

Choice Literature.

MISS GRACE'S HAPPY THOUGHT.

BY L. B. COCROFT.

"Oh Aunt Emily!"

It was such an eager, breathless voice that Mrs. Gorton looked up in alarm as Grace Douglass came into the hall. But Nannie and Saidee Gorton were behind her and Will Douglass brought up the rear, so, reassured as to the possibility of an accident, Mrs. Gorton smiled at her ward's eager face, quite sure that Grace had a favour to ask, and quite sure also, that the "favour" was to be allowed to do something for somebody else.

"Well, my dear, what is it?"

But Grace's first words came as a very decided surprise.

"You know Saturday is my birthday, Auntie."

"The most important day in the year," added Will.

"And I've been thinking that, if you didn't mind, I should like—"

"To celebrate it in a manner befitting the occasion," put in Will.

Grace slipped her pretty hand over his lips. "Now do be quiet, while I tell Auntie. I want to have a picnic, Auntie, over in Eades' woods, with all the children—all the little girls that is, that I can gather together in the village. Do say that I may."

"But there are not more than a half a dozen children," said Mrs. Gorton, doubtfully.

"Oh, but Auntie, I mean all the children. You know the poor little things don't have much fun, and really it's a simple affair. If you'll let Jane boil a ham and make a good supply of bread, I'll make a lot of cookies and plain cake, and buy a few pounds of candy, and that's all we'll need."

"Whereas, last year, when she was eighteen, we needed music and salad and ices and jellies and Chinese lanterns and a new gown and other things too numerous to mention," said Will persuasively. "You see, Aunt Emily, this is decidedly more economical."

Mrs. Gorton laughed. "Do as you like, my dear; only leave us enough in the house to last over Sunday. Jane shall boil the ham and bake all the bread and cake you want. Only you must see how many children there are. Twenty? Fifty? I haven't the dimmest idea myself."

"About thirty; certainly not more than thirty-five," said Grace, who had made a rapid calculation. "In the first place, there are Nannie and Saidee, and I know Mrs. Merton will let her children come. Then there's the doctor's little daughter and a child who is staying at the rectory."

"Six," said Will; "and for number seven I suggest that baby at the blacksmith's."

"Four years old? Isn't that rather young?" said Mrs. Gorton.

"Will and she are great friends," said Grace, smiling. "We certainly must have her, and for the rest, I'll run over and ask Mrs. Merton for a list of names. She knows everybody."

"The very thing," said Mrs. Gorton. "Suppose you go over there now. You will have time before tea—only she will be sure to want you to stay."

And Mrs. Merton did. "My dear Grace, how good of you! Come in, the tea bell has just rung," she began cordially, going forward to meet the young lady, and drawing her arm through her own to lead her into the house. "On a begging expedition you say? Well, we'll discuss it at our leisure and you can lay it before Mr. Merton."

"Ah," said that gentleman, "how lucky it is that I slipped a dime into Polly's charity purse this morning! Perhaps if the cause is very deserving, I may be induced to contribute another stray penny. Let us hear what it is, Miss Grace, and let me give you some of these strawberries."

"I only want your children and some advice this time," Grace, detailing her plan.

"My children you shall have, on condition that you let me fill a corner in one of your hampers," said Mrs. Merton, promptly. "You can use corned beef sandwiches I know, and hard boiled eggs too. Then doughnuts and some cake, and, oh! by the way, what can you give them to drink? Let me send a big tin of milk over. I'll see that some ice goes with it to keep it cool. Then you can have—"

But there Grace fairly put her hands over her ears. "Dear Mrs. Merton, we have provisions enough for an army."

"You'll need them all; and, by the way, let me suggest that you tell the children to wear plain calico frocks. It puts them on something resembling equality."

"I'll remember; thank you for thinking of it. And now about the children? I told Auntie that they would number from thirty to thirty-five."

Mr. Merton stopped to think. "Yes; I'll write out a list after tea, so that we shall be sure to remember everybody. Tom, couldn't you spare one of the farm waggons to take them all to the picnic ground?"

"Let them walk over, and in the afternoon I'll send a couple of teams to bring everybody home. Don't you think, Miss Grace, that it would be well to have three or four lads to help you keep order and to fetch and carry? Your brother will help, I know, and I'll give Robert a day off. He's a young fellow who came to us in the spring, and we all think highly of him. He's just the one to help you, for nothing pleases him better than to gather a crowd of children about him. Then there's the blacksmith's eldest boy. You don't know how pleased he would be at being asked to help you."

"The very thing!" said Grace. "I'll stop there tomorrow and ask him, and no doubt he can tell me of a fourth helper."

