

SCHOOL LUNCHEONS.

By PHILLIS BROWNE, Author of "The Girl's Own Cookery Book."



THE school arrangements of the present day are rather awkward for people who are accustomed to take their meals at old-fashioned hours. When I was a girl we used to be at school at nine in the morning, leave at twelve-thirty, return at two-thirty, and leave again at four; and our home lessons were a mere trifle. We went home to dinner in the middle of the day, and there was no difficulty about "satisfying the keen demands of appetite." But sometimes it rained unexpectedly, and on these occasions fortune was kind to us. A few minutes before it was time to start for home there would be a knock at the door, and a neat little maid would appear bearing a basket, with a message from mother to the schoolmistress, begging that we might be allowed to take dinner in the schoolroom. Who can describe the delights of the feast? On the table generally used for slates and copy-books the basket was solemnly opened. We never knew what was coming, but it was certain to be good, and, best of all, it was certain to be a surprise. First there was the snowy napkin which was to serve as a table-cloth, then were the treasures underneath. The glory of the experience came, however, when plates and food were packed away, for then a "little recreation" was considered necessary before lessons were resumed; and the "recreation," as a rule, resolved itself into taking flying leaps over forms piled in extraordinary positions one on the top of another, or alongside each other. I am afraid it is not a very dignified confession for an elderly matron to make, but those impromptu gymnastics on forms are amongst the most delightful recollections of my childhood. The little girls of the present day practise calisthenics, and perform wonderful feats with ropes and giant strides; I hope they know something of the delight we used to get out of our deftly-arranged forms.

As I have already said, however, afternoon school is a thing unknown to the majority of the fortunate girls who attend our high schools and collegiate establishments. According to present arrangements girls reach school at half-past nine, and they remain till half-past one, having an interval of half an hour between eleven and twelve for rest and refreshment. Then the pupils separate, and the elder ones go home with any amount of "home work" to prepare, while the younger ones remain at school to learn their home lessons with the assistance of the teachers. It is with the necessities of these young ones who remain that I am just now concerned. Very often dinner is provided for them at the school, and a few partake of it there under the superintendence of a teacher who is told off for the duty. It is my experience, however, that only a small proportion of the whole number of those who stay avail themselves of this opportunity. Either the price charged is too high, or conversation is too much restricted, or from some other reason

girls for the most part prefer to bring food with them "for luncheon," and postpone a proper meal until they reach home.

Now it is a very bad thing for growing girls to go so long without a proper meal. Supposing they have to be at school by half-past nine, it is not unsafe to conclude that this means that breakfast is taken about half-past eight, if not earlier. Leaving school at four or half-past, it will not be likely that dinner, or the "meat tea," can be enjoyed before half-past five. This long fast, broken only by eating an unsatisfactory "snatch" of one sort or another, is likely to be very injurious to health. Brain-workers need really to be better fed even than those who work with their hands, because brain-work is exceedingly exhausting. If it could be arranged that there should be half an hour's rest after food, so that study should not interfere with the process of digestion, why should not the "growing students" take a substantial luncheon with them, and partake of it when the morning lessons are over? Really this could be very easily managed. It only needs that there should be a little forethought on the part of the home authorities; that sufficient change of diet should be provided; that the luncheons should be freshly prepared day by day; and that a convenient receptacle for conveying it backwards and forwards should be procured; then every difficulty which could be urged against the plan would be conquered. Added to this there is the fact that children almost always enjoy food which is prepared for them at home more than they enjoy food prepared by strangers; as a regular thing, that is. There are to be bought now-a-days very handy little tin sandwich cases with sides which fold down when empty, and so occupy very little space. A good deal may be carried in one of these tins, and it can be stowed away when done with in a corner of the book bag, and the weight will scarcely be felt. Better still is one of the small luncheon baskets which are to be seen in every fancy shop, and which cost but a few pence. A basket three inches deep, three inches wide, and six inches in length, could be made to hide away a most diversified repast. A knife and fork, with a single plate could be slipped into a strap in the lid, and there would be room also for a tiny flask, whatever solid refreshment was decided on, and also one of those dainty delicacies which serve to give piquancy and attractiveness to a luncheon. There is no occasion to limit a meal of this sort to sandwiches. Sandwiches are excellent when well made, and they can be varied to any extent, but when indulged in day after day, and week after week, they become monotonous.

