

LITTLE EXTRAVAGANCIAS OF THE TABLE.



THE importance of such a subject as the one I have now taken in hand is apt to be much underrated. Many a starving family could be fed from the wasted superabundance which falls, in too many cases, not only from the rich man's but the comparatively poor man's table.

There is no extravagance so disastrous as the extravagance of ignorance. It is perhaps as difficult to define precisely where hospitality and comfort end, and extravagance begins, as it is to define where economy ends and meanness begins. Strange to say, however, we not unfrequently

find extravagance and meanness going hand-in-hand. How often do we find households conducted upon inconsistent principles! For instance, a fine large house, dogs, horses, and carriages, and yet one cannot get a good glass of sherry at dinner, or any wine at all after. Rows of fine green-houses as well as hot-houses, full of rare plants, and no fire in the bed-room. I sometimes think that quite the poor are a great deal better off than the rich for real luxuries.

I know I have stopped at some houses, and thought with a sigh of the poor man's, with the feather bed, especially when the blankets are out of pawn. After all, happiness is much more equally distributed in the world than some people think for, and living in one room has its advantages as well as its drawbacks. The pennyworth of fried fish warmed up in the oven, with appetite sauce, will hold its own with the best of *vols-au-vent* without. But all this has little to do with the subject, which is not household management in general, but table extravagance in particular.

Perhaps the most common form of extravagance is profusion, which is very marked in certain dishes; and we before called attention to melted butter, which is invariably made in quantity sufficient for quite ten times the number at dinner. Fish is commonly supplied in quantity enough for double the number; for instance, three or four persons do not want a pair of large soles; one would be ample, and the other would do for breakfast cooked fresh; instead it is either warmed up and spoilt, or eaten cold at the servants' supper with a knife and vinegar. Another common form of extravagance is cooking too many potatoes every day regularly. I know one or two houses where more than half the dish of potatoes has been left every day for the last twenty years, and I feel confident will continue to be left for twenty years to come. Again, some servants invariably cut up a great deal more bread for dinner than is necessary, the stale pieces left too often finding their way into the pig-tub. Speaking of pig-tubs reminds me of a little incident that came to my knowledge only last Christmas. A gentleman living in a

country village kept one pig, and had been in the habit of paying 1s. a week for grains from the brewery. His gardener, who lived in a little cottage a mile off, and kept pigs of his own, informed him that he was in the habit of buying pig-wash from the cooks in the neighbourhood, to whom he paid 1s. a month; and suggested that he should receive the 1s. a week, and in return find the wash, guaranteeing the pig would thrive far better. The first pail of wash the man brought to the house ought indeed to be a caution to housekeepers, containing as it did large lumps of bread, whole cooked potatoes, and chicken-bones half picked.

The gentleman, who is my own brother, declared to me that he had seen pails of pig-wash containing broken victuals sufficient to keep a poor family for a week, and jokingly remarked that should he ever be really hard up, he should dine at his pig's. These facts, however, are no joke. I believe the extravagance of ignorant servants, in large households where the mistress does not enter into domestic affairs, is beyond all conception. As Sam Weller observes, if some servants got their deserts it would be very little cold swarry they would ever eat again. I have known cases where a jug of beer left from a late dinner has been poured down the sink, and some fresh beer drawn for the kitchen supper, on the ground that the beer left would taste flat.

Some joints are undoubtedly more extravagant than others. I wonder what a French cook thinks of the English roast loin of mutton. The bones are always left half picked on the plate, and too often the end left altogether, besides which the roast loin of mutton seems to possess the unamiable property of getting cold sooner than any other joint I know of.

Now, bone the joint and stuff it with veal stuffing; the raw bones will of course make soup, and nothing is wasted.

