is now ten, and I have received no telegram. I therefore fear something has happened, and I came to suggest that you and I should go at once to Yarmouth and see. My boy is foolhardy, but he is as honourable a man as you or I. Matters have gone too far now, I suppose, for us to prevent it, if the marriage has not taken place. No, what I fear is there has been an accident. How they proposed to reach Yarmouth I don't know, but I imagine by water; and they must have left here by four, if they expected to get there by half-past six. Who is this man riding as if for his life? It looks like Adam Day," he added, abruptly, as a horseman galloped wildly up to the ark.

"So it is, sir. Where can he have been?" said Noah, as Adam, for it was he, dismounted, tied up the panting horse, and came towards them, presenting a strange figure.

He was in his shirt sleeves, and looked as if he had been half drowned, and had ridden some miles in his dripping clothes, as indeed he had.

"Adam, my lad, what is it?" said Noah.

"Bad news, Father Noah—terrible news, but it might have been worse," replied Adam.

(To be continued.)

CHRISTMAS PARTIES.

BY THE REV. T. F. THISELTON DYER, M.A.

CHRISTMAS gatherings a hundred years ago were not unlike those at the present day. However much the manners of modern society may have altered during the past century, we find little variation in the programme of merrymaking arranged for the parties of the young in olden times. Indeed no change of

fashion could alter the leading feature of a Christmas party, namely, the idea of affording both old and young as much laughter and enjoyment as possible. Although dancing formed an attractive element of the evening's proceedings, yet it was not by any means the prominent diversion as nowadays,

games of all kinds having been in popular requisition.

There was one advantage, however, which most Christmas parties in years gone by possessed, and which one would like to see introduced into the merrymakings of the present day—they commenced and ended early. The

late hours to which even our juvenile gatherings are prolonged, would have found no favour with our forefathers, who believed in no exception to the rule "Early to bed," especially when young folk were concerned. This was a good old-fashioned arrangement, and precluded any objections that even the most rigid moralist might raise against such periodical scenes of dissipation. It should be remembered, too, that the times were more simple and unconventional, and the mode of procedure on such occasions was far less elaborate than nowadays. This, again, was worthy of our imitation, and in striking contrast with the costly and unnecessary extravagance which so often mars the homely simplicity of the Christmas party. And yet let it not be supposed that they were less hearty or inferior in thorough good merriment to the modern entertainments. If the preparations were less extensive, and the programme not so attractive as at the present day, there was, nevertheless, a greater amount of unstudied enjoyment—everyone deeming it right to contribute as far as possible to the evening's amusement. Hence looking back on the social history of years past, as recorded in contemporary literature, we get a clear insight into the manner that juvenile gatherings were usually conducted.

An amusing little book, called "Round About Our Coal Fire; or, Christmas Entertainments," gives a quaint account of the arrangements at such times. The rooms, we are told, were embowered with holly, ivy, cypress, bays, laurel, and mistletoe; and "a bouncing Christmas log in the chimney, glowing like the cheeks of a country maid." The servants were running here and there "with merry hearts and jolly countenances. Everyone was busy in welcoming of guests, and the maids were as blithe and buxom as in the days of good Queen Bess." In short, cheery good nature was the order of the day; and an earnest desire on all sides to make each little guest feel welcome and happy more than fully compensated for the lack of those amusements which are nowadays supplied by professional establishments.

Among the pastimes mentioned were the masqueradings, which were the signal for the utmost excitement. The young people dressed themselves up in the most ridiculous attire, and borrowed from every conceivable quarter any article of dress which might add to the eccentricity of their appearance. As may be imagined, there was no small rivalry as to who should most cleverly conceal or disguise his or her identity, all manner of artful contrivances being resorted to for this purpose. Occasionally, too, when their "make up" was complete and generally approved of, some of these juvenile masqueraders would slip out of the house and pay a visit to a neighbouring family, their approach being heralded by many a merry peal of laughter. It was a happy time, full of good nature and harmless fun, and cheered the old as well as the young. Of the many allusions to entertainments of this kind may be noticed the "Paston Letters," wherein we find a letter dated December 24th, 1484, which relates how Lady Morley, on account of the death of her lord, directing what pastimes were to be used in her house at Christmas, gave orders that "there were none disguisings, nor harping, nor luting, nor singing, nor none loud disports; but playing at the tables, and chess, and cards; such disports she gave her folks leave to play, and none other."

In modern times, perhaps, the nearest approach to these amusing "makes up" of

past years are either charades or "tableaux vivants," in which young people ransack the wardrobes, laying their hands on anything which they consider suitable for the occasion. Indeed, it is the preparation for their juvenile display which oftentimes causes the greatest fun, besides affording an opportunity for the exercise of originality of design and ingenuity in utilising the most awkward and unpropitious materials.