If, however, sandwiches are to preserve their charm they ought not to appear more than once a week, and they ought not to be made of similar materials twice in two months. A sandwich is never so much appreciated as when it is a surprise, and it certainly lends itself to surprises more than any other preparation that can be named. There is no end to the ingredients, the combinations, the appetising morsels which can be introduced into a sandwich. Every sort of meat—tinned, potted, and preserved, roast, boiled, and stewed; every kind of fish, flesh, and fowl, can be used for it; while cheese, tomatoes, hard boiled eggs, curries, and green stuff may be employed to lay between the thin slices of bread and butter which form its distinguishing feature. To make sandwiches good, all that is necessary is to bestow a little pains upon them. Let

the bread be only one day old, the butter sweet and delicious, the meat cut up small, and the seasoning be judiciously and intelligently introduced, and there is practically no limit to the welcome changes of diet which may be presented under the general term—sandwiches. Beef sandwiches, ham sandwiches, veal and ham sandwiches, bacon, mutton, or game sandwiches, chicken sandwiches, sandwiches made of anchovy and hard boiled eggs, of curried rabbit and Parmesan, of curried shell-fish and Parmesan, of small salad, of sliced tomatoes, of mushrooms, of roast fowl, lettuce and filleted anchovies, of roast game, shred celery and Tartare sauce, of cooked fish, lettuce leaves and Tartare sauce, of cold meat and thinly sliced cucumber or gherkins, of roast game, tongue and aspic jelly, of the flesh of lobster and mayonnaise, of hard boiled eggs and a very thin sprinkle of finely shred tarragon, of potted hare, potted ham, or any potted meat, of cheese, of devilled ham, of cold asparagus, with a suspicion of mayonnaise, of brawn, of shrimps, of foie gras, of German sausage or caviare and brown bread and butter, are a few varieties which may serve to suggest others.

Tinned meats of all descriptions are much approved and largely patronised by individuals who pride themselves on their capacity for "putting up a bit of luncheon in half a minute." Tinned meats are all very well for a change, no one values them in their proper place more than I do, but it should be understood that they are abused when they are employed constantly. For growing girls who are using their brains fresh food is imperatively required, and one of the chief reasons why these luncheons are to be recommended is that they afford a means of furnishing wholesome and nourishing provision. Yet it must not be forgotten that when fresh meat is not to be had, tinned provisions are to be accepted with gratitude; and it is always wise, therefore, to keep a supply on hand.

Trifles made of pastry are always acceptable for occasions of the kind named. Small meat pies, if nicely made, are both appetising and wholesome; the great point to be observed with regard to them is that they should not be dry. Yet it is evident that if liquid gravy were put into them, accidents might be expected, and therefore gravy which will jelly when cold should always be provided, and poured in when hot through a hole left in the pastry for the purpose. Small meat pies can be made of every sort of meat, poultry, and game, the chief detail to be looked after being the seasoning. In making trifles of this sort, girls should not forget that nothing is more effectual in preventing insipidity than a tiny scrap of onion. "Yet onion is objectionable to many people." Of course it is when introduced in large quantities or in large pieces, but if used in very small quantities, and chopped until it is fine as dust, then sprinkled over the meat, it would dissolve entirely, few would suspect that onion was present, and yet there would be no danger that the pie would be tasteless. A little piece of onion the size of a thumb-nail, chopped as small as possible, would be sufficient to flavour two small meat pies four inches in diameter. And a pie this size would be quite large enough for a purpose such as this.

Some time ago I gave a few hints as to the best method of making raised pies, therefore I do not need to repeat them now. I may remind girls, however, that one encouragement connected with the attempt is that small pies are much more easy to make than large

pies, and that there is small fear of failure in connection with them. Equally acceptable will be meat patties, Cornish pasties, mushroom pies, sausage rolls, &c. Hard boiled eggs, too, are much liked by some people, and if fresh when cooked, they make an agreeable change. It is scarcely necessary to say that one or two slices from the breast of a chicken or duck will always be welcome on an occasion of this sort, if pains be taken to keep these meats from getting dry.

