

FOOD FOR HOT WEATHER.



WE have hitherto endeavoured to adapt our observations on the art of cooking to the time of year.

There are perhaps few months that test the cook's art more than that of August, and not only the cook but the housekeeper must exercise some little tact, in order to avoid the waste that too often ensues from heat and thunderstorms.

We live in so variable a climate that housekeepers are at times apt to forget that, though in winter a haunch of mutton will hang for a month, and be all the better for it, yet there are occasional days in which meat that has been killed in the early morning is bad by sunset.

It is these sultry days that seem to invite us to wander forth into some shady wood, and, stretched on the soft green turf, eat cooling food and imbibe cooling drinks, by the side of some clear rippling brook. Nor should we necessarily, whatever be the weather, enjoy our lunch the less for a little society—in other words, August hot days are admirably adapted for picnics.

Picnic! the very name conjures up before my eyes hundreds of faces. Wonderful institution! almost the only one that seems capable of driving that curse of English society, formality, out of the field.

First, the unpacking of the huge hampers, at times necessitating almost the diving in of two heads at once—bright eyes meet under cover of the unromantic wicker-work, and look brighter for the meeting. It is wonderful, by-the-by, how stooping over a hamper causes most people to flush. Ah! happy time, when most are young, and the world before them as fresh, as bright, and as green as the grass on which they sit. How many staid old married couples are there who can look back upon a picnic as the starting-point in their long road of happiness! No rose, however, without a thorn. How many too can look upon the same festive occasion, and remember as if yesterday the sharp sting of the green-eyed monster, then felt for the first time, and the poison of which has blighted a lifetime!

"Lift not the festal mask, enough to know
No scene of mortal life but teems with mortal woe."

Fortunately, we are not all moulded alike by the hand of Nature.

The majority, in fact, pass in early life from face to face like the butterfly from flower to flower, seeing no difference beyond that the present one is always the sweetest, and at last settle down into a humdrum life, as unacquainted with the blessings of love as they are incapable of feeling the stings of disappointment.

"How much methinks I could despise this man,
But that I am bound in charity against it."

But the very class of whom we are speaking—that is, the majority—have probably long ere this looked for the practical part of the subject to commence—viz., the lobster salad, pigeon pie, cucumber, ice, champagne, &c.

A few hints on the general management of picnics may possibly be of service.

All know the difference between one well-managed and one ill-managed. The things most generally forgotten are the knives and forks and the salt. The most awful thing of all to forget is the hamper containing the drinkables. One indispensable thing for the comfort of a picnic on a hot day is a large lump of ice. If this is well covered in sawdust, and wrapped round with a blanket or thick cloth, it is wonderful how little will melt even in a long journey.

We will run hastily through the ordinary picnic dishes, with a word or two to say on each.

First, cold lamb and mint sauce. Bear in mind that the former is very apt to turn quickly in hot weather, especially if packed close, or put in a hamper near the top, exposed to the sun. Pepper the joint, and wrap it up in cool cabbage-leaves. The mint sauce must be put in a small bottle, a stone ginger-beer bottle being as good as anything.

Second, lobster salad. This of course is dressed on the ground. Take care, however, in packing the lobsters, that they do not impart a fishy flavour to everything else. A few hard-boiled eggs should be taken to garnish the salad.

Pigeon pie. A good pigeon pie ought to have plenty of gravy, and this gravy when cold should be properly a firm jelly. I recollect once in a picnic the pigeon pie had leaked, and the gravy had soaked quite through the table-cloth, which had been placed folded up near it in the hamper. Now, a very little trouble would have avoided this in making the gravy for the pie, bearing in mind the time of year, and how unlikely gravy is to set firm unless made exceedingly strong. All the cook has to do is to put in a little gelatine. This will insure the gravy being firm when cold.

A cucumber properly dressed is an exceedingly nice accompaniment to cold fowl and cold meat in hot weather, and perhaps never appears to better advantage than at a picnic. A cucumber improperly dressed is a very different thing, however. Who has not at times, at hotels or restaurants, met with the small glass dish containing thin slices of cucumber soaked in vinegar, on which float a few spots of oil, looking more like the fat on beef-tea before it is cold?

How utterly uneatable was the cucumber in question, simply because the waiter was too ignorant to know how to dress it! The cucumber must be sliced very thin, and of course all the green peel removed before slicing. These slices must next be placed in a dish with a good-sized pinch of salt, and then covered with fresh oil and well mixed up; they may now be peppered and mixed again, the vinegar in very small quantities being added last of all. The cucumber, being well covered with oil to begin with, will not soak up the vinegar and taste like sour pickle.

I have already given directions how to make claret-cup. When claret-cup is required for a picnic, it will be found best to take ready mixed in a small bottle some plain syrup, and also in another bottle a little sherry, brandy, and noyau, mixed in the proportions I named before. All, therefore, that is required is a strip of the peel from the cucumber and a slice of lemon to be added to a bottle of claret, the mixed wine and spirit out of the bottle next, a little syrup, a lump of ice, and two bottles of soda-water to finish with.

