

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9.

CHRISTCHURCH.

DEAR BEE, DECEMBER 24.

One of the best garden parties of the season was given by the Hon. J. T. and Mrs Peacock. The light showers of the previous day just freshened things up a little, and the garden with the pretty striped tents and the bright costumes worn by the ladies, looked very gay. Such piles of strawberries and cream, delicious ices, tea and coffee, dainty sandwiches, cakes, etc. Then for amusement there was dancing to a nice string band, tennis, croquet, and blowing bubbles. I did enjoy that; it was a special pastime of our school days, and I felt quite young again as I watched the ball grow at the end of the pipe and saw the lovely colours. Mrs Peacock received the guests as they came up to the front of the house. She wore a handsome black silk and black lace hat. Among the numerous guests present I noticed Mrs Wilson, a pretty gown of crushed strawberry with panels of white brocade; Mrs Alan Scott, brown dress fitting to perfection, trimmed with silk to match and gold embroidery, zouave jacket; Mrs Cunningham, a grey dress with floral design; Miss Cunningham, pale green, with bands and sleeves of velvet of a dark shade; Mrs Stead, a lovely dress of pale pink silk and white lace; Mrs Westby Perceval, white silk, with bonnet of terra cotta and black; Mrs F. Grahame, a grey blue gown with sleeves of blue velvet; Mr McEwen, handsome brown silk; Mrs Neeson, heliotrope silk, and black lace mantle; Mrs Louison, a lovely gown of heliotrope satin with panels of white silk embroidered; Mrs Ollivier, cream and heliotrope; the Misses Cowlishaw, pretty white frocks and heliotrope ribbons; Miss Rhodes, a lovely white silk trimmed with lace, black lace hat with yellow flowers and strings; Miss E. Rhodes, grey dress trimmed with lace and fringe; Mrs Townend, a most becoming dress of terra cotta and white; Miss Rowland (Sydney), white nun's veiling trimmed with valenciennes lace, and floral bonnet; the Misses Bullock, in white dresses and grey hats; Miss Withnall, tussore silk and large white hat; Miss Frankish, an electric blue dress with silk trimming and broad lace; Mrs W. P. Reeves, cream dress; Mrs I. Gibbs, handsome black silk with heliotrope panel, and on the bodice, veiled with black lace, bonnet to match; Miss Evans Brown, black dress with gold lace; Mrs Kaye, Mrs Cowlishaw, Mrs Chynoweth, Mrs Appleby, Mrs Kinsey, Mrs Common, Mrs Rhind, Mrs Fisher, Mrs Jennings, Mrs Heaton, Mrs Day, Mrs Guthrie, Mrs Kimbell, and numbers more were present, and all enjoyed the afternoon thoroughly.

The following day Mrs Helmore gave one, with the additional attraction of boating. Their garden, sloping down to the river, is wonderfully pretty. Then they had a diversion which does not often happen—the eclipse, and as it was a very bright day, and smoked glass prepared for the occasion, everyone tried to get a glimpse. I had my best view at home. The boys had been collecting coloured glass, and with two pieces put together, say blue and yellow, or red and green, we got a grand sight. They had a sheet of brown paper pierced with holes, and the shape of the eclipse came out wonderfully from the shadow. This I had never seen before, and is, I suppose, a result of their college education. But to return to the garden-party. Mrs Helmore wore a handsome black dress; the Misses Helmore were in white, and were kept very busy dispensing tea, etc., ably assisted by the Misses Delamain. Mrs J. T. Brown, who has just returned from England, was there. Mrs Alan Scott looked very well in a heliotrope with wide bands of darker velvet. Mrs Douglas Andrews wore a lovely white dress with silk embroidery; Miss Andrews, white and gold; Miss E. Hutton, a pretty white dress with narrow pink stripe, and bands of pink ribbon, pink and white hat; Miss Nedwill, blue dress braided with white; Miss Macfarlane, pretty brown dress with silk trimming; Miss Kimbell, pink print with lace, and white lace straw hat; Miss Robison, white with pale green; Miss Brett, a pretty grey dress; Mrs Wilson, blue dress and hat to match; Miss E. Rhodes, white dress and sailor hat, were some of the guests.

Mrs Robison gave a little dance at Burleigh for young people. Miss Robison looked very well in a pretty dark red dress; Miss Bessie Robison wore pink; Miss Kinsey was in white; Miss Dora Harman, pink; Mrs F. Robison, pink trimmed with white lace; Miss M. Tendall and Miss Harley were some of the guests, there being about forty in all.