There was no difficulty in getting the children. Perhaps their mothers found more in getting them ready, for Friday morning saw all the clotheslines in the village fluttering with faded little frocks and pinafores, which needed all that soap and water could do to make them presentable. More than one little guest was without shoes and stockings; but at

least they all had clean faces and famous appetites. I don't know whether the sun was in Grace's confidence, but it really seemed as if he knew all about it, when his bright red face peeped over the hills and shot a glance upward to the clear sky, and another down to the dewy fields about five o'clock that morning. He fairly smiled all over when he looked in at Professor Gorton's, until the quiet house was quite transfigured with the glow. Not only Mrs. Gorton and Grace were there in the kitchen, but even Will was lending a ready hand. "For it takes the hand of a man, or at least of a big boy, to slice bread enough for Grace's army," said the handsome young fellow of one-and-twenty, deftly plying his knife while he talked. "Auntie, leave room in that basket for a few stray oranges. I wanted some so badly last night that I got five dozen and there are one or two of them left. It struck me that if we tucked them away, not too snugly, in the moss around our picnic ground, the children would take kindly to the new game. Something after the fashion of Easter hare you know."

"More provisions?" said the professor, looking in at the window. "Grace, I hope you've asked the doctor to join your company. Those children will certainly have dyspepsia if they eat half the good things I see in those baskets. You surely don't want to be handed down in the village annals as the New York girl who made a party to the children invalids during the course of her six weeks' stay in the wilderness?"

"They don't call it the wilderness," said Grace, laughing. Will joined in the laugh. "No, indeed. A woman remarked to me only yesterday, in a doubtful tone, that perhaps New York might be bigger; she's heard tell as how it was even bigger'n Peekskill, but for her part she thought folks that wasn't satisfied with this village wouldn't never be satisfied with nothing, specially since we'd got a town pump, and Abe Hackett had put such an extra choice lot of notions into his new store."

"The candy came from Hackett's. I only hope it may prove only as bad as it looks," said Grace, eyeing it with evident concern. "Genuine Paris bong-bongs, at eighteen cents a pound," she added, with such a perfect imitation of Hackett's tone that everybody laughed, though Will declared that, in his opinion, that candy was no laughing matter.

Ten o'clock was the hour chosen for starting, but by half-past nine every child was waiting on Mrs. Gorton's lawn. Grace, in a pretty blue gingham gown, was flying here and there among them, and her four knights, as Will laughingly dubbed himself and his companions, were stowing pails and baskets in the cart, and answering a ceaseless round of questions from the eager little crowd.

"March? Of course you may and sing too. What do you want to sing?"

Somebody suggested "Shoo Fly," and somebody else voted for "Barberry Allan," but the choice of the majority fell upon "Onward, Christian Soldiers," which almost everybody professed to know. It turned out that they held various ideas as to time and tune, but as they all sang with right good will, that mattered little. Then Grace and her brother sang songs in which the children came in on a stirring chorus, and time passed so quickly that there was a general cry of surprise when the picnic ground was reached. The cart was there ready to be unloaded, and Grace and two of her "knights" took the work in hand, while the other two lads and Mrs. Merton started round games among the children. They played hide-and-seek, and "here we go round the mulberry bush"; and it turned out that the doctor's little daughter had brought half a dozen bean bags, which furnished fun for twice as many children.

Four or five little girls wandered out of sight for a while, and then one of the party came back and held a whispered consultation with Mrs. Merton. It ended in her going back with the child, and then Mr. Douglass was called and let into the secret. The end of it all was, that when Grace marshalled her forces and took her place at the head of the table—or rather, the tablecloth—four little girls came forward carrying a wreath of wild flowers, which Will took and placed upon his sister's head. It proved a size too large and came down over her shoulders, but Mrs. Merton soon remedied the trouble by loosening the ends of the wreath and twining it, in a long spray, from Grace's shoulder cross-wise to her waist.

After all, the professor was right; there was more than even that hungry crowd could eat; and when each little girl had at last declined another piece of cake, Will Douglass stood up and made a funny speech, drinking Miss Grace's health in a glass of iced milk, amid much laughter and clapping of hands on the part of the children.

Then Nannie and Saidee, who knew what Miss Douglass could do in the way of a story, begged for one, and Grace was led away to the foot of a large oak tree, around which all the children gathered to listen. Mrs. Merton and the "knights" meanwhile cleared away the remains of the feast, and made a little parcel for each child to take home to mamma.

There was more singing, and a few merry games, and then Will announced that he had a story to tell. It was a short one, but it scored a great success, and there were so many hints about oranges in it that presently there was much peeping into bushes and soft patches of moss, followed by merry shouts as orange after orange was found. Nobody could believe that it was four o'clock when two of Mr. Merton's farm waggons appeared, followed by their kind-hearted owner and Professor Gorton.

And then came the crowning surprise of the day, a cake and such a cake! It was covered with frosting, had nineteen candles around the edges and bore a pink rose in the centre.

Strange to say, it was cut into exactly thirty-seven pieces. There were thirty-seven children present, "including Miss Grace," Mr. Merton said, and as he passed the cake, he warned each little girl to bite it slowly and very carefully, as he was almost sure she would find a big raisin seed or something else in her slice.

The children said, "Yes, sir; thank you sir," and bit into the slices; and at last one little girl cried out, "Oh my! it isn't a raisin seed, it's—five cents!"

