

CATERING FOR CHILDREN'S PARTIES.

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IT is a common saying, "There are no children now-a-days," and in arranging for children's evening parties, so common at the present season of the year, we—and by we I mean what children call grown-up people—must be careful not to fall into the mistake that Miss Pinkerton made when she presented the youthful Becky Sharp with a doll. I recollect not long ago seeing a picture of a little boy who has come home late, leaning back in an easy chair. His elder sister suggests that he should have a piece of cake and go to bed. The boy, who is apparently about ten, however replies, "I should like a lobster salad and some beer."

I must not, however, forget my subject; though, of course, we cannot have children's parties if there are no children. The fact is, there are plenty of children, only children are very different now from what they used to be years ago. Fortunately, I am going to confine myself to the eating and drinking part of the entertainment, and will leave the children and their elders to manage the games as best they can, merely remarking as one of the signs of the times, that it will often be seen that persons, say between forty and fifty, who are present in order to help to amuse, really enjoy themselves and the games too, while young men and women of thirteen get rather bored than otherwise with the proceedings generally.

In one respect I think it will be found that the children of the present age resemble the children of all ages, viz., in considering the supper the event of the evening; and I think I can safely pass over the tea and coffee part of the business by saying that more will take coffee than tea, that it is incredible what a lot of thin bread-and-butter children will eat, and that if there is plenty of it, many will refuse the cake altogether. This latter is different from what it used to be years ago.

Next, the supper. And let us always bear one point in mind—we must do our best to please both the palate and the eye, but at the same time endeavour that no one child present shall feel any the worse for the meal the next morning.

First remember, unless the children are very young indeed, that many are accustomed to have a late dinner, far more often than was customary years ago, and that on the present occasion they have dined early. This, coupled with the fact that time should always be allowed for digestion, tends to show us how desirable it is not to have supper too late. It is far better for children to have an hour or two of play after supper, than for them to go home almost immediately and go to bed. Boys at school go out into the cricket field directly after a heavy dinner of hot meat and pudding, and are never the worse for the exercise. So, too, it will be found that children enjoy the games

even more after supper than before it. In fact, after supper it will be seen that children will be more like children.

Now, it will never do to let children make a heavy meal of sweets and pastry, so let each one begin with some cold fowl or cold turkey, or at any rate with some meat sandwiches. First, the cold fowl and turkey. These should be roasted the day before, and should be glazed and ornamented. A very good and simple glaze can be made as follows:—Slice an onion, and put it into half a pint of water with a little parsley, let it boil for some time and strain it off, then add a good tea-spoonful, or rather more, of Liebig's extract of meat, a little pepper and salt, and dissolve in it about $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. of gelatine; one yolk of an egg may be added. The extract of meat is quite enough to make it of a nice rich brown colour, though some persons add colouring, which is generally burnt sugar and water, and what professionals call "Black Jack." This, when cold, will of course be a firm jelly. All that is necessary is to paint the cold fowls, turkey, &c., with this when it is nearly cold, but not set. This glaze will set almost directly it is put on. Avoid, however, glazing the fowls or turkey on the dish on which they will be served up. Have plenty of bright fresh green double parsley, and if possible a few cut flowers. One of the best accompaniments to cold fowl, is cold tongue. If the tongue be a fresh one it should be glazed like the fowl; but what will be found now to be very good, and far cheaper, are the preserved tongues in tins. Cut the tin neatly round close to the edge, and turn it out on a dish. Cut off the top slice with a very sharp knife, and surround the rolled tongue with a frilled paper, which had better be tied on with some white cotton. These tinned tongues are decidedly lighter than fresh ones. A border of thick green parsley outside the frill will improve the appearance of the dish.