There were two other dances the same evening which a great many were sorry for. Mrs W. Davis gave a very pleasant one in the Montreal street Hall, and Mrs Hoare gave hers in the Avonside boat-house, so it split up the Eastners a little.

Last week was devoted to 'breaking up' every evening, and sometimes two schools in one evening. What a busy time this is for mothers: I have seen some going night after night where there are three or four going to school. They are sure to be nearly all at different scholastic establishments; then all the Christmas preparations at home, and all the family assembling for the family dinner on Christmas Day. The Girls' High School began, and had a very pleasant evening indeed. The College Hall was closely packed with parents and friends, and had a number of supporters in the shape of students of the opposite sex, who cheered and gave a musical accompaniment as the successful candidates took their prizes. Then the pretty cantata, 'The Golden Link,' was given by the girls, conducted by Mr Tendall, the musical director, and very creditably they performed it. The solos were very sweetly taken by the Misses Richardson, Kinsey, E. McLeslie, and Allen. There had a perfect day for the sports and picnicking, or whatever way suited anyone best to dispose of the holiday. Hagley Park drew the largest gathering, where the Friendly Societies were holding their annual sports. The procession was not so large as in former days, but better devices. I wish the 'Widows and Orphans' would think of some other device; it is such a mournful way to begin a day's holiday; it is something like going to a funeral first. We know there are such things, but I wish someone would suggest some other device for next anniversary day. The Amateur Athletic Club at Lancaster Park were not as well patronised as usual. Two sets of sports going on at different ends of the town on the same day is a mistake. Summer and New Brighton were both extensively patronised. Miss Freeman has fairly started her boarding house at Sumner, and the large garden is a very favourite resort

these hot afternoons—plenty of easy chairs under the trees, with everything you want to refresh the inner man without the trouble of taking it with you.

Mr John Cooke, who left us about a year ago, when he went to Melbourne to relieve the manager of the N.Z.L. and M.A. Company, has been offered and accepted a very important and influential position there, the general manager of the Australian Mortgage, Land and Finance Company, with a capital of £4,000,000. Though all his friends will heartily congratulate him on his success, it is mingled with a feeling of regret that he and Mrs Cooke are not returning to Christchurch.

There is a strong flavour of Christmas about everything this week. The papers are teeming with Christmas stories, the shops are piled up and running over with toys, etc., for they are doing out of the doors and windows, and decorations are out here and there, so I must finish up my letter by wishing you all a very 'Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.'

DOLLY VALE.

DUNEDIN

DEAR BEE, DECEMBER 24.

Do you think anybody will be able to settle down long enough to read the ladies' letters in the midst of the season's gaieties? On the chance of it I suppose one must be written. All the week we have been running about to school breakings up, seeing young men and maidens made happy, while old men and matrons looked dignified upon the platform. Some very clever speeches were delivered at the Kindergarten school, while the babies chatted and played with one another on the forms, perfectly oblivious to the fact that their better nature was being appealed to, and future greatness being arranged for them. There was a painful air of patronage prevailing, and too pointed allusion to the children being rescued from the gutters, seeing that many of their mothers were present. What really was nice was the cleanly appearance of the children, and the way they went through their singing and marching exercises, doing the utmost credit to their teachers, who must have exercised the greatest patience to train such tots so. One of their teachers, a German lady, had the kindest of faces, and it was easy to see hers was a work of love. The work exhibited was very good for such mites, who usually at their age can do nothing but get into mischief. The school must be a great boon to those poor women who are obliged to go out all day and work. Each child received a picture book at the close of the proceedings.

The breaking up of the High School was a pleasant time this year for the elders too, for the old boys gave a dance in the evening at the Choral Hall, which was decorated in the usual artistic style. Dr. Belcher and Mrs Belcher were host and hostess for the occasion, and among the guests were most of the professors and their wives, and Mr Wilson, M.A., president of the Boys' High gave one of their readings a few evenings ago, selections being read from 'The Winter Tale,' and 'Much Ado about Nothing.' The president, Mr A. Wilson, M.A., occupied the chair, and gave a splendid opening address. The characters were sustained as follows:—Leontes, Mr Hanlon; Polixenes, Mr Pascoe; Mamilus, Mr Adams; Camillo, Mr Joel; Antigonus, Mr Wathen; Lord, Mr Henry; Attendant, Mr Shaw; Officer, Mr Borrowes; Hermione, Miss Alexander; Paulina, Miss K. Grant. Mr T. Hunter contributed a song, and Mr Moss a flute solo. 'Sigh no More, Ladies,' a quintette, was taken by Mrs Ross, Misses Marshall and Ross, Messrs Gully and A. Finch. In 'Much Ado about Nothing,' the characters were: Leonato, Mr Borrowes; Borachio, Mr Joel; Conrade, Mr Henry; Dogberry, Mr Burton; Verges, Mr Calvert; First Watch, Mr Shaw; Second Watch, Mr Wathen; Sexton, Mr Adams. The Club thought of breaking up some time ago—I think I mentioned the fact—but the press spoke very encouragingly upon the point, and they decided to make a fresh start.

