

"Is it? I did not hear the clock strike, I was so busy; and Cicily has not seen my pinafore," was Augusta's light consecutive reply.

"So busy!—Cicily not seen you!" her mother exclaimed in surprise. "Let me look at your hands. I am shocked, Augusta! What would Mrs. Broadbent say?"—the hands were worse than the pinafore—"Have I not told you repeatedly that 'cleanliness is next to godliness'? Go to Cicily and be washed immediately, or you can have no tea."

Augusta pouted.

"Must I, papa?"

The management of this child was the only point on which Mr. and Mrs. Ashton differed.

"Well, my dear, your mamma says so, but I think for this once it may be overlooked, if you will be more careful another time," said he, willing to excuse and temporise.

"'Only this once,' William, 'is the parent of thrice,'" responded Mrs. Ashton gravely, as she poured out the tea, giving something like milk-and-water to Miss Augusta. "You will spoil that child, and 'if you spoil her to-day, she will spoil herself to-morrow.' However, as *you* are inclined to tolerate that which I think disrespectful to us, and wanting in self-respect on the child's part, I can say no more."

Thus Mrs. Ashton yielded against her judgment, Mr. Ashton took out his snuff-box, to put it back like a culprit, and Miss Augusta sat down to the table, not knowing whether to be more pleased or sorry that she had got her own way.

To turn the subject, Mr. Ashton asked—

"What is that you put on the card-table, my dear?"

"Oh, I'll show you," and away the young lady was running, only to be recalled by her mother's decided—"After tea, Augusta."

So after tea it was that Miss Augusta brought her treasure to her father—sundry sheets of paper, on which scraps of variously-coloured leather had been arranged and pasted in ornamental patterns, floral and geometrical, aided by the stamps employed in piercing

brace-ends for the embroiderers, and in cutting stars to cover the umbrella-wheels inside.

"Who did those?" asked mother and father in a breath.

"Jabez Clegg, in the warehouse. Aren't they pretty?" was Augusta's ready reply, as she looked admiringly on her curious pictures.

"Oh! then that accounts for your being late, and in that condition at the tea-table," said Mrs. Ashton, as she glanced from the rich designs before her to the sullied hands and pinafore.

"And so Jabez Clegg has been wasting our leather to make playthings for you," remarked Mr. Ashton interrogatively, in a not unkindly tone of voice.

"No, he hasn't!" answered little miss briskly. "He only used the waste tiny bits. I wanted to take a big piece to make a housewife" (a case for thread and needles) "and he would not let me have it. He said he had no right to give it, and I had no right to take it. Was he right, mamma?"

[Along with many other vain fashions, "papa" and "mamma" had come over from France to supersede our more sterling "father" and "mother," along with other refugees from the Revolution.]

"Yes, my dear, quite right; but I wish my little daughter would not run so much into the kitchen and warehouse among the apprentices," said the mother kindly, smoothing down the light brown hair, in which the sunbeams seemed to weave golden threads. "It is not becoming in a young lady."

Mr. Ashton, who had been all the while examining the glowing devices before him, interrupted her with—

"I think I have discovered a new faculty in our apprentice. I shall buy Jabez Clegg a box of colours to-morrow. We are sadly in want of fresh patterns, and I think he can make them;" and Mr. Ashton took a large pinch of snuff on the strength of his discovery.

And Jabez, for the first time in his life the possessor of paints and brushes, became valuable to his master.

END OF CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

## HOW TO GIVE A NICE LITTLE DINNER.



HOWEVER strange may appear the statement, yet we have no hesitation in saying that one of the greatest steps ever made in economy in giving dinner-parties was the introduction into this country of the dinner *à la Russe*. It will be our endeavour in the present article both to prove and illustrate this point, by contrasting a small dinner-party of thirty or forty years ago with a modern one. As

we have already remarked, our observations are intended to apply to those whose status in society may

be best described as possessing neither poverty nor riches.

We will suppose the number of persons at dinner to be about ten or a dozen.

