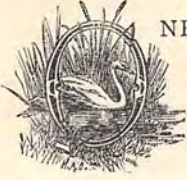


## THE ART OF COOKING RICE.

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



NE of the most constant complaints about English cookery is the want of variety of dishes. We seem to have settled down into fried bacon for breakfast and a joint for dinner, varied perhaps with the English hotel fare of the waiter's everlasting "Chop, steak, cutlet," and after a pause, "Nice fried sole." The fault lies with ourselves and not with our shops and markets. I have been told repeatedly by my friends that the receipts I have from time to time written are "all very good, you know, but then they require such devotion of time." Perfectly true. We never have a variety of dishes, first, because the cook is too idle to put herself out of the way to learn how to make a new dish—her stock of knowledge is limited probably to about twenty; secondly, we are too indolent even to try and teach her, and insist on an attempt even being made. I have had some little experience in trying to explain new dishes to "good plain cooks," the result being, as a rule, that I could have made the dish while they were talking about the difficulty and trouble there would be in doing it.

There is a strange prejudice abroad that any *new* dish is something extravagant. There are many persons who eat plain boiled eggs and bread and butter every morning for breakfast, who would cry out if the same quantity of eggs and butter were made into an omelette. We have plenty of admirable cookery books. The most complete cookery book in the world, viz., "Cassell's Dictionary of Cookery," contains nine thousand different receipts—yes, nine thousand, and yet we complain of a want of variety. Now who is to blame?—undoubtedly ourselves.

The dish I am now about to explain is simply an ornamental border made of rice, hollow like a vol-au-vent, the inside being filled with a variety of nice things. The French call this a "casserole of rice." First, for a large casserole, take, say, a pound of good rice and wash it carefully in several waters, and drain it on a sieve. Next put it in a stewpan (*clean*) with a little water, or still better, stock; it does not matter if the stock is greasy, as a little fat helps to make it better; also add about three ounces of butter, and if possible a slice of raw ham. Let this boil and afterwards simmer gently, till the rice is perfectly tender. In order to avoid the rice browning at the top, it will be as well to cover it with a piece of buttered or oiled paper. Also keep the lid well down. While the rice is boiling, it should be stirred occasionally to avoid the chance of its sticking or burning. When the rice is thoroughly done, put it in a strong basin and mash it with a large wooden spoon till it is quite smooth—in fact, like a thick white paste. The success of the dish very much depends upon the care that is taken in getting this paste quite smooth.

Next roll the whole mass into a round ball, and then flatten it so that you get it into the shape you require, which can be either quite round or oval. Next you want to mould the sides so as to make it look pretty. Suppose we take the simplest form and say we want the casserole to be oval and fluted outside. The easiest plan is to make a mould out of some raw vegetable; a potato, turnip, or carrot will do. Cut a carrot like a hollow chisel, or you can cut it so that the hollow only reaches to within an inch of the top. Then shape the rice all round outside after placing the casserole on a piece of buttered paper on a tin. Of course the number of designs for moulding are simply infinite, and if you like you can buy moulds for the purpose. You can cut the carrot a wedge shape and make the outside of the casserole like a star. In any case, when it is moulded, oil a little butter—that is, melt it—in, say, a saucer by putting it in the oven, and with a thin soft brush paint the mould over with the butter. It is best before doing this to let it stand a little while so that the outside gets dry. Then put the whole in the oven and bake it carefully, till it becomes a light golden colour. It should be turned round occasionally and painted again where it turns colour. Then take it out, scoop out the inside with a spoon, cutting round first with a butter-knife, and leave the edge, say, about an inch thick. Plaster the inside carefully with the back of the spoon, and put the mould by till it is wanted. The interior should be filled with some hot prepared meat or curry, and then the casserole, thus filled, should be put back in the oven to be warmed up, but avoid burning it after it is filled; it only requires thoroughly warming through, and as the inside is already hot this will not take long.

Before describing a few "meats" to fill it with, I will remind you that a casserole of rice can be made for sweets, only of course you must use milk sweetened instead of stock. Milk mixed with Swiss milk, the latter being very sweet, will do well.

If you want the casserole to look very rich, you can glaze it in both cases. Get some stock and reduce it. You won't want more than a table-spoonful. Take care it is perfectly bright. Water will do, coloured dark with a little extract of meat and some soy, and thickened with a little corn-flour. At any rate, be sure it is perfectly transparent. When the casserole is *finally* warmed up, paint the outside with this rich brown mahogany-coloured glaze, just before sending it to table. In order to glaze a casserole for sweets, thicken a little sugar and water with corn-flour, and colour it with cochineal.

I will now describe a few ways of filling it. We will buy a tin of preserved prawns. Open the tin, and make a nice curry-sauce, which I will briefly explain by saying—fry an onion, and add a small apple; warm up in a little strong gravy; rub the whole



through a wire sieve, add some curry-paste and curry-powder, and thicken it till it is like a purée. Warm up the prawns in the curry, and fill the casserole. The casserole should be made rather small for this, as a tin of prawns would not fill a large one.