To an impromptu meal of this kind a simple "sweet" forms a most agreeable conclusion, and really, when one comes to experiment in this direction, it is astonishing what a variety of luxuries can be cooked and conveyed in a cup or small basin, holding little more than half a pint. Perhaps it may be helpful if I give recipes for a few of these trifles. Before doing so I should like to suggest that in packing the luncheon basket a little fruit, fresh or dried, should not be omitted. Fruit is not only agreeable; it is, when taken in moderation, most wholesome. It cannot be regarded as particularly nourishing, but it is very cooling and refreshing, it assists digestion, and it possesses in a high degree the power of counteracting any harm which may arise from the use of preserved and tinned meats. It is almost inevitable that when school luncheons are provided for any length of time, preserved provisions will enter rather largely into their preparation. When preserved provisions are taken there is always a little danger of skin complications, and fresh fruit is the antidote for this condition. Therefore fresh fruit should on no account be disregarded. When fresh fruit cannot be had, dried fruits, such as raisins, figs, dates, and French plums, are almost as valuable, and they are more nourishing. Raisins, indeed, are most sustaining, and a celebrated physician said recently that when he expected to have any specially exhausting work on hand, he took a bunch of muscatels and found they did him more good than a glass of wine. It is not at all an uncommon thing also for parents who are anxious lest their daughters should become faint and weary, through going too long without food, and who cannot arrange to provide them with a well-packed luncheon basket, to make them form a habit of putting a large bunch of table raisins into their pockets, with the intention that these should be nibbled during what is called the interval, that is, the short period of rest which is allowed at most schools during the morning. The fruit thus enjoyed proves most invigorating. To gain the full benefit which belongs to raisins it is necessary that the skin and seeds should be rejected, because they are indigestible, and are apt to produce disorders of the bowels, while the ripe luscious pulp is free from these dangers. It would be well if parents could be convinced what a

valuable food the raisin is. As for dates, their nutritive value is shown by the fact that they form the chief food of the Arabs; while prunes and figs are used for their laxative tendency. Compotes of all sorts of fruits and stewed Normandy pippins may be easily introduced into the luncheon basket, if put into a wide-mouthed, well stoppered bottle.

Now for two or three recipes:—

Baked Custard Cup.—Boil the third of a pint of milk and pour it upon a beaten egg. Add sugar and a little flavouring, turn the preparation into a buttered cup, and set it in the oven in a shallow tin filled with boiling water. Let it bake gently till firm; then take it out, and when cold pack it in the basket. A couple of tablespoonfuls of stewed fruit put into a small bottle is an excellent accompaniment to this cup.

Cabinet Cup Pudding.—Soak a teaspoonful of gelatine in a dessertspoonful of water. Make a little custard as above, with the third of a pint of milk and one egg. Prepare a small mould by plunging it first into hot water, afterwards into cold water. Take two savoy fingers and four ratafias. Split the savoy in half and place them perpendicularly round the mould to line it; break up the ratafias and put them also in the mould. Dissolve the gelatine, stir it, when cool, into the sweetened and flavoured custard, and pour this gently over the cakes. The mould should be turned out for eating.

Rice Cup.—Press warm rice, boiled with milk till well soaked and stiff, into a buttered cup. Fruit syrup, stewed fruit, or sugar will be suitable as an accompaniment. Ground rice, boiled in milk and mixed with a teaspoonful of dissolved gelatine, makes a good rice cup.

Apple Mould.—Soak a small teaspoonful of gelatine in a dessertspoonful of water. Pare a couple of good sized baking apples; core them, cut them into quarters, and put them, with a small strip of thin lemon-rind, into a gallipot. Set this (covered) in a small stew-pan, with boiling water to come half-way up the jar, and let the apples steam until they fall. Lift out the lemon-rind and sweeten the apples. Dissolve the gelatine, beat it up with the fruit, add a lump of sugar and one or two drops of cochineal, and turn the preparation into a damp cup. When cold and stiff it is ready.

Coffee Mould.—Soak a teaspoonful of gelatine. Dissolve this and stir it into a third of a pint of very strong, clear coffee. Boil for a minute or two; add sugar, and, when cool, a little cream. Put the preparation into a damp cup. One or two drops of vanilla may be added if approved.

Apricot Mould.—Soak a teaspoonful of gelatine. Take two halves of apricot out of a tin of the preserved fruit. Crush them to pulp with the back of a spoon, and mix with them three-quarters of a cupful of cream or

milk. Add sugar to taste. Dissolve the gelatine, mix it, when cool, with the apricot, and mould when cold.

