

ground and we can do little outside; dirty pots, too, may then be washed and neatly put away; odd pieces of tile for crocks and drainage got together, and the names of plants written on little smooth and flat pieces of wood ready to place by your flowers. These, of course, can be bought all properly painted, but there is a satisfaction in doing all these sort of things oneself on a pouring wet day in the carpenter's room, or perhaps the children's play-room.

In dry and frosty weather, turn over your compost heaps, so as to get the frost to act well upon the interior—in plain terms, turn your soil inside out—and then pick out all the grubs and insects which you have probably disturbed in their deep winter sleep, and speedily consign them to a yet deeper slumber. We gardeners must be content to be called cruel

sometimes; yet there is a distinction between being so and being called so.

And those few plants near our window that we call our window garden, we must not forget them. Plenty of light, *very* little water, and protection from frost at night, is what they want. In very severe weather don't let them stand too near the window—your window with a south aspect of course. But during the best of the day give them plenty of air, or at all events *some*. Death is coming, we know, speedily enough to hurry away 1880, but through a window that is *never* opened it finds its way stealthily but surely, not only to flowers inside, but to their owners. Open the windows then—and once this month even at midnight, to hear those bells from the venerable grey tower

"Ring out the old, ring in the new."

CHRISTMAS DINNERS.

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



HE great difficulty in dealing with the subject of Christmas dinners is that anything in the shape of novelty will cause the dinner to cease to be a Christmas one. A Christmas dinner, to my thinking, does not mean a dinner at Christmas, but roast beef, goose, turkey, plum-pudding, mince-

pies, &c. Were we to have, say, roast beef, plum-pudding, and mince-pies in August, the one remark that every person present would make, would be—"Why, this is quite a Christmas dinner!" I will therefore give a few suggestions in regard to these essentials, and pass on to a few dishes that may be made at Christmas time, and which will form nice and suitable additions to Christmas dinner-parties not necessarily given on the day of the feast itself.

First, the beef—the large sirloin which the butcher assures us is *Christmas beef*, as if he would fain have us believe that bullocks about this time of the year become for a short period superior animals to what they are at other periods. I will not enter into the roasting beyond saying an open fire is, of course, best, but much depends upon the way it is served. First impress upon your cook the importance of having the dish on which it is served hot—not warm—so hot that the carrier up-stairs wants a cloth in each hand to prevent the fingers being burnt. Next a little gravy in the dish—enough, of course, for the first help all round. Let the rest of the gravy be kept in a saucepan, and brought up nearly boiling, and poured over the joint in time for the second help. Let the carver help not too largely at starting, and then for the second help let a fresh pile of hot plates appear, and a clean knife and fork all round.

As a rule, in middle-class families, the Christmas dinner is essentially a family one, and there are

few if any entrées. There is a great deal of nonsense talked in the present day about giving servants trouble. To some a second help on a hot plate, with fresh hot gravy, in distinction to the smeary plate with wafers of fat, that the plate which contained the first held of necessity becomes, means the difference between a good dinner and a poor one.

For a roast goose or turkey the same directions hold good: send up a little gravy to start with, and then send the tureen down to be filled up with hot gravy later on, when it is wanted for the second help. Apple sauce possesses the amiable quality of keeping itself hot, even in the coldest weather, for a considerable period, if made in any quantity.

With regard to plum-pudding, I think the chief fault, especially where there are children, is that too great an effort is made to make it as rich as possible. It no more follows that the richest pudding is the best than that you would improve hot bacon by buttering it. For grown-up people who just taste the pudding, it does not matter so much; but children want to enjoy it, and themselves afterwards; try and avoid making these two things incompatible.

Mince-pies are generally made a day or two beforehand, and cooks sometimes forget what a long time they take in getting hot through. A mince-pie to be worth anything must be hot enough to burn your mouth. Hot crust with the mincemeat lukewarm in the middle—and I think we must all admit that we can remember mince-pies in this condition—is a sad failure, especially considering what a lot of trouble has been taken over making the mincemeat, &c.

A very nice wind-up to a Christmas dinner is—or rather was, some five-and-twenty years ago—a nice Stilton cheese and some fresh crisp celery. Unfortunately, I am unable to tell you what has become of the Stilton cheeses like what I can remember in the time I allude to.

If you have boiled turkey and oyster sauce you will find it a great improvement, as well as a great saving, to get a tin of oysters, in addition of course to some fresh; but the tin will save buying so many fresh, which are now very dear. Take the fresh oysters and open them over a basin, saving the liquor. Scald the oysters for a few seconds, and put them by. Add the tin of oysters to the oyster liquor, and both to some milk, boiled separately. Thicken with a little white roux or butter and flour. Or, as milk is used, you can thicken with a little arrowroot or corn-flour, which is less troublesome. Then rub the whole through a wire sieve with a wooden spoon. The uneatable tinned oysters when thus reduced to pulp not only help to thicken the sauce, but materially add to the flavour.