Sure enough, there was a bright five cent piece in every

slice. Miss Grace declared that she meant to keep hers always to remind her of her pleasant birthday party; but all the children said that they couldn't possibly forget the day, even if they tried, so that they would not need to keep the five-cent pieces very long by way of a souvenir.

Then group after group came up to bid Grace good-by, and to thank her for "the very best time I ever had in all my life, Miss Douglass," and, at last, a funny little cheer went up as the waggons rolled away with their tired but happy freight.

"Well, Grace, I think your thought was a happy one. Has the day been a success?" asked the professor, smiling down at her radiant face.

"Indeed it has! I mean to do it again next year—this, or something like it. Don't you think it's the best way to keep birthdays, Uncle John?"

"To go on a picnic?" said the professor, laughing.

"No—not exactly; but to do something to make somebody else glad that one is in the world with a birthday to keep. And then," she added, softly, "I thought about something else, 'when thou makest a feast'."

"Ah!" said the professor. "So that was where the 'Happy Thought' came in, was it? Yes, Grace, it's the very best way to keep a birthday. May you live, to keep many and many more. I'm sure," he added, gently, "that somebody will always have cause to be glad that you are in the world with a birthday to keep."

REALISM.

It has lately become a fashion to speak of realism, so called, as if it were a recent discovery or invention, like the telephone or the electric light. Realism in literature and art has always existed, and, when unaccompanied by the imaginative faculty, has always occupied a secondary place. Every age has produced writers who have attempted faithfully to paint the life of their period, and they have painted it best who did not seek merely to photograph it. There were great warriors before Agamemnon. There were great novelists before Gogol, Tourgueneff, Dostoevski and Tolstoi, and there were dirty writers before Zola, whose vaunted realism is to be questioned. Photography has its limitations, and its perspective is invariably false. Zola's pictures of French social life and manners are obviously the grossest exaggerations. Society, as he reflects it, could not hold together a twelvemonth. Is every poor girl in Paris a courtesan, and is every well-born married woman somebody's mistress? Is everything honeycombed with corruption? Is that all the author can tell us of his own country? Then he had better not tell it. The plain fact is that Zola's romances have been widely read, not because they were truthful, but because they were nasty. They had the novelty of being more startlingly brutal than any other books not taken charge of by the police. I speak of them in the past tense, for their popularity is waning. The minority report of human decency is against it, and will kill it. The popularity of modern novels is a short-breathed business. Each century has its own particular vintage, with a bouquet so delicate as not to bear transportation from one cycle to another. Only the fittest survives. Contemporary judgment seldom settles the question. Who would have doubted the immortality of Richardson, when the blonde and brown lashes of half the girls in England were heavy with tears over his long-waisted heroines? But the Clarissa Harlowe style went out with the poke-bonnet, and has not returned, even in a ghostly fashion, as that did with the Salvation Army. We wonder at the taste of our great-grandparents, and our great-grandchildren in turn will wonder, with more reason, at ours.

"So runs the world away."

Meanwhile, Zola's writings have done vast hurt to all civilized nations,—barbaric nations were happily spared the precious Rougon-Macquart family,—and especially hurt to France and French literature, which didn't need hurting. They have demoralized many a clever French story-teller, like Maupassant, for example, and have left a nauseating flavour in the mouth of mankind.—*October Atlantic.*

FIRST ENGLISH BOOK ON AMERICA.

It is not generally known that the earliest book printed in English which contains the word America—or, as it is styled, "Armenica"—was printed at Antwerp by Jan Van Doeshorch. The volume bears no date, but according to Muller, the eminent Amsterdam bookseller, now dead, "it is out of question that it has been printed in the period 1506-9, the time when all the separate editions of Vesputius were published;" and certainly the latest date that can possibly be assigned to it is 1511. The last mentioned date is therefore usually quoted by cataloguers as a fair, if not conclusive, statement of the facts.

The title of this first English book on America runs as follows: "Of the new landes and ye people | founde by the messengers of the kyn | ge of portyngeale named Emanuel | Of the x dyvers nacyons crystened | Of pope Iohn and his landes and of | the costely keyes and wonders Molo | dyes that in that lande is |" And following is a kind of preface or introductory notice, which explains that "in the yere of our Lorde god M.CCCCXVI., and so be, we with shypes of Lussembourch sayled oute of Portyngeale through the commandment of the Kyng Emanuel. So haue we our voyage. For by fortune ylandes over the great see with great charge and daunger so haue we at the laste sounde oon lordshyp where we sayled well ix.c. myle by the cooste of Selandes, that we at ye laste went a lande, but that lande is not nowe knowne, for there haue no masters wryten thereof nor it knowethe, and it is named Armenica." According to the author that land was, at the time he wrote, "ryght full of folke, for they lyue commonly iii c" (by which he meant 300) "yere and more, as with sykenesse they dye nat."

Many other extraordinary statements are to be found in this exceedingly rare, curious and cosmographical work, which is also the very earliest printed document in the English language relating to what we are wont to call the New World.—*American Bookman.*