

Miss Hargood's Party.

It is not often that the god of circumstances is a clever producer of drama. The hero and heroine do not seem to be sufficiently trained to impress the audience, the entrances and exits are badly timed, dress is rarely well chosen, and very few of the characters fit their parts. Occasionally however the production is fairly good.

I had two friends who lived in Newnham Terrace near the old Bishp's Mill that looks over the Fen. Their names were Bessie and Rosa Hargood. They were well-to-do ladies and, although they had no direct connection with the University, they belonged to its society. They had travelled a good deal and Bessie was a great reader interested in all the intellectual activities of Cambridge. Among her friends in the University was a young Mr. Berry whose work as an astronomer at the Observatory interested her. She also knew his parents who did not live in Cambridge.

During the early summer about the year 1905 I spent a good deal of time with Bessie because- Rosa being away - she was alone. During the May Week my afternoon classes were very thin as nearly everyone wished to go off and see the "bumping races". May Week is the first week of that fortnight in June

when Cambridge University and town give themselves up to festivity. During that week the College boat races are run on the river at Fen Ditton, a village about two miles lower down the river from Cambridge. In those days most people went by boat to see the races. Many private tea parties would also take place among those who were not going to Fen Ditton. Bessie Hargood was giving one. She had begged me to come to it as she would not have her sister to help her entertain her guests.

I went to Cambridge by train that day. When I was going along the station platform on my way out I saw, sitting on a bench, a girl and a young man. There was some thing very pretty in the turn of the girl as she leaned towards the man giving him money. He looked at the coins with earnest care as she counted them into his hand. I had to get to my Studio punctually or I should certainly have lingered in the station to watch them a little longer.

I had no class that afternoon so, after painting, I walked early over Coe Fen to Newnham Terrace. As I went I amused myself by guessing whom I was likely to meet. I knew that certain people might be there who did not altogether approve of me because I was a professional artist. Cambridge society was still at that time narrowly University and exclusive.

I found Bessie anxious and a little puzzled. She told me that she had had a letter from Mr. Berry asking her to see something of his sister who had taken to the stage. Miss Berry

had joined a travelling Company who, as it happened, would be performing in Cambridge during May Week. Bessie had received an answer to her request to the actress that she should call but the only time possible for her to come was on that very afternoon and that made Bessie very doubtful about the success of her party. She knew well that so many of her friends were shocked at Miss Berry for becoming an actress. She had heard some of them even call her "fast". "Oh!" Bessie exclaimed, "I know she will not fit in with my guests!"

I was excited by the ~~knowledge~~ thought of meeting an actress, especially in such circumstances, so I was not, I am sure, as sympathetic as I should have been for ~~in~~ my friend's anxiety.

The guests one by one arrived and I think that the first who came was a lady who was welcomed at nearly every University tea table. She had daughters who came to my Studio. She was often in and out of it whether they were in it or not in order to see that the temperature was kept low enough for health and that all things were in good order. She frightened me dreadfully once, long after Bessie's party, by coming into my class room with a most serious face to tell me that my drains were out of order. She knew in what a very bad condition they were when she went into the scullery. (No room was sacred from her.) I ran down at once. Yes, certainly there was a smell, but not from drains. I even guessed at once what it came from and

opened my back door. Signe Laven was in my yard cleaning out the acetelene lamp of her motor cycle. Acetelene lamps were then often used for cycles. Of course this lady's care over the physical and moral health of my Studio need not have prevented her from enjoying the company of Miss Berry, the actress, but I am certain that she would have avoided it if she had been able to.

A very sweet lady was the next to come in. She was gentle and kind but she had caused me some trouble. Her daughter came to me to learn drawing and should have attended the afternoon classes which in the autumn were held in the Cast Museum. But the mother did not wish her daughter to study there because so many of the statues were unclothed so I had to arrange that my assistant should teach her in the Studio instead of helping me in the Museum. I can not remember exactly among so many guests all who were there but I think the lady came who afterwards refused to know Rupert Brooks. She would not allow him to be introduced to her because he often ran about the water meadows of Grantchester in his pyjamas. I am quite sure that the daughter of a well known theologian would have been of the party. She was very, very good. Her brother told me that he might have been a better man if his sister had not been so good. However he always seemed to me to be quite as good as anyone could wish. I know too that my friend Louisa Bensly was there but she would not understand the difficulty. She would not

mind at all whom she was introduced to for her eye would be glued on Miss Hargood's bookshelves and, in any case, she would only have answered by an absent minded grunt if anyone had whispered to her words of disapproval.