Indeed, I would ask you next time you have, say, a piece of boiled codfish to try some oyster sauce this way without any fresh oysters in it. Take the tin and boiled milk, &c., and rub the oysters through the wire sieve, and call it if you like oyster melted butter. In any case, whether arrowroot is used to thicken or not, butter must be added, and melted into the sauce; the more butter, the richer the sauce. Do not forget also to add a little cayenne pepper, a good tea-spoonful or more of anchovy sauce, this latter being a great improvement, and a few drops of lemon-juice. Now that tins of oysters can be bought for 4½d. this oyster sauce is well worth making. The same sauce moistened with white stock makes good oyster soup without any oysters in it. A small tin of mushrooms can be added to the soup, sliced up. It is very nice and, at any rate, far more economical than buying fresh oysters.

A nice entrée at Christmas, when, owing to the cold weather as well as other causes, we can bear a somewhat richer living than at ordinary times, is *Poulet à la Marengo*. Take a fowl and half roast it in a quick oven or before a fierce fire. Take it out, and let it get quite cold, and then cut it into small joints, cutting the breast, including the merry-thought, into five, and the back into four joints. If the fowl is a large one, cut the thigh into two; but if small, leave it whole after separating it from the drum-stick. I may here observe that the proper way to commence to make *Poulet à la Marengo* on a large scale, and where there is every facility of kitchen utensils, time, &c., is to cut up the fowls raw, and fry the joints in oil or clarified butter till they are of a nice brown. In private small kitchens the previous method will be found more practicable. Next, have ready some good brown gravy, similar to what you would serve with a goose or turkey, add to it a tin of mushrooms, and two or three table-spoonfuls of tomato sauce pulp. Take care the tomato sauce is good, and not an acid imitation made chiefly from carrots.

Warm up the underdone joints of fowl in this sauce, letting it stew gently, but not boil. Pile the fowl up in the centre of a dish, and place on it some nicely fried eggs. These eggs should be browned all over, not cooked like eggs for eggs-and-bacon in a frying-pan

with a dab of grease, but simply boiled in fat that will cover them. Cut some bread into wedges, and fry this a nice golden-brown colour in deep fat. When you take the bread out of the fat do not put it on a cold plate, but on to a hot cloth or, far better, some blotting paper, and keep it in a hot place till the fat is drained off the bread, which would otherwise taste greasy. A few stoned Spanish olives may be used to ornament the dish, and will be found an improvement to it in flavour as well as appearance.

Very often at this time of the year there is a great deal of cold turkey left. Now, if the turkey be in any part at all underdone, it can be cut into small pieces and treated in an exactly similar manner. Care should be taken in this entrée to avoid having the joints large, as it is difficult to help oneself to the dish in this case without making an awkward upset. Take care also when you use turkey that none of the stuffing gets mixed up with the *Sauce à la Marengo*.

Stewed pigeons cooked as follows make a nice entrée:—Get some small button onions, the size of marbles, and fry them a nice brown colour in a little butter. Cut the pigeons in half, and brown them in the same butter quickly, and then place them with the onions in a stewpan with some good gravy and a small tin of mushrooms. Take care to skim the gravy carefully so that it is not sent to table greasy.

As a rule, in private houses, I think less difficulty is experienced in making a variety of sweets than in getting any great change in entrées. I would remind you how very useful tinned fruits are, such as preserved peaches, apricots, &c.; a few tins can always be kept in hand, and a few minutes only are required for their being served. A great deal can also be done in the way of making ornamental borders of rice or corn-flour and filling up with preserved fruits. In ornamenting sweets, preserved angelica and preserved cherries will be constantly found useful, and if a little of each is always kept in the house a pretty dish can be made at a few moments' notice.

There is one set of dishes at the present season particularly in vogue, and that is nice little supper dishes. I will mention one simple and pretty. I will first, however, suppose that some cold turkey or some cold chicken has been left. Cut the meat from the bones, placing the white meat from the breast at the top, and surround this piled up in the centre of the dish with some "macédoines" out of a tin. I may mention that macédoines can be bought in tins, and are cooked mixed vegetables, and form an admirable salad when cold. They can be dressed with oil, vinegar, pepper, and salt like an ordinary salad, and some hard-boiled eggs can be placed round the base. A little chopped beetroot would improve the appearance of the dish.

The drum-sticks left from turkeys are best devilled. Slice the drum-stick down with a sharp knife to the bone in several places, and insert in the cracks some French mustard mixed with cayenne pepper. Then butter the leg slightly, and grill it over a fierce fire on a gridiron, and serve it quickly like a chop.