My mind now goes back to some people I knew very well in my younger days, and who will make admirable representatives of a very large portion of the backbone of English society: exceedingly kind, generous, and hospitable, but whose ideas of cooking contained a strong element of contempt for what they called—recollect I am speaking of thirty years ago—French messes.

The time is soon after Christmas, and the party a family one. The boys of the party, in their large white collars outside their jackets, look flushed and happy.

But dinner is announced, and we soon find ourselves seated round a large table that may almost be said literally to groan with the weight of the good things placed on it.

First, some good mock-turtle soup—no doubt about it being a jelly when cold—a sort of soup that, in the

After all these had been partially consumed, the covers were taken off what is termed the *pièce de résistance*, which consisted of a huge sirloin of beef.

At the other end of the table were generally two large capons, with a boiled tongue between them;



"IT WAS INDEED A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH" (p. 270).

present day of beards and moustachios, would require some care in taking.

Next the cover is taken off a huge cod-fish, with oyster sauce. Good oysters could then be obtained at fourpence a dozen, and now—three shillings a dozen.

The entrées were as follow :—Oyster patties, curried rabbit, stewed kidneys, and what used to be called a beef olive—which consisted of a steak rolled with veal stuffing, and some very thick brown gravy poured over it.

beside which, two side dishes, the one a pigeon pie and the other a small York ham.

We will not go on to describe the second course. As a rule, lady housekeepers have no difficulty in superintending this part of the dinner. There are thousands of ladies who can make a splendid dish of trifle or a mould of jelly, who would not have the slightest idea of gravy. It was but yesterday I was dining out where the gravy was handed round, that looked and tasted like pale, weak beef-tea, which in truth it was.

At other places, too, cooks seem to think that when gravy is required all they have to do is, to put a little of the soup in the sauce tureen, and send it up.

We would inform them that soup and gravy are two distinct things. Perhaps at some future period we may have a whole article on gravy, for this is a very weak point with inexperienced cooks.

But to return to the dinner before-mentioned. We do not for one moment wish it to be understood that we complain of it. It is a sort of dinner after which people, on their return home, feel that they have dined, and that they do not, as is too often the case after some of these large dinners where fruit, flowers, and ice abound, want a sandwich and glass of sherry or brandy and soda before going to bed. What we do maintain is that it is exceedingly expensive, and that a handsome little dinner *à la Russe* can be served up for less than half the money.

We believe there is still an impression abroad that a dinner *à la Russe* must necessarily be a very expensive affair; we will therefore proceed to describe a cheap but nice-looking little dinner, and, if space permit, how to make the dishes.

In the first place, flowers, like Mrs. Scratchit's ribbons, make a great show for sixpence. Where there is a good garden, there ought to be no difficulty in making a dinner-table look nice. All that is required is just a little taste. It is well to bear in mind, however, that in selecting flowers dark green leaves and the colour blue or violet should not be forgotten.

And now for the dinner. First—say the time of year be the present—Julienne soup, bright as sherry, with just a taste of tarragon in it; a turbot or brill, with lobster sauce; a dish of chicken cutlets, white as snow, with small green and red leaves in the centre of each, about half an inch long, and a little red lobster-claw representing the bone, served in a silver dish, with aspic jelly piled up in the centre. Another entrée of eggs and spinach—always a pretty-looking dish—some lobster cutlets, and some rissoles. Next a haunch of mutton—*i.e.*, a small roast leg of mutton cut outside the room haunch-fashion, parallel with the bone—and red-currant jelly handed with it. In small households, where a large quantity of cold meat is undesirable, this is far preferable to a large haunch, and it is very nearly the same thing so far as taste and appearance are concerned when cut. Next, by way of game, have some roast larks, served up in little paper cups containing a rich forcemeat.

Only one fowl, and that a moderate-sized one, will be necessary to make both the chicken cutlets and the rissoles. We will now calculate roughly the saving in this dinner when compared with the old-fashioned one we have mentioned.

In the first place, Julienne soup can be made far cheaper than mock-turtle; but we will leave out the question of the cost of soup altogether. Next the fish; here again the saving only consists in the fact that it is possible to have a small fish when it is

not put on the table, but impossible to have only just enough when it is. Now, warmed-up fish is never nice, yet how often do we see a splendid turbot or cod-fish go down, not a quarter of it eaten!