All the guests would have been dressed in the full and fussy attire of that time and would be wearing the necks of their dresses covering the throat up to the ears.

As each lady arrived she was told that Miss Berry was coming. The more they gathered the more the atmosphere seemed charged. I handed tea round and heard low ~~whispered~~ words that revealed their feelings about the actress. No one of them had met her or seen her on the stage. I realized that after all I was favoured - that I followed an art that was accepted and that poor Miss Berry followed one that was not. - I more than ever wished to meet her.

And still the looked for lady did not appear. I was afraid that her courage had failed her. A late-coming guest told us that she had just heard that Miss Berry had engaged herself to be married to one of the actors and that it was to the one who had, a night or two ago, saved the Company a good deal of trouble. What had happened was that one of the principal actors during that play had met with an accident which would have stopped the performance had not a young actor come to the rescue. He had not up to then had an important part, yet he, with the help of Miss Berry, kept the audience in fits of

of laughter by improvising amusing talk. In that way the wounded man was given time to recover and take up his part again.

"He must be clever" murmured the ladies. "And likely to attract a girl". "What a distress to her parents". "Of course some love affair was the kind of thing that could be expected".

At that moment the maid opened the door and ushered in a visitor but did not announce her name. I, and all the others, were thrilled by her appearance. Her's was certainly a telling entrance ! She was young, tall and very noticeable. Especially would she be noticeable in Cambridge for there, at that time, it was almost a social sin to be smart and she was very smart. She had on a dress of Cambridge blue silk and a hat large and amply trimmed. She wore a fine feather boa of a very light tan colour. Her eyes were blue, her plentiful hair pale gold and her complexion bright.

Bessie evidently did not know her visitor and advanced towards her in a hesitating way. We all felt that the actress was not disappointing us. Such should be her appearance. However the lady, speaking with an unusually engaging American accent, introduced herself as an unknown relation from New York who was visiting Cambridge and wished to call and make herself known to her distant cousin. She was warmly welcomed and introduced to us . All were genuinely interested in her nationality her beauty and her smartness. The actress was wholly forgotten and it was then that she appeared.

The maid opened the door and announced Miss Berry. A

young lady entered. She was small, was dressed in black of some soft material and wore a black mushroom hat which was tied on with narrow velvet ribands. There was no relief to the black dress except a spot of pure white at her throat which, in my memory, persists in taking the shape of the band that a nonconformist minister would wear during his service. I am certain however that it had not that shape. I started with pleasure at seeing her for she was the girl on the station bench. I at once decided in my mind that the man I saw on the bench with her was her fiance and would not entertain the idea that it might have been the wounded actor in spite of the fact that he was sitting down and that she was helping him. The ladies' heads were so full of the lovely American that they seemed to forget their disapproval of the actress. All went well and Bessie was radiant.

After this I think the god of circumstances missed a chance of finishing his production really well. The play might have ended with more of a flourish and it would have been so easy to have done it. The star turn should have been given to Louisa. Miss Berry for a time would be watchful and apparently diffident. The stranger Lady would have made remarks about Cambridge and talked of the play she had seen in the theatre. She would speak with a broadening accent and with all the humour Americans can get out of exaggerated obviousness. She would rouse Louisa who would have poured out her knowledge

of Greek, Latin, German and French plays in a devastating stream stopped at last by a light remark from Miss Berry. This would cause relief and laughter. Conversation would become so general that not a word could be distinguished.

But Louisa was not given a chance to take the lime light. How I should have enjoyed it if she had. I know however that I went back across the Fen feeling that I had spent a lovely time which I would not soon forget and I have not forgotten it.