

## IS IT GOOD TO EAT?

## BEING COMMON-SENSE PAPERS ON COOKING.

## III.—KITCHEN ECONOMY.



HERE is perhaps no word so little understood, or rather so misunderstood, as the word "economy." Just as there is a vulgar and popular impression that political econ-

omists are a hard-hearted, selfish class, so domestic economy is too often regarded as a synonymous term for meanhness and want of hospitality. Conversely too many are apt to confound extravagance with liberality. Economy in regard to money has been defined as "the judicious use of money." So in cooking it simply means the judicious use of materials. In fact, economy is closely allied to common-sense, whereas extravagance is the twin sister of ignorance. Good cooks are never wasteful. The difference between a good dish and a bad one often consists simply in the fact that in the one all the flavour has been extracted from the materials used, and in the other, part, often the best part, has been lost and thrown away. Nowhere is waste and extravagance so wanton and reckless as among the extreme poor, and the more ignorant the worse they are. The savage method of cooking roast pork illustrates our point. As savages are more ignorant even than the lowest of our own lower orders, we ought to expect to find them more extravagant and reckless. Such is the case. On one occasion an Indian wigwam or hut, containing a live pig, caught fire. After the fire had subsided, and the embers were raked away, the remains of the unfortunate animal were found inside, which on being tasted proved to be far superior to the raw flesh to which the Indians were accustomed. Consequently on great occasions when a dish of roast pork is required, it has been the custom ever since to drive a pig into some small hut or house, and then set the house on fire. Now, this method has all the charm of simplicity, but still it is not altogether an economical method, though there are some dens and hovels even in this country where no one could regret the experiment.

But to take a simple case to illustrate our point, we

will describe that very common sauce, lobster sauce, and contrast it as it is with what it ought to be, trusting that our description of the latter will be attended with the practical result of enabling those who read it to make it for themselves, should they so desire, besides something in addition.

First, we all know the lobster sauce which too often is handed round as an accompaniment to some boiled fish, such as turbot or brill. It consists simply of melted butter, with small pieces of lobster—some white, some pink—cut up in it; but as to the liquid sauce itself, it does not contain even the slightest flavour of lobster whatever. On the other hand, good lobster sauce is of a bright red colour, and tasting so strongly of lobster that it is too often apt to entirely overpower the flavour of the fish. Yet this latter has probably been made out of exactly the same materials as the former. What, then, is the difference? Simply this:—In the one case all the flavour of the lobster has been extracted, and in the other it has not. Cutting up the meat of a lobster and putting the pieces into melted butter is no more making lobster sauce, than cutting up a calf's head and throwing the pieces into boiling water would be making mock-turtle soup.

We will suppose, now, the very ordinary case of some lobster sauce being required for a small party, say eight persons; the ordinary method being for a lobster to be ordered, the white part of the meat cut up and put into some melted butter, while the pickings, so called, generally make a tit-bit at the kitchen supper, with the usual accompaniment of at least a pint of vinegar. Now, what is the difficulty? First, even a small lobster is amply sufficient to supply sauce for double the number. Every one who has eyes, and knows how to use them, must have observed how invariably is it the case that in small households fish sauce of any description is always made in gigantic proportions. We have seen melted butter of the consistency of a pudding brought up for four persons, in quantity sufficient for the table d'hôte at the Grand Hotel in Paris. Make up your mind, therefore, as follows:—Order a moderate-sized lobster, and have a dish of lobster cutlets as an entrée in addition to the sauce for the fish.

Now, there are few prettier dishes than lobster cutlets, and few easier to make, yet how rarely is it met with in small households!

First get a lobster containing some spawn and coral. Cut open the lobster and remove the whole of the meat, including that in the claws, cut it up into small pieces, and put it on a plate in a cool place, to be used as we shall explain by-and-by. Next take the spawn and coral and place it in a mortar with about twice the quantity of butter, and pound it well together, adding a good pinch of cayenne pepper. You will by this means obtain what is called lobster



butter, and without it is impossible to make either good lobster sauce, or patties, or cutlets, or bisque—the latter being, in other words, lobster soup.

This lobster butter has a strong lobster flavour, and is of an exceedingly brilliant colour. It will keep a long time, and good cooks should always try and have some by them, as oftentimes lobsters contain neither spawn or coral. Scrape all the lobster butter out of the mortar, and place it in some small jar for use. Next (we are supposing that eight persons are the number at dinner) take about a dessert-spoonful of the cut-up meat and put it by for the sauce—this quantity will be amply sufficient—and take all the rest of the meat and place it in a mortar, and pound it up with the following materials, previously chopped *very* fine: a piece of onion as big as the top of the thumb down to the bottom of the nail, a small tea-spoonful of chopped parsley, and a piece of lemon-peel the size and thickness of the thumb-nail. But while these are being pounded, let us return to and finish making the lobster sauce. First make a little rather thin melted butter, using milk instead of water; add sufficient lobster butter to make it a bright red colour, this lobster butter containing as a rule sufficient cayenne pepper for the whole sauce. Add the dessert-spoonful of lobster meat, about half a salt-spoonful of anchovy sauce, and the same quantity of lemon-juice, and the sauce is complete. The quantity of melted butter made should be regulated by the size of the ladle in the sauce-tureen. There are over twelve ordinary ladlefuls in half a pint; as a rule each person takes one ladleful, therefore half a pint of lobster sauce is more than sufficient for eight persons. If you don't want waste, tell your cook to pour a tumblerful of water into the sauce-tureen, and see how much it looks, and never to make more melted butter for eight or even ten persons. The melted butter should not be made, however, until it is nearly dinner-time, as *properly* made melted butter is apt to decompose or run oily if exposed to heat too long.

