

## THE PRESERVATION OF FOOD.



WE will here endeavour to treat—necessarily briefly—not only the various kinds of food and the easiest modes of home preservation, but also the methods by which the quality of such commodities as are imported may be generally tested.

A very useful work\* recently appeared, from which we give a few extracts; these, supplemented by hints of our own, may, we hope, prove serviceable to our readers, who will please accept the word “pre-

servation” in its widest sense, as we refer to retaining the goodness of, as well as extending the time of keeping, edibles of all kinds.

Summer, as housekeepers know, is the time when it is difficult to hang meat long enough to be tender without its becoming tainted. The author of the above-named work advises that the joint be securely bound with stinging nettles, then hung up in a canvas bag. Another simple way is to moisten a clean cloth with malt vinegar, and wrap it round the meat; while a third plan, easily carried out by country residents, consists in covering the meat with buttermilk, which must be renewed every second day.

Buttermilk is said to be good for soaking old game, hares especially, which can be made tender by the treatment. The same authority is loud in the praise of salicylic acid, “which has no injurious effect on the system, while the antiseptic properties are great.” To prepare it, put a drachm into a wine-bottle, and fill up with luke-warm water. Meat just commencing to putrify should be brushed over with this at intervals of a few minutes for half an hour, then washed in warm, and lastly in cold water. Dry well before cooking, if it is to be roasted. Another way to use the acid is to dissolve a quarter of an ounce in a pint of cognac. Two ounces of this solution may be added with advantage to each quart of liquid used for preserving fruits. Another use—soak the papers for laying on jam, in the solution; those that touch the preserve, we mean, not the outer wrappers.

Joints of meat will keep good, even in the hottest weather, for a month, if plunged into boiling fat, when cool wrapped in straw, and sewn in canvas bags, then hung in a cool place. Venison is said to be delicious if sprinkled, while fresh, with a mixture of charcoal, ginger, pepper, and pimento, all in powder; afterwards sewn up, and buried six feet in the ground, where it may be left for three weeks. It must be washed before cooking at a *brisk* fire. Salt should never be put on meat to be hung, it has such a hardening tendency.

Perhaps few things are purer and more efficacious

\* “Philosophy in the Kitchen,” by “An Old Bohemian.” Published by Messrs. Ward and Downey.

than a weak solution of permanganate of potass for restoring game, meat, or poultry already tainted. How often will a few hours work the mischief in sultry weather, the meat changing to such an extent as to appear almost irremediably spoiled! However, by washing in the fluid it *can* be sweetened. As long as the liquid changes colour—that is, loses its pink tint, and becomes greenish-brown—it must be renewed. When it ceases to change colour the meat will do. After this treatment it is more suitable for braising, boiling, or stewing, than for roasting and baking—although it *may* be so treated if well dried and floured.

A wrinkle for those who have to bake their meat occurs to us from “An Old Bohemian’s” book. An iron frame, consisting of two upright bars, and one at the top from which to suspend the joint, seems a simple idea, which may be easily carried out. A dish is placed underneath to catch the dripping; the last-named being enclosed in a perforated dredger, which is also suspended from the top bar, thus rendering the basting of the joint *almost automatic*. This is a strong point, and the meat will be found to possess, in a marked degree, the sweet flavour it has when roasted before the fire.

We quote a tasty pickle for meat, though less mace would perhaps be more agreeable to most palates. Two quarts of water, half an ounce each of cloves, mace, and peppercorns, two ounces of Orleans vinegar, one and a half ounces of sugar, two and a half ounces of treacle. Boil for half an hour with frequent skimming; pour over the meat—eight to ten pounds—and leave it for six to ten days. Boiled again it may be used a second time, unless a pig’s head has been in it; no pickle is fit for further use after *that*.

This is an age of adulteration, and no doubt “butterine” is superior to *bad* butter; still, if people pay for butter they ought to get it. Here is a test for suspected butter. Melt it at a gentle heat, then cool it quickly, on ice if you can. If lard, or any other substance, has been added, the butter will rise to the top, and there will be a distinct line between that and the fat at the bottom. It must be liquefied in a glass for this test. If the fat is uniform in appearance, it is pure. Rancid butter, says “An Old Bohemian,” should have sharp white vinegar worked through it by gashing with a knife all over the mass; then knead and squeeze thoroughly, to get rid of the vinegar. Afterwards it may be salted, and pressed firmly into earthenware jars, into which, right through the butter to the bottom, a few sticks of liquorice root should be stuck.

The ways of preserving eggs are many; from personal experience (and we have tasted those preserved by professionals), we cannot recommend either lime or brine as reliable or satisfactory in its results. All we have tried have been brittle in the shell, the white and yolk have become mixed, and the egg has never turned out clear, as an egg should.

