

PASTRY—AT HOME AND ABROAD.

BY A PRACTICAL COOK AND CONFECTIONER.



It will state at the outset that in the present paper the term "pastry" is to be understood in a very elastic sense, as we shall include many pretty little dishes suitable for dinner and supper parties, suggesting only those that will taste as good as they look. Many readers have, no doubt, at some time in their lives, cast a longing glance at a beautiful-looking combination of glittering jelly, whipped cream, and bright-coloured sweetmeats, &c., and ventured on a taste, maybe to leave the greater portion, after shudderingly exclaiming, "What a mess!"

Our aim shall therefore be to show that sweets *can* be made pretty enough to form part of the table decoration (and in some cases, regarded in this light alone, they are a necessity), as well as pleasant to the palates of all, with the exception of those who avoid sweets of any kind. In some instances our space will only admit of suggestions, though these are often as great a help to a quick, practical cook as a number of cut-and-dried recipes would be.

We must assume, necessarily, that the art of making puff pastry is understood by all who venture upon the concoction of sweets of a superior kind. Were we to attempt *that* description, it would take up the whole of our space. Perhaps it would astonish readers to watch a good German confectioner making pastry. After working out perhaps a dozen recipes, from all the odds and ends he will produce the most dainty little dishes with astonishing rapidity. Nothing comes amiss to him. Out of an apparently useless pile of cuttings of pastry, remnants of jellies, and preserved fruits, and a few spoonfuls of whipped cream or meringue mixture, he will turn out tiny dainties of all shapes, utilising the scraps to the last bit.

When something really pretty is desired, nothing is more useful as a foundation than some "almond paste"; if made at home, it is not expensive, as a little goes a long way, while it is so delicious that almost everybody will appreciate it. A pound and a half each of sweet almonds, pounded, and fine white sugar, with half an ounce of bitter almonds, also pounded, mixed with the whites of four or five eggs, will make a "paste" of about the right consistency, and bitter enough for most palates. A yellow paste is obtained by using the yolks of the eggs instead of the whites.

Most confectioners sell this—as it is used in making wedding-cake—so when only a very little is wanted it will be as cheap to buy it. The addition of a few drops of *vegetable* colouring is quite harmless, and will increase its utility when wanted chiefly for ornamenting other dishes. Some American cooks add a

flavouring of rose or orange-flower water; either may be recommended as a decided improvement.

Cocoa-nut Paste is delicious made in the same way, but with a rather smaller proportion of sugar. The nut must be grated on a perfectly clean grater, and in mixing it white of egg only used, as the paste should be snow-white. Orange or lemon essence is most suitable as a flavouring for this. Other kinds of nuts are also used abroad, walnuts and Brazil nuts being especially suitable; the latter make a very nice paste. Any of the above can be substituted for puff paste for tartlets, darioles, &c.; tiny patty-pans or dariole moulds should be lined with the paste, rolled as thin as possible, then put into a gentle oven until firm and crisp, but kept quite pale. They may be filled with preserves, jellies—both clear and opaque—fruit compôtes, whipped cream, or *blanc-mange* mixture. The last-named may be of many flavours and colours, and should be poured in just before it sets; the whipped cream, too, may be coloured; and a spot here and there on a tartlet filled with anything of a contrasting colour has a pretty effect. A meringue of white of egg, beaten to a stiff froth, mixed with an ounce of crushed sugar to each white, can be utilised in precisely the same manner.

Fancy shapes in great variety can be readily produced: for instance, tiny balls the size, say, of a nutmeg, hollowed with the thumb, then filled with large sugar-plums, white and coloured; or pistachio nut comfits. The latter are pale green, and very nice. These little nests should be laid on a baking-sheet, covered with white paper, and baked as directed above *before* filling. By cutting out a ring, then filling it with thin strips of the pastry, "bundles of sticks" are obtained, while small cones, imitation flowers, fruit, leaves, and stars are some of the simplest devices of nut paste. Any may be decorated, before baking, by means of almonds or roughly-pounded sugar—white, green, or pink; or, after baking, with preserves, candied fruits, or whipped cream; in the latter case care is necessary in the dishing-up.

To make *Almond Sandwiches*, roll out a sheet of almond paste, and cover it thinly with icing (as used for wedding-cake), mixed soft enough to spread easily; then sprinkle it over with anything pretty—pink sugar candy, crushed, tiny bits of chopped fruit, or anything handy—then leave it until set, when it may be cut with a sharp knife into diamonds, triangles, &c., and either mixed in a dish with fancy biscuits, or used as a garnish for other sweet dishes. These need not be baked, but just dried on the plate-rack or top of a cool range. In the above, or any recipe where bitter almonds are mentioned, they may be dispensed with if a few ratafias, finely crushed, are substituted. We have dwelt at some length on nut pastes because, when once the mode is understood, they are so useful in the hands of an ingenious person.