It is always extravagant to use up any joint or poultry, when it can be helped, when bones are left on the plates. I succeeded some little time ago in persuading a shockingly bad housekeeper not to bring up the remains of a large turkey cold. It was treated instead as follows:—With the assistance of a small tin of mushrooms, part of it made some Russian Kromeskies; another part made a dish of mince; some nice slices cut off the remains of the breast were converted into a capital Mayonnaise; while the two legs—for it was a fine bird, weighing twenty-one pounds—were devilled, and sent up with some devil sauce, which I may briefly describe as follows:—Cut up some young onions very fine, and moisten them with a very little French vinegar, and boil for about five or six minutes; add some cayenne pepper, some good strong gravy, wine, and anchovy butter—which latter consists of filleted anchovies pounded very thoroughly in a mortar with some butter and cayenne.

Any grilled meat, such as a chop, or drumsticks of fowls, is very much improved by a sauce of this kind. Of course the cayenne must be suited in quantity to

the tastes of the eaters. But to return to the turkey : by treating it in the manner I have described, there was no waste, all the bones being saved, and the result was that they made more than half-a-gallon of stock, which when cold was a hard jelly.

Another common form of waste is home-made pastry. I recollect some oyster patties as they were called, but oyster pies as they really were, being very nearly as big as cheese-plates, in which the pastry was

but cut. In the first place, if the joint is cooked properly the first day, every one possessing even the vestige of a palate would surely prefer it cold to being warmed up and spoilt. The probable reason of warming up a joint the second day is that the cook knows of no other way of extricating herself from the difficulty of sending up cold meat. Such extreme ignorance is, however, I am pleased to say, rare. I once knew a case of a loin of mutton which went



(Drawn by J. PROCTOR.)

"IF YOUR COOK HAPPENS TO 'HAVE A WEAKNESS THAT WAY'" (p. 242).

so out of proportion to the oyster that the dish was almost ludicrous, the impossibility of eating even a quarter of the pastry being self-evident the moment the pie was cut. I have seen lobster patties made on a similar principle, in which, when the top was taken off, the lobster part appeared beneath something not merely in colour but in size resembling a red wafer. Now these dishes are really very extravagant, for the reason that they cost both money and trouble, and in the end no one eats them.

A somewhat eccentric form of the "extravagance of ignorance" to which I have alluded, is that of warming up joints that have been not only cooked before,

through the following awful processes:—first it was roasted, fortunately being a trifle blue; the second day it was roasted again, the flavour being of course quite gone. The awful part remains behind—the rest was cut into chops, egged and bread-crumbed, and sent up as cutlets; and I, alas! ate one.

Another instance of waste and extravagance is a ham which is allowed to get musty. It will be found that a ham when it first comes up is very popular, but wait till the middle bone is distinctly visible, and the fat has a yellow tinge and doubtful smell—no one will touch it. But why let it go so far? Why not pot it? Potted ham is easily made, will keep a long time, and

is always useful. Now, to pot ham, take a pound of the lean to half-a-pound of the fat, or less—in fact, a pound of lean to a quarter of fat does even better for potting—mince it very fine, or better still, run it through a sausage machine, and add to, say the pound and a half, a small teaspoonful of pounded mace, about a quarter of a good-sized nutmeg, grated of course, and about a saltspoonful of cayenne pepper. Less mace may be used, or a little pounded allspice added instead; one dried bay-leaf powdered may be added also.

Mix all this up thoroughly, and press it down in the dish or pot in which it will be served. Bake it in the oven for about twenty-five minutes, taking care the top does not brown, and then press it down very hard—a weight is a good thing to use for the purpose—and cover the top with some fresh lard, which must be first melted, and then poured on to the top. Ham potted this way will keep good for months. Fresh clarified butter may be used, but lard is best, especially in summer.

One very common form of extravagance, which is essentially the extravagance of ignorance, is giving the cook orders for certain dishes without ascertaining whether the materials are in season or not. I recollect hearing, some time ago, of a married couple living in London, who, liking a little fish every day for dinner, made a contract with the fishmonger to send each day, about six o'clock, what fish suited him best; I believe they paid regularly 6d. a day. It is on such principles that tables-d'hôte can be given so cheaply at hotels. The manager of the hotel goes to market and buys—especially in fish—what happens to be plentiful. Good wholesome fish may be bought in Billingsgate Market sometimes at a penny a pound.