And now let us return to the rest of the lobster, which we left being pounded in the mortar, and to which have been added the chopped onion, parsley, and lemon-peel in the proportions we have mentioned. Mix in sufficient lobster butter to make the whole mass appear of a bright red colour—about a brimming teaspoonful is generally sufficient to a medium-sized lobster. After this add some ordinary butter, about two ounces, but of course the quantity must vary with the size and meatiness of the lobster, but sufficient must be added to make the whole quantity into a sort of thick pudding, which when struck with a table-spoon makes a noise like—slosh.

Next mould the mass into a quantity of small pieces, the size and shape of an oval pic-nic biscuit. This moulding is best done with the hands, by throwing the piece from one palm into the other. Dip each piece in a well-beaten-up egg—of course, one egg is sufficient for the whole quantity—and then into some fine dry bread-crumbs. Fry in some *boiling* fat or lard for about two minutes, and put each piece on a cloth to drain for a few minutes in front of the fire. Stick a

small piece of the end of the small claws of the lobster—say about three-quarters of an inch long—into each, to represent the bone of the cutlet, and the dish is complete, though it had better be put in the oven for four or five minutes just before serving. Now, when lobsters are fairly cheap, the cost of these pretty little red cutlets varies from one penny to three-halfpence each. I once made twenty from a lobster that cost one shilling and sixpence; this was four months ago, and in London. There are many foolish, ignorant people, who on seeing such a dish would imagine that it must be a very extravagant one; and yet these same persons would think nothing of having a dish of six or eight ordinary mutton cutlets handed round as an entrée, costing at least sixpence each. Besides, there is no comparison in the appearance of the two dishes. There are, perhaps, few entrées more invariably passed by at dinner-parties than mutton cutlets, unless dressed ones, which, especially when truffles are used, are very expensive. A dish of bright red lobster cutlets, neatly arranged in a silver dish, with a pile of crisp fried parsley in the centre, always looks nice; and if economy is very much thought of, a few bread-crumbs added to the mass before moulding will increase the dish, but we don't recommend the method: we wish to be practical, and the probable result of the suggestion to the cook is that the cutlets will be spoilt, and the cook will have the best claw for her supper, served *au naturel*—i.e., with the vinegar.

It seems very dreadful, when one comes to think about it, but how horribly dependent we all are upon our servants! and, as a rule, how far less regard have they to economy than we have ourselves! This is probably owing to early education—for instance, the girl who in childhood has been accustomed to see her mother buy coals by the apronful. Yes, gentle reader, such is the fact, which you may see for yourself any day in some of the poorer neighbourhoods in London. I recollect a case once in which the apron-strings gave way, thereby causing the coal-cellar to make a sudden and unexpected appearance on the pavement, and calling forth the exclamation of—

“Drat the thing!”

Yet this very girl, who, as we said, has been used to see her mother lay in coals in this fashion, when she goes out to service is so overcome by the inexhaustible supply, as it seems to her, in a cellar containing several tons, that from sheer thoughtlessness she is extravagant to a degree. In most houses the ashes are thrown up far more often in the dining-room than in the kitchen.

Another, and oftentimes a more terrible difficulty that young housekeepers have to contend with, is the impenetrable stupidity of the women in their employ. I recollect a most amusing case that occurred many years ago in a house at Woolwich. An elderly lady—one of the good old sort, not above occasional interference in domestic matters—had personally superintended the preparation of that somewhat nasty creature in the raw state, a hare for juggling. The richest of gravy had been prepared, the joints of the hare had been neatly browned in a frying-pan without being cooked. Cloves, port wine, &c.—nothing had



been forgotten, and the whole had been placed in a large jug, and only required being put to simmer gently in some boiling water. Now, the elderly lady wisely thought that the copper would be as safe a place as any wherein to stand the jug, the water reaching about half-way up, this method having the

which is that of economy. Now, economy is the very soul of cookery, and can be alike practised in the palace and the cottage, and, unfortunately, is less regarded in the latter than in the former. It is wonderful how many really nice dishes may be made out of odds and ends. In a well-managed house there ought



"IMAGINE THE ELDERLY LADY'S FACE.

additional advantage of leaving more room on the kitchen fire, besides obviating the risk of its being upset by the saucepan, if the jug were placed in one, being hastily moved. Directions were given accordingly.

Imagine the elderly lady's face on discovering, about a quarter of an hour before dinner, that Mary Ann had put the jug in the copper by simply emptying it in!

But I fear I have rather got away from my subject,

not to be enough left to keep even a dog; whereas, if the truth were known, the contents of the dustbins alone in England contain sufficient food to almost banish poverty from the land. This may seem a strong statement, but it is no more strong than true. Recollect waste is a crime; and were it in our power—which it is not—to be able to multiply food even to a miraculous extent, it would not the less be our duty to "gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

A. G. PAYNE.