The tiny brook, that lay in trance
Beneath the North King's spell,
Once more upon its way doth dance,
Its happiness to tell,
And with a kindly touch to lend
A little timely aid
To many a dear half-famished friend
In valley and in glade.

Comes now the cuckoo's welcome voice,
Prophetic of the hour's
Approach when Nature shall rejoice
Through all her sylvan bowers;

When every branch shall bear a bloom,
And hill and dell be gay
With flowers that breathe a sweet perfume
Throughout the live-long day.

The yellow butterfly shall take
The tidings to the town,
And bid the pale-faced toiler make
For moorland, mead, and down,
To mark the beauties that abound
Wherever he may rove,
And gather from God's garden ground
The blossoms of His love.

JOHN GEO. WATTS.

SPRING COOKERY.

BY A. G. PAYNE, AUTHOR OF "COMMON-SENSE COOKERY."

WITH change of season naturally comes change of food, and I think it will generally be found true that nature is the best guide as to what kind of food is most suited to us at different seasons of the year. So far as vegetables and fruit are concerned, we naturally in winter fall back on onions, potatoes, and apples, while in summer fresh fruit keeps us in health, though there is among some persons a strange prejudice against it, probably owing to the fact that illness in summer is sometimes caused by the stale fruit that is too often sold in the streets.

We often hear complaints in early spring—and as Englishmen we are accustomed to invariably grumble—on the subject of the weather. "Ah! it is this early spring weather that is so trying." Suppose by way of remedy we try and feed ourselves plentifully on those delicious early vegetables and fruits, instead of having recourse to the physic-bottle?

Before we proceed to discuss the various dishes suitable to spring, let me warn you against imagining that the earlier a fruit or vegetable can be obtained is necessarily the better. On the contrary, forced fruits as well as vegetables are generally not only dear, but poor in flavour. For instance, strawberries when sold in the streets at 4d. a basket are far better than those we see in Covent Garden Market in January at some incredible price—a guinea an ounce, I think. In a word, everything is best in season, and not out of it; and those who pay fabulous prices for fresh green peas and strawberries in winter, and similar luxuries, in reality spend their money to gratify their vanity rather than their palate.

As we usually begin dinner with soup, I will try and explain how to make that exceedingly delicious soup known as spring soup. Spring soup is composed of a number of fresh vegetables cut up and served in some good clear soup. I will first give you a list of the best vegetables, reminding you that all are not of course absolutely necessary; though where there is a large kitchen garden there can be no difficulty in making this soup to perfection. Take a couple of turnips and a couple of carrots, and after of course washing and scraping them, cut them up in small strips, or if you wish the soup to look very nice, and you can afford the time, cut them into some shape, such as small olives, or with a cutter make them into stars, the only drawback being that there is a good deal of waste in the young vegetables unless these cuttings can be utilised for some other soup, such as for the children's early dinner, where great attention to ornament is not requisite. Add to the cut carrots and turnips about twenty small spring onions, trimmed; the white part of a head of celery cut into slices, and stamped into some shape if desired; and a small head of a cauliflower, using the white part only, divided into pieces like miniature bouquets. Throw these into some boiling water, in which a little salt has been put, and let them boil for about five minutes, then strain them off, and throw them into the clear stock, and let them boil gently till they are tender—about half an hour is generally sufficient. Then add the white leaves only, cut up, of a good-sized cabbage-lettuce, and a few fresh tarragon-leaves that have been washed in warm water. Have ready the last thing a small saucepan of boiling water, and throw into it a couple of table-spoonfuls of young green peas, and one table-spoonful of asparagus-tops; these will boil tender in about ten minutes if really young. Strain these off and throw them into the soup just before it is sent up to table.

We must next consider the soup itself. We will suppose a piece of knuckle of veal has been put on to simmer gently in some water with a small piece of gravy beef, some fowl bones, and a slice of lean ham. To this has been added a little salt and pepper, a head of celery, one carrot, one turnip, and a couple of medium-sized onions, in which a few cloves have been stuck. This should all have simmered for one day, and at night have been strained off. If not bright it

can be cleared by means of beating up two whites of eggs in a little cold water, which must be added to the soup; when hot the whole allowed to boil for a few minutes, and then strained off through a fine cloth.

A better but extravagant way of clearing soup is to send, say, a pound of gravy beef through a sausage machine, mix this sausage-meat up with a little cold water, and add to the soup: this adds to the goodness of the soup when boiled up with it, whereas white of egg detracts from the goodness. Where fowls are kept that occasionally have chopped meat given them, there is no waste in clearing soup in this way.