Apple Custard.—Bake a large apple, remove the skin and core, and beat the pulp with sugar and a squeeze of lemon-juice. Pour the third of a pint of boiling milk upon one egg, add one lump of sugar. Put the apple into a cup, pour the custard over, and set in a small baking-tin half full of boiling water, to bake till the custard is firm in the centre.

Bread Cup Puddings.—Soak one or two scraps of stale bread in milk to soften them entirely. Beat them with a fork to a smooth, soft pulp, add a slice of butter, a spoonful of moist sugar, a little vanilla essence, a few currants, and one beaten egg. Three parts fill a buttered cup with the mixture, and bake till firm.

A little well-flavoured jelly, broken up and put into a cup, will always be a welcome addition to a repast of this description. The same may be said of tartlets, turnovers, cakes of all descriptions, lemon cheesecakes, &c. Fruit juice, sweetened agreeably and firmed with a spoonful of dissolved gelatine, supplies a very delicious sweet. When a pudding, cream, or tart is being made for the family, it is very easy to take out a portion and cook it separately in a small glass or jar, to be used for the school luncheon next day. Some girls would enjoy a morsel of cheese and a sea-foam biscuit as a relish. A little trouble spent is well worth while. We should not hear half so many complaints about over-study and over-pressure, if girls attending school had a good luncheon in the middle of the day; and before mothers and elder sisters make up their minds that a girl is doing too many lessons, and that the teacher must be asked to excuse a portion thereof, they ought to consider whether they are doing all that is possible to furnish the young student with food which will give her strength to make the most of the precious opportunities for improvement which will be gone all too soon.

One important detail connected with school luncheons must not be forgotten. It is that the luncheon-basket or sandwich-tin must be kept sweet and pure. It ought to be scrubbed out frequently, and every day as soon as it is brought home it should be emptied, cleansed, and put, wide open, in an airy place, to prevent its becoming close and musty. If crumbs or little pieces of fat are allowed to work their way into the crevices, they will surely impart an unpleasant, stuffy odour to the food which is put into the basket afterwards, and the annoyance will not easily be got rid of. Unless scrupulous cleanliness be observed in everything connected with the preparation of food, delicacy and refinement must be regarded as entirely out of the question.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PINEAPPLE.—An ordinary afternoon garden and tennis party might be held in September if the weather were fine.

GILLESPIE.—Most stationers keep very pretty menu cards now, which can be filled in by hand with the names of the guests and the dishes.

X. Y. Z.—Press the flowers in blotting-paper, which should be frequently changed.

REXIE.—We are much obliged for your impromptu verses on the G. O. P., and for your good wishes also.

RAY MAJENDIE.—The warts may be touched with a stick of lunar caustic. You had better get a doctor to do it if they be very bad. The 8th July, 1867, was a Monday.

K. T. S.—The digestion is weak and the circulation is affected. You should consult a doctor about it.

POMPS AND VANITIES.—The maidenhair fern was

probably chilled in some way; it needs warmth and dampness. Your education should be quite completed before you think of society and its distractions. When you are twenty (about) will be time enough. Do not write to us again on blue paper with blue ink, please.

ASPHODEL.—We sympathise much with you, but we cannot advise you to have anything done to your face. The result is generally a bad scar. Use a little harmless powder (magnesia), and try to forget it as much as possible, and fix your thoughts on better things.

A. WALTERS.—The passion-flower bears that name on account of its several characteristics, which, combined together, seem to symbolise the following appliances and circumstances connected with our Lord's death and passion. The leaves, the spear; the tendrils, the cords with which He was scourged and bound; the ten petals, the ten apostles who deserted Him; the central pillar, the cross; the

stamens, the hammers, the styles, the nails; the inner circle round the central pillar, the crown of thorns; the radius round it, the nimbus of glory; the white in the flower, an emblem of innocence and purity; the blue, a type of heaven. The fact that it remains open three days and then dies, denotes the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. We partly copy from the *Watchword*.

LILIAN VAUGHAN.—The Editor of the G. O. P. has nothing to do with the publishing department of the Religious Tract Society. Write to Mr. Tarn.

EBNOCUB.—The term "bumpkin" is of Dutch origin, taken from the word *boomken*, meaning "a sprout," "a fool." It signifies a loutish person, and is applied to a country clown, not a woman.

CHERRY PIE.—A good run over the downs, or a canter on a donkey, not only circulates the blood, but make the lungs work well. But you should beware of cooling quickly afterwards, and of sitting in a draughty or windy place.