

## A LESSON IN INVALID COOKERY.



**J**ACK and I are in easy circumstances; we have £400 a year—an income which is considered very comfortable in Ireland. We have two children, our two selves, and three servants to support upon this sum,

and all the old people in the parish to assist in case of illness.

Our charities certainly run away with more money than we ever set down in our account book—at least, I, who keep that book, am inclined to attribute many deficiencies in my husband's purse to his large almsgiving. He is the rector of the parish, and feels bound to share what God has given him with the poor of all persuasions; and he does not like me to inquire too closely into his disbursements. I, therefore, preserve a prudent silence, satisfied in my own mind, and I would say it with reverence, that this expenditure is no real loss to us.

Our clothing does not cost much, since we lead a very quiet life, indulging in no excitement, beyond an occasional dinner at the house of the squire of the parish, or with the neighbouring clergy; and our housekeeping is not expensive, because we are contented with simple fare. But I confess to having indulged in one luxury: I kept a good cook, to whom I paid £15 a year. My reasons for this extravagance were two: I was quite ignorant of cooking when I married, and Jack is a delicate man who requires care and good food.

All went well with us till one unfortunate day when our cook became suddenly ill, and had to be taken to the infirmary. Gladly would I have acted as nurse and housemaid, and left my other woman-servant to cook, but she was as ignorant of cooking as myself; and after a laborious morning in the kitchen, I produced a hash which was tough and greasy, and a heavy tasteless pudding.

"Oh, Jack," cried I, seeing the efforts my husband made to finish his dinner lest I should be hurt—"oh, Jack, I cannot cook!"

"No, Fanny; but you can sing a good song, and paint a good picture."

"I don't care for ironical praise," replied I, offended.

"My praise is not ironical, I assure you; you do well what you have been taught to do, and that is all any of us are able to do."

"I would willingly exchange my useless accomplishments for the power of cooking an eatable dish," I answered.

To this he returned something about the value of my music in the church choir, and of my songs that cheered his evenings, and resolutely took up his spoon again to finish the heavy pudding. But I implored him to leave it uneaten, promising to apply my powers of mind, such as they were, to learning to cook.

Fortune aided me sooner than I expected. A lady who had taken out a diploma in cookery at South Kensington, advertised in our local paper that she was about to give a series of lessons in Superior, Household, and Artisan Cookery in the county town; and Mrs. O'Hara, our squire's wife, invited me to accompany her to them.

"Well, Fanny, what have you learned?" asked Jack the first evening; he had eaten a meagre dinner contentedly, looking forward, he said, to future feasts. "Begin as usual from the beginning, and tell me all about your lesson."

"Picture, then, a long room, with rows of forms the length of the room, facing a portable American cooking-stove, which is carried from town to town by Mrs. Hunter, as she goes about giving lessons. Behind a screen to the right was a little back kitchen, fitted up with such vessels and provisions as were likely to be needed during the lesson. A young girl in a white apron was stationed there—she was Mrs. Hunter's servant, who accompanied her everywhere. A long table was placed from the outer edge of the screen along the room in front of the rows of forms, which were already occupied, when Mrs. O'Hara and I entered, by about sixty ladies with note-books and pencils in hand, looking very eager and business-like. Mrs. Hunter, a little bright lady-like person, faced us, with her back to the stove, her hands constantly employed in demonstrating, while she gave her instructions in a clear and lively manner."

"Well, my dear, what did she teach you?"

"Nothing that will interest you particularly as yet; the lesson to-day was in invalid cookery, and you are not an invalid, thank God."

"No, but we have several invalids in the parish. Did you take notes?"

"Certainly;" and I produced my little book. "The first time you have a cold I shall make this gruel for you:—"

*Recipe for Effervescent Gruel.*—Make half a breakfast-cup of gruel very thin and smooth. Stir it over the fire for twenty minutes; then bruise a small teaspoonful of carbonate of soda with a table-spoonful of sifted sugar, and pour the gruel upon it. Squeeze the juice of a lemon into a wine-glass, and when the patient is warm in bed, take the gruel to him in a basin, and pour the lemon-juice from the wine-glass upon it. It must be taken as hot as possible.

"This, as you hear, is very easily made, but the ladies were so anxious to learn that they asked several questions—for instance, 'How much meal will make the half-cup of gruel?' 'A table-spoonful to half a pint of water. It should be steeped the night before.'"

"I am sure you want me to catch cold, that you may try your effervescing gruel upon me; but I warn you I shall keep well as long as I can."