Perhaps, however, some may ask—"But how do you season the soup?" My reply is—"Why season it?" The beauty of the soup is to taste the pure juice of the meat, the few vegetables we have added assisting this flavour quite sufficiently without any further additions beyond a little pepper and salt. Why ruin the soup by adding mushroom ketchup, Worcester sauce, &c.? Next with regard to colour. There, unfortunately, seems an almost universal misapprehension among women-cooks that the dark colour of soup means strength. Also many persons imagine that thick soup contains more nourishment than clear. As a rule, the dark colour means what professional cooks know as "Black Jack," *alias* burnt sugar, which deteriorates very considerably from the flavour of the soup. The thickening of soup is generally either butter and flour, or arrowroot, or perhaps plain flour; but so far as the juices of the meat are concerned, as a rule clear soup will contain more than thick.

With regard to the colour of the soup, the lighter it is the better; indeed, a very pale straw-colour is the best; and if, as is almost always the case, scraps of cooked meat have been added to the stock—for instance, a sirloin of beef bone, or the bones of a roast fowl—the burnt part of the meat will be found to have given quite sufficient colour. Remember, too, that it is essential for the appearance of the soup that these bright vegetables should be seen. The red carrot, the bright green peas, the dark green tarragon, the yellow lettuce, the white celery, form an agreeable contrast, and the brighter the soup the better.

It will be seen in the above directions that I have always recommended the vegetables to be thrown into boiling water; I may add, let them boil in an open saucepan—*i.e.*, not put the lid on. So many fireplaces in the present day are close ones, that as a rule no difficulty will be experienced in following these directions. In houses where the old-fashioned open fireplaces are still used, of course considerable risk is run of getting the vegetables smoky; and I would here, in passing, remark that if you have an open fireplace, and gas laid on, for a few shillings you can buy a small gas-stove and an india-rubber tube. The saving of time and trouble is something wonderful. For instance, a cook has a smoky fire, and wants to boil a little milk for some coffee; all cooks know the difficulty. A little gas-stove will stand on the kitchen table, and can be connected in an instant, and possesses great heat, no smoke.

Fish naturally follows soup, and we will begin with that king of fishes, salmon. There is no salmon equal to freshly caught salmon, though some of the preserved is exceedingly good. One of the most recent methods of preserving salmon is to freeze it, in which state it will keep good for an incredible length of time. A fish was caught in the Columbia river in America in May last, and then and there frozen. In December it was sent over to England to be inspected by Mr. Frank Buckland, and the fish lay for nine days in the window of a newspaper office in Fleet Street. It was then cut up, and a slice was sent to me to cook in whatever way I deemed fit. I cooked it *en papillote*—that is, wrapped it up in oiled paper, with some butter, pepper, and salt, and grilled it over a clear fire, having first soaked the slice in tepid water for about half an hour in order to completely thaw it. It was very nice, but harder and rather tougher than first-class fresh salmon. Probably the best way to cook these frozen fish would be to thaw them gradually in tepid water, boil them whole, and let them get cold in the water in which they have been boiled. They could then be garnished with mayonnaise sauce and lettuce, some bright red crayfish, and a few sliced truffles. This would make an excellent supper dish, or would be suitable for a wedding breakfast. In the autumn and winter, when salmon is out of season, it would be a great addition to the appearance of the table.

Salmon is, I think, nicest when plainly boiled; and the piece should, if possible, be long enough to be cut parallel with the bone. As a rule, it will be found that all meat is best when cut in this manner. A haunch of mutton is generally considered superior to a leg, the only difference between the two being that one is cut parallel to the bone, and the other at right angles to it. The difference between a saddle of mutton and a loin is still more marked, though simply a question of carving, beyond the fact that as a rule joints are better in proportion to their size.

In boiling salmon, take care to hit on the happy medium between redness and dryness. Underdone salmon—*i.e.*, when it is a flabby red near the bone—is horrible, and quite unfit for food. On the other hand, over-cooked salmon loses all its flavour. Now salmon is not like meat, in this respect, that when cut it loses a lot of gravy or juice. Suppose you have a good thick piece, put it in cold water, with plenty of salt, and put it on to boil; as soon as the water boils up, skim it; and as soon as the cook thinks there is any chance of its being done, let it be taken out and looked at. Take a knife and stick it down to the bone, and take say a fork, and by means of pressing it on one side, look at the backbone; a glance is sufficient to say whether it is done or not. If not, put it back in the water and give it a little longer. If done, take it out of the water, put a hot, moist cloth on it till it is wanted; but do not over-cook it, as it will completely spoil it. It is quite impossible to give accurate directions as to time. The time varies with the thickness, rather than with the weight; and the time also varies with the weather, or rather with the temperature of the fish before it is put in the

water, as many salmon are packed in ice, though not frozen.

