SOUP.

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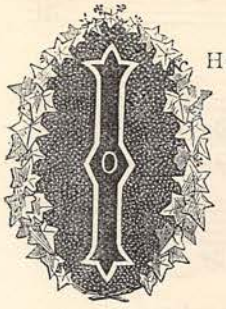

"I HOPE you can dine without soup and fish." Such has often been the half-jocular apology for what persons term a plain dinner. Strange to say, probably in the majority of English houses, the idea still exists that soup and fish are unnecessary luxuries.

There is a good story told in connection with the Irish famine of 1847–8. A hard-working practical London clergyman, of considerable experience in dealing with the poor, was sent over to the West of Ireland, to superintend the distribution of the relief fund that had been collected in this country. He had heard so much of the misery of those by whom he was surrounded, that he had naturally determined to exercise the greatest personal self-denial as regarded his own food; what was his disgust, then, on finding the dinner at the clergyman's house at which he was stopping to commence with a splendid turbot, fit only for an alderman's table, and which could not have been bought even at Billingsgate Market under a couple of guineas!—an indignation heightened when the worthy rector called his wife's attention to the fact that that epicure's *bonne-bouche*, the fins, had been cut off. To vent his indignation, he sternly refused to eat a mouthful. The rector's wife was at her wits' end to know what to do, for there was nothing to follow. The conversation with regard to the fins, however, continued: "I am sure, my dear, Nora is an excellent manager. The fish was only one-and-twopence, and she couldn't get it into the copper without cutting the fins." "Excuse me," suddenly said the stranger, "but I will alter my mind and have some fish," and a hearty meal he made. He had forgotten the part of the country he was in, and had attributed the magnificent display of fish to Irish recklessness and improvidence, instead of to strict economy.

So it is in this country: cheap fish is undoubtedly a saving. The poor, however, have a deep-rooted prejudice against it, such prejudice being founded on the fact of its unsatisfying properties. Persons should, however, bear in mind that where fish precedes meat in any meal, if the fish cost a penny a pound, as is often the case when plaice is plentiful in London, or when sprats are in season, or a grand take of herrings has recently been achieved, and when meat is a shilling a pound, it is far cheaper to have fish and meat than meat alone. Exactly the same observations apply to soup. Those who have watched the poorer classes in France, will have noticed that a Frenchman invariably commences his dinner with a large plate of *bouillon*, into which he always breaks up and soaks a huge hunk of bread: indeed such plate of *bouillon* very often forming his whole dinner. Now, any one approaching, say, a roast leg of mutton, whose inner man is thus fortified, will of necessity eat far less than one who starts fresh and ravenous.

It will be observed that at those somewhat disgusting orgies called agricultural labourers' feasts, the men almost entirely eschew bread and vegetables. I once witnessed a feast near Dover: the roast and boiled—thanks to the skilful use of the blade of the knife—rapidly disappeared; the fork, as a rule, being kept in reserve as a toothpick. I was afterwards informed on undeniably good authority that the men averaged over 2lbs. of solid meat per head. But I must not forget the practical part of my subject, which is how to make soup; nor must I forget that I am writing for private houses and not for hotels. We will therefore be sufficiently unorthodox not to commence with—"Take 40lbs. of shin of beef," &c. &c., but will "try another method." Suppose you had a boiled silverside of beef yesterday, and that for the sake of your digestion as well as your soup you had ordered fresh and not salted beef. I think it will be found that, as a rule, in private houses the preparation of soup more often than not starts with a quantity of what may be called pot-liquor, that has been used for boiling a silverside or aitch-bone of beef, a leg of mutton, or a leg of pork. I might here state that it will be generally found advisable to vary the soup according to the original material boiled. The liquor that has boiled beef is indeed adapted for almost any soup, but the liquor in which mutton has been boiled is particularly adapted for white soups in general, but more especially for oyster soup. Again, pork liquor is peculiarly suitable for pea soup; indeed, pea soup can be made from stock that would be far too greasy for any other purpose whatever. We will, however, return to the "beef liquor." Now, undoubtedly a very fairly good palatable soup can be made from this liquor without the addition of either gravy beef or veal; still I would prefer to give a few simple directions at starting as to the best method of making really first-class soup, suitable to the present festive season. If the joint of beef has been large, no further gravy beef need be added to the stock. Take, however, about 4lbs. of knuckle of veal; slice the meat and chop the bone, and reserve one good slice of the veal as free as possible from fat, to be used, as the cookery books generally say, as hereinafter directed. Next, let the knuckle of veal be placed in the cold beef liquor, to which must be added one turnip, one carrot, one onion in which half a dozen cloves have been stuck, a good handful of freshly cut parsley, and a small head of celery. We will, of course, take for granted that the pot or saucepan was scrupulously clean. One word of warning, however, with regard to the vegetables, and more especially the celery, that have been added to the soup: it is of great importance that these should be thoroughly washed. Very often a head of celery looks properly clean, but when the sticks are

