

HOW TO COOK HARE.



AS often happens, with change of season also comes change of food—which is doubly welcome in a country like our own, that seems to possess fewer changes than others, on the beef and mutton, mutton and beef, day after day and week after week. There are, perhaps, few changes more decided than that of hare, in the shape of food, and few dishes that persons would care less to eat every day. Still it is a change, and a pleasant one; but hare requires rather more skill in cooking than many cooks are aware of. Hare really properly cooked has simply to be compared with hare carelessly served, to prove the truth of this statement.

I will begin by describing that simple dish—roast hare. Now, what is the common fault to be found with this excellent dish, as we get it in nine houses out of ten? It is nearly always dried up; that part of the meat of the back which in roasting is nearest the fire seems covered with a thick, hard skin, the reason being that it has roasted too long, too fast, and has not been sufficiently basted. In cooking hare, and in fact in cooking any kind of meat, the nature of that meat should be borne in mind. The speciality about hare is that it has a tendency to taste what we may call dry; and also it possesses very little natural fat. Consequently, the cook's great object should be to keep the hare as moist as possible, and to prevent it from getting dry. In all high-class works on cooking, entrées made from hare are invariably spoken of as larded fillets, which are finished by the addition of various sauces, &c.; but I do not think it would be very practical to describe the process of larding fillets of hare. Larding requires practice; and one practical lesson of *seeing* it done would be worth a volume of writing—indeed, I might as well attempt to explain how to shoot the hare. I fear the cook who depended upon hearsay for her knowledge of larding would miss her mark, as surely as the sportsman whose sole experience consisted of a similar kind would miss his.

To begin at the beginning. We will suppose the hare caught and hung up, head downwards, in his fur jacket. Now, the first thing to be thought of is the length of time that a hare should be kept before it is cooked. This entirely depends upon the weather; a perfectly fresh hare should never be cooked unless the whole of it is intended for hare-soup, which is rarely the case in small private houses. Some persons prefer the hare absolutely high; the best course is a happy medium between being too high and too fresh; and cooks should bear in mind that what often appears very high and offensive when raw, becomes perfectly right when cooked.

We will not dwell upon that not very agreeable, but still necessary, process of skinning the hare, but will at

once commence to make the stuffing, which must be tied up inside it. Ordinary veal stuffing, as it is generally called, is best for the purpose, and, as I think I have before pointed out, the most common fault is too much lemon.

The following receipt will, I think, be found well adapted to improve, and not destroy or overcome, the flavour of the hare:—Take a quarter of a pound of beef-suet and chop it very finely, with two ounces of raw, lean ham; add a tea-spoonful of chopped fresh parsley and two tea-spoonfuls of dried mixed savoury herbs, or one, if the herbs are fresh. These herbs are sold ready mixed in bottles, which is the simplest method, and are composed principally of marjoram, basil, thyme, &c. As the herbs get drier more must be used; but, as I have said, if quite fresh, one tea-spoonful; if very dry, two; the cook, consequently, must use her judgment for intermediate stages. Add to this, to continue the stuffing, a quarter of the rind of a lemon—this latter should be chopped very fine; add a little cayenne pepper and salt, about five ounces of bread-crumbs, and two whole eggs. The whole quantity should be well pounded in a mortar.

Some persons add the liver of the hare to the stuffing; if the liver is quite fresh this may be done, but not unless; and if the hare has been kept a proper time, the liver is very often the part that exhibits most the—what shall we call it—ravages of time, and in such case should on no account be used. This stuffing must be placed in the hare, taking care to wipe the inside first, and sewn up; the hare should then be hung up before the fire, at a greater distance than meat would be ordinarily; plenty of dripping should be ready melted in the dripping-pan, and the cook should *keep basting as often as possible*; this latter is the secret of having the hare moist, and without that hard, dry coating outside, which we mentioned. As for the time a hare takes to roast, it is almost impossible to say—a small one taking an hour, and a very large one nearly two. Much depends also on the fire, and the distance the hare is kept from it in the early stages. Bear in mind, however, that under-done can be remedied, and over-done can't. An inexperienced cook can cut into the joint at the back, about where the hind-leg joins the body, and look, or stick a little piece of firewood in after the knife, and judge from the colour whether it is done or not. On the average, an hour to an hour and a quarter will be ample. Near the finish, however, take away the dripping-pan and get a little butter; baste with this to finish, putting the hare near the fire so as to froth the butter, and at the same time dredge it with some flour, so as to get it a nice brown colour; and serve some good, rich, hot gravy with it in a separate tureen. As hare is an awkward joint to carve, it will be found best *not* to pour gravy over it, for the sake of the table-cloth and the feelings of the carver. Red-currant jelly should always be handed

round with hare, and the gravy will be much improved by a few cloves, a tiny piece of cinnamon being boiled in it and then strained off; add also half a glass of rich port wine, and by rich I mean not a dry wine, but rather port wine dregs. The last spoonful of port in the bottle should always be reserved for purposes of this kind.