At the conclusion of such entertainments dancing has generally formed the chief diversion, or as it was formerly nicknamed, "hopping;" for, as the same old writer says, "these dances stir the blood;" while those unable to join in this pastime have never failed to find equal pleasure in one of the many time-honoured English games, in which even "children of a larger growth" have whiled away many an hour. But in the course of years some of these harmless and once popular amusements have become almost obsolete, being nowadays rarely seen. Some of them might well be revived, and would doubtless prove as attractive in our modern juvenile gatherings as they did in days of long ago.

A game, for example, which often caused a considerable amount of laughter and excitement was known as "Dun in the Mire." The mode of procedure was somewhat after the following fashion:—A log of wood was brought into the middle of the room; this was nicknamed "Dun," or the carthorse, and a cry was made that he had stuck hopelessly in the mire. Instantly two of the young people, responding to the appeal, advanced, either with or without ropes, to draw him out. When unable to do so they in turn called for further help, and finally all the party joined in the game; poor Dun, of course, being eventually extricated. Meanwhile, however, no small merriment was caused by each person's sly efforts to let the log fall on his neighbour's toes. The popularity of this Christmas pastime may be gathered from the frequent allusions to it by old writers. Thus Shakespeare, it may be remembered, in *Romeo and Juliet* (Act i. scene 4), speaks of it, where Mercutio says to Romeo—

"Tut, dun's the mouse, the constable's own word:

If thou art dun, we'll draw thee from the mire."

Beaumont and Fletcher also, in *The Woman Hater* (Act iv. scene 3), refer to it:—

"Dun's in the mire; get out again how he can."

Chaucer, too, probably alludes to this old game in the *Manciples Prologue*, where the host, seeing the cook asleep, exclaims—

"Syr, what dunne is in the mire?"

Another diversion which was in request at Christmas parties was "hot cockles." This was a species of blindman's buff, in which the person kneeling down, and being struck behind, was to guess who inflicted the blow.

According to Strutt, in his "Sports and Pastimes," this pastime received its name from the French "hautes-coquilles," and is thus described by Gay in the following lines—

"As at hot cockles once I laid me down,

And felt the weighty hand of many a clown,

Buxoma gave a gentle tap, and I Quick rose, and read soft mischief in her eye."

Then there was the old phrase "to sit upon hot cockles" which probably meant to be very impatient, as in the subjoined extract from a work of the beginning of the seventeenth century: "He laughs and kicks like Chryssippus

when he saw an ass eat figs; and sits upon hot cockles till it be blazed abroad, and withal intreats his neighbours to make bone-fires for his good hap, and causeth all the bells of the parish to ring forth the peal of his own fame."

Again, oftentimes, "Handy-dandy" was the signal for a merry romp at the Christmas party. One of the party concealed something in his or her hand, making the others guess what was concealed. If the latter guessed rightly, he or she won the article; but if wrongly had to pay a forfeit of an equivalent value. Sometimes it would appear the game was played by a sort of sleight of hand, the article being rapidly changed from one hand into the other, so that the looker-on was easily deceived.

Such old games as snap-dragon and hide-seek are, however, as popular at our juvenile gatherings as in years past, although unfortunately some survive only in name. A game twice mentioned by Herrick, but not once explained, is "Fox i' th' hole," the allusion being thus—

"Of Christmas sports, the wassail bowl,
That's tossed up after fox i' th' hole."

After the young people were fairly tired with dancing and romping, round games were next in request, these in their turn affording immense excitement. Then there are numerous allusions to the diversion known as "Questions and Answers," or as it was sometimes called "Questions and Commands," when, says the author of "Round About Our Coal Fire," "the commander may oblige his subject to answer any lawful question, and make the same obey him instantly, under the penalty of being smutted, or paying such forfeit as may be laid on the aggressor." The more intellectually inclined would play at "cap-verses," wherein one gave a word, to which another of the party gave a rhyme, and so on, much amusement being caused by the difficulty some would have of finding the suitable rhyme, and the foolish mistakes others would make; for which, of course, they had to pay in each case a forfeit.

Card-games, once more, have from time immemorial been an endless source of laughter at Christmas parties; a highly popular one having been known as "Post and Pair," an allusion to which Ben Jonson makes in his "Masque of Christmas."

"Now Post and Pair, old Christmas's heir,
Doth make a gingling sally;

And wot you who, 'tis one of my two
Sons, card-makers in Pur-alley."

This game is included among the pastimes enumerated by Sir Walter Scott in his famous and graphic picture of Christmas Eve, given in "Marmion." It was played thus: Three cards were dealt to all, the excitement of the game consisting in each of the young people vying, or betting, on the goodness of his own hand. A pair royal of aces was the best hand, and next any other three cards according to their order. If there were no threes, the highest pairs might win. But round games of this kind were numerous, the forfeits being paid with sugar-plums. It is unnecessary to quote further instances of these harmless modes of merrymaking, which were the life and happiness of the young at Christmastime, and many of which might be with advantage revived at the present day. They had, too, this additional recommendation—they united old and young together; and whilst the former forgot for a few hours the more prosaic matters of life, the latter were proud of, and flattered by, the hearty interest displayed by their elders.