Another excellent cheap method is to take a tin of pilchards, open the tin, and pour the oil into a frying-pan, and put the pilchards in a small stewpan. Next add a little stock or water and some curry-powder to the oil, thicken it with some corn-flour, then pour this over the pilchards; make them hot, and fill the casserole. The pilchards can be halved and the bone removed. This is a very quick and cheap way of dressing tinned pilchards, and both prawns and pilchards make a capital breakfast dish cooked this way without any rice border at all.

Again, suppose you have that common dish left, cod-fish and oyster sauce. Take the remains of the fish and pull it with a fork into flakes; pick out the oysters that are left and stew the fish-bones in the remains of the oyster sauce, and if possible get an extra dozen oysters. Blue-points are cheap and cook, if anything, better than natives. Add the oyster liquor to the sauce but keep the oysters. Then drain off the sauce—adding a little milk and butter, and flour if necessary—make the whole hot, and warm up the fish in it; when *quite* hot take it off the fire, add the oysters, toss it all lightly together, fill the casserole, and warm up in the oven, only avoid making it too hot, as should the mixture turn the boiling point the oysters will be as tough as leather.

Perhaps the most useful method of cooking rice is to boil it plain for curry, as this serves as the basis of a variety of other dishes. Rice for curry should be served so that each grain is separate, and tender, and yet the grains do not stick together. The best way to obtain this end is to get good Carolina rice, and after carefully washing it in several waters, put it into a saucepan with plenty of water and boil it till it is nearly done, but not quite. Then strain it off into a sieve and wash the rice again with plenty of cold water. The grains will now be quite separate. Put the rice back into the saucepan, and put the saucepan, after buttering the bottom, by the side of the fire where the heat is slack, and let the rice gradually warm and dry. This will be sufficient to make it tender.

It is not really economical to throw away the water the rice is boiled in, as this water contains so much nourishment. There is a well-known story told of the devotion to Lord Clive shown by some native troops in a memorable siege during the conquest of India by the British. These natives, when provisions ran short, told their chief that the rice might be given to the English troops, who required solid food, as the water in which the rice was boiled would amply suffice for them. Lord Macaulay quotes this as one of the greatest instances on record of the devotion of troops to a popular commander. It is rather cruel to throw cold water on such a good story, but the natives probably got the best of the bargain.

A very nice Italian way of cooking rice is as fol-

lows:—Boil it as above, as though for curry; spread it out and let it dry thoroughly. Then fry it of a light golden colour, only take care not to let it get too dark. Then add some grated Parmesan cheese and some meat or fish shredded. Season the whole with pepper and salt, and moisten with a little butter. Serve very hot.

Rice is so much used in the East that it is just as well to give their method of cooking it a trial. The rice is first boiled for a few minutes and then dried. In the meanwhile you cut up an onion and fry it brown, and then fry the rice in the same butter or fat that you fried the onion in till the rice has turned colour. Then you stew the rice in some soup, coloured yellow with saffron, till it is tender. You thicken the whole with butter and flour, and add some grated Parmesan cheese.

Another Turkish method is to boil the rice, then fry it in some butter, season it with salt and cayenne pepper, and add, when it is tender, a handful of raisins.

In making simple baked rice puddings, the usual fault is to put in too much rice, the result being that the pudding is what is called stodgy. A baked rice pudding can be flavoured with lemon, by rubbing a few lumps of sugar on the outside of a lemon. You should never put in any juice.

A very famous Eastern dish is pilau. This consists of mutton or fowl, cut up and stewed in broth, to which are added some onions, fried in butter, and a fresh mango—where mangoes cannot be obtained some Sultana raisins can be used—as well as some spices freshly ground, such as are used for making curry. In this country, curry-powder can be added. This is allowed to stew till the meat is very tender, then some rice is boiled; the meat is placed on the rice, which is hollowed out, and the gravy poured over the whole.

The best method of boiling rice for pilau is to boil it for a short time, to lightly brown it over a fire in some butter, and then let it stew in some good stock till it is perfectly tender. Indians colour the rice with saffron, and add a good deal of cayenne. Sometimes pilau is garnished with hard-boiled eggs and rings of onions fried brown.

One very simple form of rice, is rice curried. This makes a nice supper-dish and can be done very easily. First take some rice and boil it till it is nearly done, wash it in cold water and warm it up as follows:—Slice an onion and fry it in some butter till it is quite tender and slightly brown—not burnt. Then warm up the washed rice in this butter and onion, after adding a tea-spoonful of curry-powder and another of curry-paste. Here again a little coriander-seed may be added as well as a bay-leaf.

When there is meat or stock in the house this will be found a very nourishing dish. Or the rice can be boiled tender in a little water till it has almost absorbed the water. This can then be added to the fried onion and curry powder and paste, and you by this means get the entire nourishment out of the rice, as you do not waste the water in which it has been boiled. The rice should, however, always be washed first in cold water.