We will now discuss what is, to my mind, a far preferable method of cooking hare, and that is jugged hare. For this purpose a stone jar with a wide mouth will be found better than an ordinary jug, which was formerly used, and which gives its name to the dish. Have ready some good brown gravy, free from fat. Next cut up the hare into joints, each joint not being larger than would be considered the proper quantity for one help; fry these joints in a little butter in a frying-pan, so as to turn them a nice brown without cooking them. Have the empty jar made hot by placing it in the oven, and have a cloth ready to tie over its mouth. Then as soon as the joints of hare are browned, throw them into the hot empty jar, pour a large glass of port wine in too, tie the cloth quickly over the mouth of the jar, and let it stand for, say, a quarter of an hour or more on the dresser. By this means the fumes of the wine will rise—the jar being hot—and will impregnate the meat of the hare in a way which it would never do were it simply added to the gravy. After this has stood some time, untie the jar and add the gravy, with a small piece of cinnamon, six cloves, two bay-leaves, and the juice of half a lemon. The gravy should be strongly impregnated with onion, and should be thickened with a little arrowroot rather than with brown thickening. The port will materially assist the colour; a good spoonful of red-currant jelly may also be added to it and dissolved in it, though in addition red-currant jelly will be handed round with it. Next place this jar up to its neck in a large saucepan of boiling water—only take care that the jar is well tied down, or much of the flavour will be lost; allow this to remain in the boiling water for about an hour to an hour and a half, when it will be found to be sufficiently done, as jugged hare, like roast hare, is generally over-cooked rather than under. Stuffing-balls should be added to it, but not cooked with it. For this purpose prepare some stuffing as directed for roast hare; roll this stuffing into small balls, a little larger than marbles, and throw them into some boiling fat. A few minutes will be sufficient to cook them; drain on a cloth, and make hot in the oven before adding them to the jugged hare.

As I before mentioned, hare-soup is best made from fresh hare, in which case as much as possible of the blood of the hare should be preserved, and used in the soup. However, it will be often found expedient to use up the remains of the jugged hare by converting it into hare-soup for the following day. I will proceed to explain the best method of doing this:—First, you must have ready some really good stock; next, pick

out all the best-looking pieces of meat—little slices from the back are best—and put them by on a plate, to be added to the soup at the last moment; next, take all the remains of the hare, and add it to the stock with, if possible, a head of celery; let it all boil for an hour or more, till the celery is quite tender; strain off the meat, take out carefully all the bones—which will be found, after this boiling, to be quite white and dry—and then, with a good-sized wooden spoon, rub all the meat and celery through a wire-sieve into the stock. This will take time; but recollect, the one secret of good hare-soup is the fact of the meat being rubbed through the sieve helping to make the soup not only thicker, but materially affecting the taste. Indeed, I may go farther, and say the excellence of the soup is in proportion to the amount of hare-flesh rubbed through the sieve. Should, therefore, the soup look a little thin, allow it to boil away and decrease in quantity. Of course, the taste will much depend upon the amount of jugged hare left; but a little port wine may be added at the finish, as the flavour of wine in soups is very apt to go off after they have been boiled for any length of time. A little more lemon-juice may be added near the finish, but avoid putting in too much currant jelly. Some persons think hare-soup should be absolutely sweet; for my part, I think this a mistake; besides, red-currant jelly can always be added, if wished, but cannot be taken out of the soup. The soup should be made slightly thicker by means of brown thickening, which I have before described to be simply butter and flour fried of a rich brown colour. Do not, however, use too much of this thickening, as it will be found to somewhat destroy the delicate flavour of the hare; besides which, good hare-soup should by no means be very thick. It will, however, have one very marked effect, and that is, it will enable you to add some more port wine, or port wine dregs, which has such an enormous influence over the flavour of hare-soup. When the soup is about to be served, throw in the little slices of hare that had been put by on the plate, but do not let the soup boil, as the hare is probably already more than cooked by being jugged. Allow, therefore, these pieces of meat to remain in the soup just long enough to get hot, and no longer. One objection brought against jugged hare and hare-soup, is the quantity of port wine evidently required in order that the result should be worthy of the trouble bestowed. Recollect, however, what I have said with regard to port wine dregs. Now there are many houses where port wine is kept in the shape of a quarter-cask; where this is the case there should be no difficulty, if the precaution is taken to bottle the thick dregs of the wine and reserve them.

When claret or burgundy is used instead of port, I would recommend the addition of a little—a very little—nutmeg, and also a little extra red-currant jelly; for bear this in mind, port wine is sweeter than claret.

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