A cod-fish, by-the-by, is not a particularly easy dish for a cook to serve properly done, and yet looking really nice. I shall never forget the look of dismay on a certain face when the cover was taken off a remarkably fine cod that had been specially sent down from a famous City fishmonger. The cook, too, was really a good one, and knew that raw cod-fish is simply uneatable. Probably the man, in bringing up the fish, had shaken the dish somewhat roughly, or set it down on the table with too much of a bang. However, the whole of the meat had fallen from the bones in a sort of shower on to the dish, and the gaunt skeleton remained alone, an awful sight, like some of those pictures of the desert with the remains of a camel being hovered over by one or two vultures. In fact, it looked so exceedingly ridiculous that nearly every one laughed, in which laughter the host wisely joined. It was indeed a pretty kettle of fish.

It is, however, in the entrées and joints where the great saving will be found. First let us roughly guess the cost of the old dinner: Sirloin of beef, or haunch, about 14 lbs., 14s., taking of course present prices; two capons, 10s.; tongue, 6s. 6d.; small ham, 12s.; pigeon pie, say 3s. 6d., which would be cheap; oyster patties, eight at 6d. each, 4s.; beef olive, 2 lbs. of steak, &c., 2s. 6d.; curried rabbit, the rabbit being 1s. 6d., 2s.; stewed kidneys, say 1s. 6d. Now, this all added up comes to £2 16s. Next let us take the other dinner: One fowl, 3s. 6d.; mushrooms, one tin, 9d.; cream, 3d.; lobster, 2s.; eggs and spinach, 1s.; leg of mutton, 8 lbs., 8s.; calf's liver for forcemeat, 3d.; larks, one dozen, 1s. 6d.; about 1½ lb. of ham or bacon, 1s. 6d.; which, added together, comes to 17s. 9d.

Of course it will be said that in the first dinner there was plenty left to keep the house for several days, and in the second but very little. This is perfectly true; but this is what I complain of. The old-fashioned style was, when ten people came to dinner, to cook enough for thirty. This seems to me to be folly. Of course some allowance must be made for the character of the visitors; the little dinner *à la Russe* we have mentioned would be exceedingly unsuited to hungry school-boys, or an agricultural labourers' feast; but then one doesn't ask these sort of people to late dinners. The average guest is one who has had a substantial lunch—in the case of ladies—or one whose appetite is jaded with worry and anxiety, and requires a certain amount of tickling. The same dinner would not do for a dealer on the Stock Exchange, and a healthy country gentleman, who spends half his time on horseback, and has not a care in the world. We mention this, as one of the arts of giving dinners is to adapt the dinner to the guests, and the guests to one another.

But we must now turn to the practical part, which is, how to make the chicken cutlets, &c. First, early on the morning previous to the dinner, boil the fowl in

some *clear* stock or some water ; take it out and let it get cold ; cut off all the meat, cutting the breast into thin slices ; scrape all the bones, and place the latter back in the stock to boil down. If water has been used, the usual vegetables must be placed in—viz., an onion stuck with six cloves, a small head of celery, a turnip, carrot, a bunch of parsley, and pepper and salt. When the whole is reduced to about a quart, strain it carefully off ; remove every particle of fat, and if not clear, clear it with the whites of two eggs, by whipping them up with a little cold water, adding them to the stock, boiling briskly for a few minutes, and then running the whole through a jelly-bag. Next, again place the stock in an enamelled saucepan, and let it boil down to about a pint. Take a third of this and put it into a little enamelled stewpan for the aspic jelly.

Now, this jelly requires rather a decided flavour, add therefore a couple of beads of garlic, and let these simmer sufficiently long to give the stock—one-third of a pint—what may be called a foreign smell. The fowl-bones will probably have been sufficient to cause this to set into a firm jelly when poured out on to a plate and allowed to get cold ; should it not, however, be firm enough, a little gelatine must be added to it. Should the jelly require a little colour, a small piece of toasted bread, such as is used for toast-and-water, will be found best for the purpose—of course put in when the jelly is hot. When set, it must be cut up—two silver forks are best for the purpose—and piled up in the centre of the silver dish, for the chicken cutlets to be placed round it.