We saw lately a dish of little cakes called *Steeples*; and the mode was very easy. Some sponge-cakes had been baked in tins six inches high, and as large round as a penny. When cold, these were cut into slices half an inch thick, and made by alternating a slice of cake with one of almond paste, some pink, some green, until the desired height of three inches was obtained; the tops were coated with clear jelly whipped to a froth. These would be nice for a supper party, and equally good at "high tea."

Another convenient way of serving cake is to cut out as many kinds as are available—one at least should be a rich fruit-cake; the rest may be seed, sponge, or any other plain sort—then to pile them with Devonshire cream between each slice, and cut them into fingers or squares. It is astonishing what an improvement in the appearance of a table may be effected by a few minutes spent in this way.

Vol-au-vent cases are universal abroad, and when filled with a variety of fruit compôtes the effect is very good; and we are inclined to the opinion that they are general favourites. Skill and experience are necessary to produce good results in this line when large ones are made, but the small ones are comparatively easy, and the necessary oval cutters can be had in all sizes.

Savoury Vol-au-vents are equally popular on the Continent, and quite as common as *patties* are in England, and when filled with a nice mince of ham and chicken, lobster, salad, oysters, &c., and prettily garnished, they present a very appetising appearance.

A really artistic dish, which can be made large or small, as required, owes its foundation to puff pastry, baked in thin square sheets, first sprinkled with sugar. Each sheet should be one inch less on each side than the one beneath it: for instance, in a large *Leaf Tourte à la Française* the bottom sheet may be seven inches square, and the top one three inches. Each must be laid on the preceding one in a contrary direction: that is, for the corners to come in the centre of each side, and the said corners must be turned up—previous to baking, of course. Need we say that few sweets afford greater opportunity for ornamentation than these? The corners and sides may be garnished with almost anything in the way of jelly, roughly chopped or cut out in patterns; cream, coloured, and dotted here and there; almond pastry; icing sugar; candied or fresh fruit; any good fondants of nice shapes being also suitable. A simpler kind may be made by just covering the edges with jam of several sorts, and coating the top layer with whipped cream. Pistachio nuts are much used as a garnish, but they are too expensive for general use; and chopped almonds, or any other nuts, may be tinted with a little vegetable green colouring, and will answer equally well.

Venetian, or *Venice Cakes*, are real delicacies. They are usually served in a round or oval form, but on the same principle as the foregoing—viz., one above another, from large to small, leaving a margin of half an inch or more between each. They are often made, however, of an equal size. The foundation, or crust, is prepared as follows:—Into a pound of the

finest white flour (half of which should be Hungarian) rub half a pound of fresh butter until very fine; add six ounces of pounded sweet almonds and half an ounce of bitter ones, fourteen ounces of powdered lump sugar, and a pinch of salt; make into a *firm* mass with the yolks of three eggs; if small, four may be necessary. Roll out to the fourth of an inch in thickness, brush over with the white of an egg, sprinkle with sugar, crushed, and bake in a gentle oven to a delicate brown. The several layers—for a large cake—should be piled up while warm, and spread with apricot jam or marmalade, and another kind, of a contrasting colour, alternately. The smaller ones look tempting with just a little stiff preserve, such as damson or plum cheese, in the middle, and dished in a circle, one overlapping the other; but when thin jam is used this is not practicable.

Another effective shape is to pinch up the rounds—which should be cut with a crimped cutter—into tiny baskets, with a strip across the top, fastened on with a dash of white of egg, to form the handle. These must be filled with a dry biscuit or bit of bread to retain their shape during the baking. They may then be filled according to fancy, custard and cream, of course, being included.

The same pastry rolled into the shape of an egg, and baked as directed, makes a nice dish if each one, on being taken from the oven, is dipped into white of egg, then into crushed sugar of various colours, and left to dry. Many people would venture to try one, who would carefully avoid richer sweets.

Grated chocolate, and chocolate icing, must not be omitted in our list of articles wherewith to decorate sweets, but it should be of the very best quality, with the true vanilla flavour. *Chocolate Meringues* are delicious, and a little brown colouring can be added with advantage, so far as appearance goes, as, of course, sufficient chocolate cannot be added to the sugar to make them a decided brown.

Boston Cream Cakes, or *Puffs*, as they are sometimes termed, must close our remarks. They sound extravagant, so many eggs being used, but in reality are not so, as a little of the batter goes a long way, for being light, it rises considerably. We have tasted them in England, but not in such perfection as those of the States. To make them, put half a pint of water into a saucepan, add four ounces of butter, and bring slowly to the boil; then stir in gradually half a pound of flour, beating well. Let it boil a couple of minutes, then turn out until cool, when the yolks of six eggs should be beaten in, and finally the whites, whisked to a stiff froth. This must be dropped from a dessert-spoon upon sheets of greased paper, laid upon a tin in a *hot* oven. When baked, slit one side with a sharp knife, and fill with corn-flour *blanc-mange* mixture, made in the usual way, but with extra sugar, as, it will be noted, there is none in the batter for the cakes themselves. A little butter is an improvement, and few flavourings can hope to rival vanilla. These are only nice while quite fresh, but in that state are certain of a warm reception, and form a delicious accompaniment to fruit at high tea.