Sandwiches, properly made, will always be found popular at evening parties. Beef sandwiches are so easily made that they scarcely need directions, but I would remind you that a square tinned loaf is best; very little butter indeed should be used, and if the weather is cold the butter must be put in a warm place for some time, or else the bread will crumble in spreading the butter. Boiled silver-side of beef (fresh) is best, and a very little mustard and pepper should be added. A novelty in the way of sandwiches can be made with tinned preserved salmon, and by using mayonnaise sauce instead of butter. First make some good thick mayonnaise sauce, by dropping oil drop by drop on the yolk of an egg, carefully separated from the white, and beating it with a fork. Do not use any vinegar or pepper and salt at starting, or you will probably fail. Keep adding the oil and beating till the mixture gets as thick as butter. Now add some tarragon vinegar, about a tea-spoonful will

be enough, and a little white pepper and salt. Butter some thin slices of bread with this sauce and place a very thin layer of salmon between them, having first thoroughly pounded the salmon in a mortar or basin, and then, after gently pressing the slices of bread together, cut the slices into little triangular pieces, and pile them up on a plate and ornament the dish with nice bright parsley, and place a few small crayfish, with outstretched claws, round the base, and one on the top. It is a pretty, delicious, and inexpensive dish. Prawns, good-sized ones, are even better than crayfish.

Lobster salads are very nice and very popular, but I should advise not having any at children's parties. Before we come to the sweets we will for one moment consider the somewhat difficult question of what is best to drink. Plain water is decidedly best. Cham-

and purchase $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of angelica; pick a thick piece, the darker the green the better—this will cost 6d.; $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of preserved cherries, another 6d.; and a small bottle of cochineal. It is wonderful what an improvement can be made in the appearance of dishes with these simple ornaments.

Let us take the simple case of a boiled custard pudding that has been turned out of a shape. To illustrate the point, I will take a very common shape, that will probably be found in every house—viz., an empty round marmalade pot. First, the pudding: suppose you are going to make several, you need not use too many eggs, but can, if you wish it, make the puddings less rich by using a little corn-flour as well. Essence of vanilla is a most delicious flavouring, but I think it will be found that children as a rule do not care for vanilla, and I would strongly recommend the



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pagne is expensive and unnecessary. Port wine negus is very nice, but not exactly suitable with meat. Many children will drink water, or a little sherry and water; but for moderately-sized children, who do not care to take water, what can be better than plain home-made lemonade? To my thinking a glass of lemonade is far preferable to *cheap* champagne, and far less vulgar. Why poison your guests for the sake of appearances? Claret cup is a nice thing, but more suitable for summer than winter. A good claret cup can be made as follows:—A bottle of sound claret, free from all acidity, about eight lumps of sugar, which can be dissolved in a little boiling water first, the rind of half a lemon, one glass of golden sherry, a strip of cucumber-peel put in for five minutes and then taken out again, a small glass of Maraschino, a lump of ice, and two bottles of soda-water. Balm and borage are generally recommended to be added, but are by no means necessary.

We now come to the sweets, and I would remind you that a really nice supper very much depends upon appearances. A day or two before the supper, go out

good old-fashioned flavouring of bay-leaves, two or three of which should be washed, and then boiled in the milk used for the pudding for a short time. We will, however, suppose the pudding made, and turned out into a glass dish. Now take the angelica, and cut it first into very thin slices, and out of these slices cut some strips just like blades of grass, pointed at the end. On the top of the round mould of pudding place a single preserved cherry, and make it the centre of a small star composed of strips of angelica, and see what a different aspect the mould has. In fact, it has the appearance known as "coming from the pastrycook's." A row of preserved cherries can be placed round the edge of the mould, though it is a doubtful improvement. A nice, clear, bright, pink sauce can be poured round the edge, made as follows:—Boil a little water, add some lump sugar to it, and a piece of lemon-peel; thicken it with a little arrowroot till it looks like syrup, colour it with a few drops of cochineal, and add about a table-spoonful of Scotch whiskey; let it get cold, and pour it round the solid custard pudding.

A very nice mould can be made out of an old Yorkshire-pie dish. These are generally quite plain ovals, about six inches long and four inches wide. In placing a star in the centre of this, the strips of angelica pointing long-ways should be, of course, longer than those pointing cross-ways; or, in other words, the star should be arranged in proportion to the shape of the pudding.

It will be found a great convenience using these shapes for making plain puddings, as the ordinary shapes will very likely be wanted for jellies, lemon sponges, &c.