Next we have two-thirds of a pint of strong stock left in the saucepan. Add to this about half an ounce of gelatine and a couple of bay-leaves, and let it boil till the gelatine is quite dissolved ; take out the bay-leaves, and pour it off into a basin, and take off any little scum that may have risen from the gelatine. Next pour some cream—about half a tumbler—into an enamelled saucepan ; as soon as it begins to boil, pour the warm stock on it, take it off the fire, stir with a spoon for a few minutes, and pour it into a small basin for use. Now, this white-sauce, which is exceedingly nice, when cold will be a hard jelly, looking like blanc-mange.

Next take the slices of chicken and a few *thin* slices of ham, pour a little of the white-sauce on to a plate, and before it has time to cool, cover the plate with very thin slices of chicken ; dip the ham into the stock, and spread it over the chicken, again covering the ham with some more thin slices of chicken. Cover the whole, by means of a spoon, with some more white-sauce, taking care to leave a little sauce for use afterwards.

Now, when all this sets, which it will do very quickly, it becomes like a large white cake, barely half an inch thick. Cut this white cake into little oval pieces, the size and shape of the lobster cutlets, with a sharp pen-knife ; take up each cutlet carefully, and with a small spoon, or end of a silver knife, cover the edges with the white-sauce, which must be *nearly* set. Next cut some tiny green leaves out of pickled gherkins, and red

leaves out of beetroot, or the red skin of a chili, and place four of these, two of each in the centre of each cutlet, star-shaped ; a drop of white-sauce will make them stick. Place a piece of parsley, not much bigger than a pin's head, in the centre of the star ; stick a little lobster-claw, three-quarters of an inch long, in each cutlet ; and place them in a silver dish, round the aspic jelly, with a small piece of fresh, bright green parsley between each cutlet, by way of garnish ; and few prettier dishes can be handed round than the one in question.

The dish is somewhat troublesome, but then its appearance repays the trouble, besides which it does not require much standing over the fire. The latter part can be done sitting down. The basin containing the white-sauce can be placed in a larger basin containing hot water, in order to prevent it setting too soon.

Instead of beet-root a thin leaf of truffle looks much better, in which case a red bead of lobster coral should be placed in the centre of the star, instead of the parsley. However, recommending truffle is rather useless, for the simple reason that persons rich enough to use it, generally keep a cook to whom these instructions would be unnecessary.

Next with regard to the forcemeat for the paper cases for the larks. These paper cases can be bought at the pastrycook's, but they are easily made at home, much cheaper, out of stiff note-paper. Take a quarter of a pound of calf's liver, cut it up into small pieces, and fry in about the same quantity of rather fat ham. Chop up finely a bead of garlic, a piece of lemon-peel the size of the first finger-nail, a tea-spoonful of parsley, and half a tin of mushrooms ; add a little Cayenne pepper, some salt, and enough aromatic mixed herbs to cover a sixpence (these herbs are composed of white peppercorns, cloves, one portion ; marjoram, basil, thyme, nutmeg, mace, half a portion ; dried bay-leaves, a quarter of a portion ; well pounded and sifted, and put by in a stoppered bottle for use). Chop the whole very finely, and put it by in a small stewpan to keep hot till wanted. Place a dessert-spoonful of this rich forcemeat at the bottom of each paper case. The paper cases should have the chill taken off them, by being placed before the fire for about a minute. Then put a small roast lark on the top of each case.

Larks take only about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to roast, according to their size, and ought to be eaten directly they are cooked. The cases should be placed in a silver dish, with parsley between them. This is a very savoury dish, and at the same time a very cheap substitute for game for a dozen people.

Of course, in comparing the above two dinners, we have purposely taken rather extreme cases. What we would impress on housekeepers is that many of these pretty, savoury little dishes, though they may give considerable trouble, are nevertheless very cheap. By simply looking ahead for a day or two, and a little industry on the part of others in house than the cook only, a dinner often may be given combining elegance with strict economy.