Some time ago I promised to tell you how to make mock-turtle soup out of pig's head, instead of calf's head. Now calves' heads vary immensely in price; when half-a-head can be got for 2s. 6d. or 3s., it is a fairly economical dish; but when calves' heads, as happens sometimes about Christmas, owing to the extraordinary demand for them, run up to a guinea each, of course the dish would be extravagant to a degree. I don't know what the price of pigs' heads is in the country, but in London they can generally be bought for 6d. a pound. To make mock-turtle soup from, say, half-a-head, first scald it thoroughly, then put it on to boil gently in some stock made from bones. The drawback to the soup is that it has a tendency to taste greasy, consequently the point to be always borne in mind is to thoroughly get rid of the fat. After the pig's head has boiled for about an hour and a half, take it out, let it get partially cold, then cut the meat off the head exactly in the same shape as the pieces of calf's head in good mock-turtle soup; let each piece be about an inch and a half or two inches square. These should be allowed to get cold between two large dishes, the bottom one being placed upside down, as in cooling they have a tendency to curl, and they look far better flat. Put all the bones of the head back into the stock, and let them boil as long as you like. I

would mention, in passing, that a couple of bay-leaves in the stock are a great improvement. Next thicken the stock with brown thickening, which is, as I have before described, simply flour fried brown in butter. Let the whole boil very gently, and keep skimming it carefully. It is surprising what a lot of fat there will be on it. This soup should always be made the day before it is wanted, in order to let it get cold; the fat can then be taken off, but I would warn cooks against supposing that because soup has got cold *all* the fat will necessarily float to the top, as this is not the case. A great deal of fat is what may be termed held in solution in the soup, and is only thrown up by boiling. When therefore all the fat has been got rid of, the pieces of meat can be replaced in the soup, and some sherry added—golden sherry, or still better, Madeira—and recollect that this latter wine is fairly cheap again now, as therefore you have saved money over the pig's head instead of the calf's head, you can afford to be a little more generous with the wine. It is wonderful what a difference this latter makes in the flavour; only just taste it for yourself before and after. Soup like this will bear a large claret-glass of sherry, or even more; only pray put in the wine yourself, for if your cook happens to "have a weakness that way," it may never be mingled with the soup at all.

I believe it to be real extravagance to buy things that are out of season, in addition to its being foolish. It will generally be found that things are nicest when cheapest; for instance, strawberries are never so good as when they can be bought for 6d. a basket. Who the people are that buy the peaches at 5s. each, pines at a guinea, and green peas at 10s. a pint, I cannot say, but that such people exist is evident from a walk through Covent Garden Market. Such sort of extravagance seems to me to be hardly consistent with good moral character. There is a story told of a lady who was particularly fond of the "Pope's eye" in a leg of mutton, and would often have a dozen legs ordered, simply for the sake of cutting out the "Pope's eyes," the rest of the meat being given to hounds. The story, however, sounds too wicked to be true.

I heard a delightful story, a short time ago, of an extravagant husband who was blessed, or cursed, as the case may be, with a wife who may be described as "a little near." In expectation of a dinner party, which to him was a business dinner, expecting as he did some friends from the City, he ordered a salmon from his fishmonger, the price being £1. Fearing, however, that his better half would find fault with the price, and being anxious to prove himself good at a bargain, he paid down 10s., and sent home the fish as if the remaining 10s. was the whole charge. On his return, his wife, with great glee, told him how she had disposed of the fish to her friend Mrs. —, who had called, seen the fish, and thinking it remarkably cheap, had offered 15s. for it, which offer had been gladly accepted. The wretched man's feelings can be better imagined than described; but the moral of the story, which is really true, seems to be—don't deceive your wife.

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