"Then came lessons in making lemonade, tamarind-tea, and apple-water. To make these drinks, and indeed for cookery of every description, I should get water fresh from the spring, let it come to the boil, and that instant I should pour it upon the lemons, tamarinds, or apples. The lady who had questioned Mrs. Hunter about the quantity of meal to be used in making half a cup of gruel, asked, 'Why is the water not to stand long in the house, and why is it merely to come to the boil before we use it?' But, indeed, I must not laugh at her, for I myself was ignorant of the reason. 'Because,' replied Mrs. Hunter, 'the longer the water stands, and the longer it boils, the more oxygen it loses. You have often heard a servant say, 'Oh, yes, ma'am, you can have tea now—the kettle has been boiling this half-hour,' neither servant nor mistress knowing that the longer the water boils, the less wholesome is the tea.' In making beef-tea, chicken-broth, or mutton-broth for the sick, the same rule is to be observed. Did you know that, Jack?"

"No, indeed, Fanny."

"Did you know that when a patient is very ill you should not put any salt in his food? Mrs. Hunter says so. She taught us how to make three kinds of beef-tea. The first was for a patient in typhoid fever. One of the ladies nearest the table offered her assistance, and was set to pound an ounce of raw beef in a mortar. During Mrs. Hunter's instructions how to make beef-tea for a patient who is very sick, I noticed a young lady in deep mourning lay down her pencil, while more than one tear fell upon her note-book. I fancied she was regretting that she had not received the lesson in time to benefit some dear invalid; and while mentally sympathising with her, I confess I lost a few words of the lecture."

Jack smiled. "How like a woman! No woman is able to attend rigidly to one thing at a time. A man gives his mind to the subject in hand, whatever that may be, and reserves all desultory reflections till afterwards."

"Ungrateful! I went on from sorrow for the girl in black, to think how I should feel if *you* were very ill."

"Thank you, my dear Fanny; but I really had rather you had learned how to cook my beef-tea."

"But I did learn: my attention merely wandered for a moment. Listen while I convince you by giving the recipe without looking at my notes:—"

"*Beef-tea for Typhoid Fever.*—Take one ounce of the very best beef, and one ounce of water. Cut up the beef, taking care there is no fat or skin. Pound it in

a mortar for a quarter of an hour. Then put it in a glass or cup, pour the cold water upon it, and let it stand for half an hour, bruising it from time to time with a wooden spoon. Pour off the beef-tea. It makes one dose. There must not be any salt.

"*Ordinary Beef-tea.*—Take one pound of the best beef, perfectly free from skin and fat, and one pint of water. Cut the beef as fine as you can, and pound it in a mortar for a quarter of an hour, till it is reduced to a pulp. Put it into a clean saucepan with the pint of cold water, and let it stand for twenty minutes, bruising it every now and then with a wooden spoon. Next put it on a very slow fire, and let it gradually come to the boil. Directly it boils take it off, and strain it through a sieve, stirring it to get all the fibrine through. Remove all fat from the top with a sheet of blotting-paper. If the patient is tolerably well you may add a little salt."

My husband, being a candid man, was forced to confess that I knew my lesson perfectly.

"Another incident that occurred is worth noting. Mrs. Hunter taught us to make arrowroot, and after concluding with the remark that one ought never to take a larger quantity of any eatable into the sick-room than one thinks the patient is likely to take, both because the sight of much food disgusts him, and because the germs of infection floating in the air are apt to settle upon the food, rendering it unwholesome for future consumption, she said, 'but in case your patient cannot eat the arrowroot, I shall show you how to turn it into a pudding for the rest of the family.' A quiet smile ran round the class. You see our teacher has a thrifty soul, and all her instructions are likely to partake of the true spirit of economy. But while my 'desultory reflections' this time pointed to the heartlessness of devouring what had been prepared for the poor invalid, I beg to state that I did not lose one word of the lesson, to prove which I shall again give you the recipe without reference to my notes:—"

"*To Make Arrowroot.*—Take one dessert-spoonful of arrowroot, half a pint of milk, and one lump of sugar. Mix the arrowroot into a very smooth paste with two spoonfuls of the milk. Put the rest of the milk with the sugar on to boil. Pour the boiling milk upon the arrowroot, stir it carefully, and it is fit for use. This is the only farinaceous food that should never be boiled.

"*To Make a Pudding of the Above.*—Beat up the yolks of two eggs very well, and mix them with the arrowroot, adding more sugar. Put it in the oven for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. Dust it over with sifted sugar.

"I might tell you still more to show that I have profited by the lesson; but perhaps I have already convinced you that I am likely to give my full attention to the beefsteak pudding, fish soup, and apple tart, which we are to learn how to make in our first lesson in Household Cookery."

L. MCCLINTOCK.