Salmon can of course be grilled, and when grilled, Tartare sauce is the best. Lobster sauce is the best with boiled salmon. Whenever you get a lobster with plenty of coral in it, be sure and take the coral and make lobster butter—*i.e.*, pound the coral in a mortar with some butter, and mix in some cayenne pepper. It will keep good for months, and costs next to nothing, as sometimes your own fishmonger will give you some spare coral for nothing. The advantage of lobster butter is that with its assistance you can make some really good lobster sauce out of a small tin of lobster. Take a little good thick melted butter made with milk, add some of the tinned meat to it, and stir into, say, half a pint of sauce, a dessert-spoonful of the lobster butter. This will give the sauce a strong fresh lobster flavour, and will also make it of a bright red colour. Fresh lobster-meat is of course superior, but then a tin can be bought for fivepence, and a lobster sometimes cannot be obtained at all, or perhaps 3s. 6d. may be charged for one.

A very nice way of cooking salmon for breakfast, is to cut some thin slices across the tail part, and grill them over a brisk fire; pile them round in a dish, Miroton fashion, and warm up some hot piccalilly in a spoonful of brown gravy and place in the middle.

A most delicious fish in season at the present time is whitebait, but there seems a universal difficulty in obtaining these delicious little fish in private houses. I think the chief difficulty is that cooks, as a rule, do not sufficiently understand the verb "to fry." The proper explanation of the word is to boil in very hot fat. Recollect, water cannot be heated above a certain temperature, at which it ceases to be water, and becomes steam. Fat, on the other hand, can be heated far above the temperature of boiling water.

The same general principles apply to cooking whitebait as to every other description of fish that has to be fried. As whitebait are so small, they require a small wire basket, specially called a whitebait basket, so that they can be plunged into the boiling fat for the half-minute, more or less, that is required to cook them.

Take a deep frying-pan, and take your fat and put it in to melt. Fat, especially that which has been used before, generally contains moisture, and consequently the fat when melted floats at the top, and what moisture there is remains at the bottom of the frying-pan in the shape of water-bubbles. As the heat increases these bubbles become converted into steam and escape with considerable noise, or in other words the fat crackles. There is an old-fashioned maxim, but rather an unscientific one, that fat when it stops crackling is sufficiently hot. As a rule, most fat contains moisture, and consequently will crack or hiss. If, however, the fat contains no moisture it will not make any noise, and the sound will therefore be no guide. Fat that has been crackling and has stopped, simply means that all the water in it has been converted into steam, and consequently the inference is that the fat is of a higher temperature than boiling water. If, therefore, it has not crackled, dip your finger in cold water and let one drop fall in the fat. If it instantly makes a great noise and in a few seconds becomes still again, the fat is sufficiently heated for frying.

Take a cloth and put some flour on it at least an inch deep. Take the whitebait out of the water in which they float, and which generally has a little piece of ice in it, with your hand and throw them into the flour; take them immediately out of the flour, shake off the superfluous flour, put them into the basket, plunge the basket into the *smoking* hot fat; about half a minute will cook them. Send them to table quickly, and send them up in relays, very hot.

The secret, if such it may be called, is:—First, the whitebait must be as fresh and as unbroken as possible, and it should be picked clear of shrimps and sea-weed. Secondly, plenty of flour, and light handling. Thirdly, the fat must be very hot, smoking almost, and must completely cover the whitebait. Fourthly, do not let more than a minute elapse between flouring the whitebait and frying them. This last point is, perhaps, not so generally known. Cooks are apt to egg and bread-crumb soles, eels, &c., in the morning and put them by for frying. This is all very well, but you cannot cook whitebait by drying them, flouring them, and putting them by in the same way. If you attempt it you will get simply a flabby, sticky mess, which you cannot send to table at all.

A few words at this season on lamb. Lamb requires even more cooking than mutton, and also a brisk fire. Lamb to be well cooked must be white to the bone, and the outside crisp, and the edges even black.

For lamb make a little gravy out of some mutton bones; whatever you do, don't use extract of meat. The black burnt pieces of the roasting joint will sufficiently colour the gravy, which should be of a light colour.

Make your mint sauce early in the day. Have plenty of mint, and use half English vinegar and half water, and put some coarse brown sugar to it.

Spring chickens are now in season, but are too frequently spoilt by being over-cooked. Suppose you dine at seven, and the dinner consists of some spring soup, a piece of salmon, and a couple of spring chickens. The cook will, alas! too often commence to roast the chickens about half-past six. Now chickens, when young and small, really don't require more than about twenty-five minutes to half an hour. Perhaps some one comes late, or there is some little delay; then the soup takes some time, and there is some delay over the salmon, consequently the result is that the chickens come to table all falling to pieces, the meat falls from the bones, and the bones are white and dried up. Let the cook take my advice, and when she is told that she can send up dinner, commence to roast the chickens then, and not before. Immediately they are started, pour out the soup, send it up, then the fish, and by the time the chickens are wanted they will be done to a turn.

It requires a little nerve, this running things so finely, but it is the very soul of first-class cookery.