An exceedingly delicious, and at the same time unintoxicating drink, is some syrup of pineapple added to a bottle of soda-water and a lump of ice. Perhaps the most important element towards the success of a picnic is good temper and the absence of selfishness. Just as on board ship there seems a sort of mutual understanding that every one must be pleasant, so is there in these little happy gatherings. Of course, too, much depends on the selection of the company. Avoid asking those who invariably act as wet blankets on anything approaching to fun or merriment.

But however hot the weather we cannot have a picnic every day, though some may have thoughts on the subject similar to the little jockey boy, who wished it was Derby-day all the year round. We must eat to live, which is better than simply living to eat.

Mushrooms *au gratin* form a very good dish for hot weather, but as fish is eaten first I would remind those who suffer from heat, and consequent loss of appetite, that what is known as fish souchet is an admirable thing to start dinner with. Those who have dined at fish dinners at Greenwich, or still better Gravesend, as the latter is nearer the sea, will remember how exceedingly nice was the flounders souchet which generally constitutes the first course at those admirable little dining places like the "Old Falcon," at Gravesend. The neat-looking thin slices of brown bread and butter somehow make one hungry to look at them, so suggestive of the *real* white-bait to follow. The preparation of flounders souchet is very simple. First boil the fish in some water with a little salt till they are tender. Then take off carefully all the scum, and lift the fish one by one into a vegetable dish nearly full of boiling water, taking care in so doing not to break the fish. Throw in one or two sprigs of fresh green parsley, and the dish is complete. Hand round with the fish some thin slices of brown bread and butter. Eels souchet is very nice, and we described how to make it under the heading of turtle soup. When flounders cannot be obtained, those very small

soles, sometimes called, I think, dabs, make a capital souchet; a large dish need not cost sixpence; but pray don't forget the brown bread and butter.

It is wonderful sometimes, by a little forethought, how a dinner can be improved. Out of the many hundreds who have enjoyed those fish souchets at fish dinners, I wonder to how many the idea ever occurred—I must have this at home.

Mushrooms *au gratin* form a more elaborate dish. For this purpose only large cup-mushrooms should be used. Suppose, then, we have eight or ten fine cup-mushrooms—and by cup I mean the top of the mushroom round, and capable of being made hollow. First cut off all the stalks, and peel them, and also peel very carefully the cup-like part of the mushroom, so as not to hurt the rim. Next scoop out the inside of these cups, and chop it up with the stalks of the mushrooms. Take a piece of shalot about as big as the top of the thumb down to the first joint, and sufficient parsley when chopped fine to fill a tea-spoon, and sufficient thyme to cover a shilling. Chop all these up together very fine, adding a little cayenne pepper. Next take some raw bacon and scrape it. It will be found that the fat will scrape easily, but not the lean. This latter must occasionally be cut in strips. Continue scraping the bacon till you have got about three ounces altogether. Chop the lean as fine as possible, and put it with the fat into an enamelled saucepan. Add the chopped mushroom, thyme, parsley, shalot, &c., and fry it all over the fire for a time. If the mass is too dry, it shows there is not enough bacon-fat; if it is too moist, add some bread-crumbs. Fill the cups of the mushrooms with this preparation, and shake over some fine golden-coloured bread-raspings. Place these cups in a covered stew-pan with some butter or oil, and let them cook very gently till the cup part of the mushroom is quite tender. They can be served either plain or with some rich brown gravy poured *round* them. It is rather a rich dish, and of course not one off which it would be possible to dine; but it is exceedingly good and savoury, and not nearly so troublesome to make as would be imagined from reading this recipe.

When there has been a large lobster salad or salads made, the cook is often at a loss how to utilise the lobster that is left. In the first place, lobster will not keep sometimes even one hot night. One very good method of using up any remains is what is called bashawed lobster. Take all the pieces of lobster left, and cut them up with a knife and fork; chop up a piece of onion, just about the size of the top of the little finger, and a small piece of parsley. Mix it with the pieces of lobster, and a very little anchovy sauce and cayenne pepper. Cut up a piece of butter into little pieces, and mix in, and fill the shell part of the lobster—*i.e.*, the two half-tails. Cover these shells over the top with some fine bread-crumbs, and shake a few fine bread-raspings on the top. Put the shells in the oven for ten minutes, or a little longer, and serve hot. Some fried parsley makes a good garnish in contrast with the red shell, and is also a great improvement to the flavour. This is a capital supper dish after a hot day, can be made early in the after-

noon, and only requires what the cooks call "popping in the oven."

Cook will, of course, maintain that the remains of a lobster or lobsters cannot be done this way properly. The reason is, lobster—and, in fact, shell-fish generally—has particular charms for the kitchen. Servants are



partial also to cucumber, vinegar, liver and bacon, lamb's fry, roast pork and sage and onions, winkles, radishes, &c.—almost anything with stuffing, onions—in fact, generally it may be said that anything that possesses what is vulgarly known as the property of rising seems adapted to them.

The world, thanks to strikes, love of dress, drink, &c., is changing very rapidly. Where the class of servants is to come from ten years hence, adapted to small families of limited incomes, is a problem to be solved in the future.

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