pulled open or when it is sliced with a knife, mould from the garden will be discovered inside. Add salt very sparingly and do not put in any spice or pepper. Let the whole simmer very slowly and gently for several hours—say five or six—the amount of stock or soup that we intend making, considering the quantity of veal used, being one gallon. Let the whole be carefully strained through a clean cloth or sieve into a large basin. In making soup, care should be taken to keep the vessel closed as much as possible; the lid must, however, be removed occasionally for the purpose of taking off the scum that rises to the surface. Young cooks would do well to bear in mind that soup is often rendered smoky, and consequently utterly spoilt, by carelessly shutting in a little smoke in replacing the lid, or by placing the lid on the hob by the side of the fireplace. It is a good lesson for beginners to take a saucepan-lid and leave it for a few minutes on the hob of an open fireplace, and afterwards to smell the lid.

We will now suppose this gallon of somewhat colourless stock to have got cold, to have had the fat removed from its surface, and to have been poured back into a large saucepan for the purpose of being cleared. It will also be seen that I have given directions not so much in accordance with high-class cookery, as suitable to the mind and intelligence of the ordinary women who in small private houses term themselves cooks, believing as I do that as a class they are incapable of grasping the idea of boiling down stock to a glaze, and thereby making what may be termed a natural colour for the soup.

In first-class kitchens, where soup is made in wholesale quantity, cooks would be astonished at the few whites of eggs used for clearing soup. Undoubtedly the best method of clearing stock is veal itself. We here come to the slice of veal that we put by a short time back. Run this through a sausage-machine, if possible, fine chopping being of course the alternative; next, take a single white of egg, bearing in mind that half that white would be sufficient; beat it up thoroughly in a pint of cold water; add the minced veal; let the stock be boiling tolerably briskly over a clear fire; add the mixture, which will of course have the effect of taking the stock off the boil. Stir the whole up and let it boil again; then strain the whole off carefully, and your stock will probably be as bright as good Amontillado sherry.

There are numerous devices by which cooks colour soup; of course bringing the stock to a glaze is the best. Where this, however, is impracticable I think as good a method as any of attaining a little colour is the addition of Liebig's extract of meat, so long as only sufficient is added to turn the otherwise colourless stock a pale straw-colour. It now depends upon what soup you require; for instance, suppose the soup be macaroni, the macaroni must be boiled tender in separate water and added to the straw-coloured soup afterwards. Had the macaroni, as is too often the case, been boiled in the soup itself, the soup would be cloudy. The same remarks apply to vermicelli. It must be boiled separate. Again, supposing spring soup be required, boil the young carrots, turnips, leek, lettuce, &c. &c., in plain water, taking care that they have been originally thrown into boiling water, thereby preserving the colour; add these vegetables to the stock, throwing a small handful of young peas into the boiling stock itself. I might add here, in passing, that many cooks do not discriminate between spring soup and julienne soup. In the latter, the vegetables are not boiled in water, but are softened by being stewed in butter; in julienne soup, also, a lump of sugar is added. An almost infinite variety of clear soups can be made by adding various ingredients to this clear stock. For instance, sago, plain boiled rice, Italian paste of various kinds, pearl barley, of course previously boiled, &c. &c.

We will now take a very cheap and practical soup, namely oyster soup, to be made from tinned oysters. Of course, I do not for one moment mean to assert that oyster soup made from tinned oysters can in any way compare with soup made from fresh oysters; but then remember that the latter are at the very least two shillings a dozen, while a tin only costs fivepence.

We will suppose for the basis of our soup that we have the liquor in which a leg of mutton has been boiled; next take, say, two tins of oysters, strain the liquor into a basin, and add this liquor to the mutton stock, which we will presume to have been flavoured with the ordinary vegetables for making soup, remarking in passing that the flavour of onions should be used sparingly, and that this mutton stock has been reduced by being allowed to boil away till barely more than a pint has been left; add to this a quart of boiling milk. Remember that in boiling milk care should be taken, first, that the milk does not burn, and secondly that the better part of it is not wasted by being allowed to boil over. The best method to guard against this is to have a little cold milk, say a wine-glassful, ready; the moment the milk foams and begins to rise in the saucepan, remove the saucepan from the fire with one hand and pour in the cold milk with the other, which will have the instantaneous effect of taking the milk off the boil. Next, add to this mixture of mutton stock, boiled milk, and oyster liquor a brimming tea-spoonful of anchovy sauce, and thicken the whole with some white roux; white roux being, as we have already described in "Common-sense Cookery," butter and flour mixed together, and baked without being allowed to turn colour.

This oyster soup is now complete, and before serving must be poured on the oysters; it will be found that the soup itself is far better than the oysters; the latter, as a rule, being tough and insipid. A bay-leaf boiled in the stock will be found an improvement; a "suspicion" of nutmeg will add to the flavour, but then remember it must be a suspicion or the soup will be spoilt.