'Fun on the Bristol' opened at the Princess Theatre, and in the City Hall the photograph is another attraction. It is the first exhibition of it in Dunedin. Speeches from Gladstone, etc., are reproduced. The 'Messiah' on Christmas Eve was given in the Garrison Hall, the leader of the orchestra being Mr E. Parker, pianiste, Miss Lily Cameron, and the conductor Mr Arthur Towsey.

Mr and Mrs G. Rhodes have returned from the lakes, where they have been spending their honeymoon, and went North by the express. Mrs E. T. Rhodes is at present staying at the Grand with her husband, and her many friends will be glad to hear of her convalescence after her long illness. Mrs and the Misses Stephenson gave a delightful picnic at the waterfalls, at which everyone enjoyed themselves immensely.

MAUDE.

Her cheek turned pale,
Of red bereft;
It was indeed no jest;
Her cheek turned pale
Because she'd left
Its colour on his vest

JOHN STARK'S WIFE.

'MOLLY STARK,' of historical anecdotes, was really Elizabeth, or Betty Stark, and was a gay young woman who enjoyed a neighbourly dance or merry-making; but General John did not enjoy that amusement, and Mistress Betty often had to go out alone or not go at all, and was expected to be indoors at nine o'clock.

One night she decided to attend a party at a friend's house not far from her own, and her husband, as usual, declined to accompany her. The Dutch clock struck nine, but madam had not come home. General Stark locked the doors, and dropped the oaken bars in their wrought-iron sockets.

'She can just go back, the hussey!' he growled. 'But in the morning she may come in.'

Presently a gentle hand tried one door after another, while the general lay in his lonely bed, grinning grimly at his wife's discomfiture: but when he, having overslept, went from his chamber in the morning, Mistress Betty looked up from the broad hearthstone where she was stirring the fire, with a mischievous twinkle of her eye.

'Had a good sleep, John?' she said.

'She had sprung lightly, in the moonlight, to the low, slanting roof of the shed, whence she entered a chamber window, and went comfortably to bed in a guest-room.'

Another time the best brocade gown had been laid out to be worn, when a sudden squall made Mrs Stark think that one less fine would do for the dance she was about to attend—without the general—and the better frock was left across the bed in the 'fore-room' out of harm's way.

Her evening duties were done, and everything was ready for preparing breakfast, when, fearing that she might sleep late in the morning, she put a goodly quantity of cream for the next day's churning into the churn.

Madam Betty went her way, and danced to her heart's content until past nine o'clock, and when a merry party left her at her own door, she hardly dared believe that the useful window would be left again unfastened, and wondered what she could do with herself were all the doors locked, as they had been before.

But the great lock of the front door yielded to her pressure, and she entered easily, quaking a little at thought of the harsh words her stern spouse might hurl at her. She had a brave heart, however, and went to her chamber.

'Come, Betty, come!' This time the decent women were in bed, said the General. 'Had plenty of gallants, I'll be bound to dance with that neat step and spar with that saucy tongue. Come; there's much work to be done on the morrow.'

So peace reigned, and Mistress Betty slept happily, to wake rosy and bright for the morning work. The first great task was the churning, but the dasher seemed strangely heavy, and her vigorous strokes but made it more and more hard to move. She opened the churn impatiently.

No wonder the dasher was so unwilling. There in the yellow cream was her best brocade.

'Better stay at home, Betty, better stay at home!' said John Stark, complacently.

But at the next neighbourly gathering both the general and his wife were present, and madam wore a brand-new, gorgeous brocade frock. Probably there had been concessions on either side.

'Blykens is an exceedingly extravagant man,' said Mrs Jones to her husband. 'Has he been telling you how much he paid for his house?' 'Yes,' 'Well, I never could make up my mind which were the most extravagant, his expenditure or his lies about it.'

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