One very popular dish at supper-parties is tippy-cake. I think tippy-cake is best made from small penny sponge-cakes. These can be first sliced and spread with thin layers of raspberry jam, and moistened with some sweet wine, such as raisin, suitable for children. Avoid, in any case, a dry sherry. Next have ready some custard, and in making this I would strongly advise Swiss milk instead of sugar. Take, say, a pint of milk and boil it; stir in a good table-spoonful of Swiss milk, and when it is thoroughly dissolved add four eggs well beaten up; put it all together in a jug, and place the jug in boiling water, and keep stirring till the custard is sufficiently thick, but do not go on too long, or it will curdle. Custard for tippy-cake should be thick, or it will, when poured over the sponge-cakes, run off and leave them bare. When the custard is thick enough (if you wish it very thick, a little corn-flour mixed smooth with some cold water may be cautiously added), take the jug out of the boiling water and plunge it into cold water, and keep stirring for some time, as otherwise the custard has a tendency to turn lumpy. When the custard is quite cold it can be poured over the sponge-cakes, which have been piled up on a glass dish; but put off pouring the custard as long as possible.

The dish has now to be ornamented, and the usual ornaments are almonds sliced, stuck into the cakes, and which are allowed to stick out porcupine fashion. These almonds must first be thrown into hot water, the skins rubbed off, and then thrown into cold water in order to preserve their white colour. This decoration can of course be varied. Some of the thin strips of almond can be coloured pink with cochineal, and can be mixed with the white strips of almond, as well as some thin strips of angelica; but pink and green must be used sparingly always in ornamenting dishes.

Some tiny pieces of angelica can be sprinkled over the custard instead of any almonds being used at all, similar to chopped parsley over a mayonnaise salad.

One very popular supper dish with children is trifle. It is rather expensive if made properly, but sponge-cakes can be mixed with the macaroons and ratafias, and whipped white of egg can be used instead of whipped cream for the top. White of egg is not so nice, but it is far cheaper and less rich than cream.

Whipped white of egg will be found an excellent thing to use for garnishing dishes, and if it is made nice and stiff, so that those little sugar-plums called "hundreds and thousands" can be sprinkled over it,

the effect will be very pretty. For instance, a little drop of white froth can be placed in the centre of each pippin in a dish of stewed Normandy pippins, and then a little pinch of sugar-plums placed on the top. Do not, however, sprinkle the hundreds and thousands till as late as possible.

A great many nice dishes can be made in the present day with the assistance of fruits preserved in tins, and I would particularly mention preserved peaches and apricots. For instance, take a tin of the former and strain off the peaches; add a little wine to the syrup, and dissolve in it, by boiling gently, enough gelatine to make it a fairly firm jelly when cold. The quantity of gelatine is generally about 2 oz., or rather more, to a quart of liquid. A few drops of cochineal may be added to make it red, and the liquid must be then poured into a mould, and the peaches dropped in. When quite cold, you have a nice mould of peach jelly with ripe peaches in it. It must, however, be made slightly stiffer than ordinary jelly, as the slices of peaches inside increase the tendency it has to break. This jelly of course will not be bright, though it can be made nearly clear by means of white of egg used in the ordinary manner.

Of course you must have some pastry for children's suppers, but let it consist as much as possible of fruit pies rather than jam tarts, puffs, &c.

One very nice supper-sweet is rice-cakes made as follows:—Get some plain rice, wash it, and boil till it is quite tender; drain, and mix it with some eggs well beaten up in milk, in the same proportion as used for making ordinary custard. This can be flavoured with vanilla, bay-leaves, essence of almonds, or with lemon-peel—this latter flavour being best obtained by rubbing lumps of sugar on the rind of a lemon and afterwards dissolving the sugar in the milk. Put the rice, mixed with the custard, into a tin to bake, first of all taking the usual precaution to butter the tin. A large square tin is best, so that the rice-cake, when baked, will be about an inch thick. The process of baking will harden the cake, which can be turned out whole when cold, but not before, and can then be cut into any shape desired. You can make round cakes with a cutter (but this is wasteful), or square cakes by simply cutting with a knife. Perhaps the best way is to cut them into strips, which can be piled up like children build a tower with toy bricks. The cakes and strips are best ornamented with jam and marmalade, laying on streaks of alternate colours. These cakes look very pretty, and have the advantage of being very light and wholesome.

Try and avoid letting children, especially young ones, finish up with rather sour oranges and hard apples, intermixed with the sugar-plums out of the crackers. Too often it will be found that these things do what mischief there is done on these occasions. If you have them on the table to make a show, recollect it is hard to refuse them to any little one. In conclusion, think of the children's health and comfort rather than of making the table "look handsome" to gratify your own vanity.