But we agree with “An Old Bohemian” that eggs

coated with pure salad oil, to close the pores and so exclude the air, are generally successful. He says, smear each egg in every part, and wrap it in a square bit of tissue paper, screwing it up tightly top and bottom. Flatten out the top screws, thread a needle with worsted and pass it through, then suspend the eggs—thick ends downwards—across a ceiling in a cool place, where they may be left for months. Lemons, pears, &c., similarly papered and hung will keep good some time.

Dr. Cooper's recipe for preparing game eggs for shipping is a *thin* varnish, made by dissolving shellac in alcohol. *Every part* of the shell must be covered with this, then the eggs should be set point downwards in bran or sawdust, so that they cannot move. When ready to use them, either for hatching or for the table, the varnish must be carefully washed off.

We are told that salad oil should be left uncorked in a cool place, with two ounces of fine dry salt to each quart bottle, which must be shaken occasionally. This is frequently adulterated with poppy oil, which is cheaper, and which remains limpid in cold weather. Pure salad oil, on the contrary, congeals in cold.

We are one with "An Old Bohemian" in admiration of fireproof china and earthenware, especially for cooking such delicacies as omelettes. He is energetic, too, in his disapproval of tin canisters for tea, coffee, &c.; the tannic acid in time acts upon the tin, which destroys the flavour of the contents. Glass jars, especially with screw-fitting lids, like those in which French plums are packed, are far preferable for storing purposes generally.

This seems a fitting opportunity to say something about the rendering, clarification, and preservation of fat, for cooking purposes. Butter cannot be afforded by everybody, and is not nearly so indispensable for kitchen use as many would have us believe, if nice clear fat is at hand; such, we mean, as may be seen in large establishments, and training schools for cookery, where huge blocks of almost snowy whiteness are in daily use for many purposes.

Here, of course, fat is bought from the butcher purposely for clarifying, as so much is needed; and in large families, if there is not sufficient from joints, &c., it would be far more advantageous to buy a little (the price varies from 4d. to 8d. per pound) in place of lard, especially for frying, lard being not only costly, owing to the large percentage of added water so much of it contains, but anything fried in it is more liable to greasiness than if cooked in fat.

Here, then, is the *modus operandi*:—Cut small any fat from joints or cutlets, trimmings of suet, &c., or pieces from the butcher, and put them into an iron pot. The kinds may be mixed; pork, mutton, and beef, for instance, and cooked fat may be added, but will not take so long. See that every bit is sweet; one tainted piece will impregnate the whole. Just cover with cold water, about a quarter-pint to each pound, to prevent

burning; put the lid on until hot, then remove it, and cook until every bit of fat is dry and shrivelled and looks brown. Four pounds or so of fat may take a couple of hours or nearly. Then let it cool, and strain for use. Excellent pastry and cakes can be made from this. That used for frying should always be strained afterwards, and kept in separate vessels: one for fish, the other for savouries, such as rissoles, fritters, and the like.

After being used several times for frying it naturally wastes, but can be re-clarified by adding it to fresh fat when the latter is nearly cooked. Care must be taken that it does not burn, otherwise it is spoiled; it should be frequently stirred to prevent this. Dripping, while hot, should be poured into a bowl of cold water, from which it can be removed in a cake when set, any impurities, which will settle at the bottom of the fat, being scraped off. If a bad colour, or at all tainted, a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda added to each quart of water into which it is poured, will improve both flavour and colour. We have seen charcoal recommended for use in the same way.

A hint now about tinned goods, meat especially. Note, when about to purchase, the condition of the tin; if bulged outwards, *don't have it, even as a gift!* We will explain the process of canning, to give weight to our warning.

The meat is packed in the tins while raw, then sealed, and cooked in an outer vessel of boiling water, with sometimes the addition of a chemical to raise the temperature. When cooked, the can is pierced, and, as soon as the air and steam have been expelled, it is soldered. Experts know when it is ready for soldering; a moment too soon, and the mischief is done, because if air is left in, the tin bulges, and the meat will not be good. On the contrary, if the tin has sunk, it is an infallible sign of goodness; it proves a vacuum, which is natural, as the meat shrinks when *no* air is left in the tin.

Some may say, what matter if air be left in the tin? Simply this: nitrogen, an element of air, imparts to bodies with which it comes in contact a tendency to change and decay.

Often, on opening a tin of preserved goods, people are heard to say "the air is escaping," instead of which, the slight hissing sound is the result of the air rushing *in*, another proof that there was a vacuum. Well, we go so far as to say that, assuming the outward sign of goodness above referred to; a label bearing the name of a good exporter or importer; and also a reliable vendor of the article, whether meat, fish, milk, soup, or vegetable, the chances are a million to one against any one being injured, much less poisoned, by tinned goods.

Another caution, though: always look out for any little globules of solder that sometimes find their way inside the tin; and take care, especially in the case of salmon and lobster, to empty the contents, as soon as opened, into an earthenware vessel. This is necessary for everything except milk.