

THE STOREROOM

Edited by "Deborah"

Address all communications to "Deborah," *Fruit and Farm Magazine*

I saw some early gooseberries in the market the other day—very green and small they were, but the sight of them brought many things to mind. I hadn't realized how close Summer was before. The most vivid picture the gooseberries recalled was a day last year which I spent with my "Favorite Family." It was a really hot day in June; and when I reached the house, doors and windows were open, but there was no one in sight. The sound of voices and laughter led me to the back yard, however, and there, crouching among the gooseberry bushes, I found the whole family, with the exception of Father, who was hoeing potatoes not far off.

They picked in pairs—Mother and Sally, with a bush between them; close by, Peter and Grannie. The children were at school, the holidays not having begun yet.

"Is that the way you do?" said I, observing that there were ripped-up sacks lying under the bushes, to catch the berries raining down.

"We strip the branches this way," Mother answered, and illustrated by taking a long trailer loaded with fruit between her heavily gloved thumb and fingers. She started from the top, and, with a quick stripping motion, brought fingers downward, divesting the branch of every gooseberry. They all fell on the sheet, to be gathered up later. "We save all the old gloves for this, Auntie Deb," Sallie explained; "but even so, the thorns prick, and it is hard on the hands"—and she stopped a moment to gingerly extract a prickle from a finger-tip.

"Aren't there a great many leaves and rubbish?" I hazarded the objection after watching them for a time, and noting how the leaves came off almost as readily as the berries.

"Yes, that's the worst of it," Peter agreed. "Other years the kids have had to pick them over; but I've rigged up a kind of rotary fan, like one I saw, to work above the tray when the gooseberries are spread out. It's going to do the trick all right."

"Peter's invention genius to the rescue again!" I said.

"It's to be hoped it won't turn out like his trap net—do you remember that, Aunt Deb?"

"Of course I do," said I. "It was a fine invention—only it had the misfortune to trap the rooster instead of the hen—wasn't that it?"

"It took no notice of the hens," laughed Sallie; "they could go in and

out and lay all the eggs they liked—or none. But as soon as Mr. Rooster stepped inside, hey, presto! down fell the door, and he was a prisoner."

"Oh, shut up! Sal," Peter protested. "It was an all right trap nest—only the weight wasn't adjusted right, that was all. I meant to fix it, but I got started on something else."

Like some other inventive geniuses, Peter lacked the patience to correct his mistakes.

They found me a pair of gloves, and soon I was stripping gooseberries with the rest; and very scratchy work I found it. The sun mounted in the sky, and by noon we were fairly baked.

"Time for me to stop," said Mother. "We'll finish in the cool of the evening. Come with me, Deborah," she continued. "We will get dinner ready, and the rest will go on till we call them."

The kitchen seemed delightfully shady and cool. Even when the stove was lighted, the heat was not so fiery as it had been outside in the sun.

"We won't cook much today," mused Mother. I followed her into the pantry, when she made a hasty survey of the empty shelves and gathered up all the cut pieces of bread out of the bread tin—and then out to where the safe stood in the coolest corner of the back porch.

"It looks like short commons today, Deborah," said my friend. "No meat; no nice fresh vegetables, such as people are supposed to always have on a farm. There may be carrots fit to pull in the garden, but nobody has had time to get them."

"Never mind; there are always gooseberries," I consoled her.

"To be sure! I'll make you a gooseberry shortcake. We have had several lately, but perhaps you have not, Deborah; and for a first course we'll have tomato and bacon."

She took down the side of bacon from the nail as she spoke, and carried it back to the kitchen. I watched her cut thin rashers—about a dozen—and then cut them again into smaller pieces. These she put in the frying pan and asked me to look after them while she did something else. I turned and tossed the bacon till it was just browning—and all the time I watched out of the corner of my eye while my friend cut up the pieces of stale bread into cubes—a big pile of them.

"Put the bacon on the platter, Deborah," she ordered; "make a ring of it and the tomato will go in the mid-

dle." And when I had done it, she dumped the bread into the hot fat and made me mind that too, while she opened a large tin of tomatoes. These were added to the pan as soon as the cubes were nearly browned.

"You season it, Deborah; I must get on with my shortcake. The oven will be hot enough by now."

My friend flew here and there collecting her materials, and by the time I had the tomato mixture salted and peppered to my taste, she was already stirring her batter, and had two jelly-cake tins ready greased to receive it.

Fearing to interrupt her activity, I slipped away to fetch the gooseberries, and when I returned with a pan full she was in the act of putting the shortcake into the oven.

"Here are the berries," said I, pleased to have done something useful. "Shall I top and tail them?"

"We'll just give them a rub and put them in as they are—it's all there is time for. But don't tell any one I ever cooked gooseberries without topping and tailing them first, Deborah, or my character will be gone forever." I laughed, and together we hastily picked them over and rubbed them lightly in a coarse sieve. The tender green gooseberries cook quickly, and almost as soon as the shortcake was out of the oven, the fruit, nicely sweetened, was ready too.

"Fortunately, there's lots of sweet cream to eat with it," said Mother, as she put a layer of cake in a blue bowl, and poured half the gooseberries over it—then put the second layer on, "topped off" with the remaining gooseberries, and set the dish on the sill to get the breeze from the open window. "Call them in now, Deborah," she went on; "call loud, so Daniel will hear. The table is set; we left it ready after washing the breakfast things."

Whether it was that we were all extra hungry, I can't say. I only know that the dish of tomato and bacon, smoking hot and rather highly seasoned, was greatly appreciated. I have seldom tasted anything that I enjoyed more, and I heartily recommend it to Fruit and Farm housewives as an economical and quickly prepared lunch dish. As for the gooseberry shortcake, enriched and mellowed with cream, it was delicious. Even that elegant confection, the strawberry shortcake, would have been hard put to it to beat the dish Mother had prepared for us with such lightning rapidity, and so I told her.

I think I shall visit my Favorite Family again very soon.

They will not have Peter's help picking gooseberries this year. Peter has enlisted and is now on his way to the front. I hope he got his rotary fan working well before he went.