

OUR NATIONAL SCHOOL OF HOUSEWIFERY.

SECTION I.—(HOUSEHOLD ROUTINE)—PART 2.

COMMON-SENSE MEALS.



HERE are a good many worthy housekeepers in these days who blame themselves, and think themselves a failure, because, notwithstanding all their efforts, they are not able (perhaps with limited means, insufficient domestic help, and indescribable difficulties connected with an inferior cooking range, and a deficient supply of cooking utensils) to place on their tables delicacies with high-sounding names, which have been prepared for a mere trifle. Let these individuals be comforted. "She does well who does her best." A house-mother has a thousand and one things to superintend besides the daily meals; a domestic also, who lives in a family where she has other work to do as well as to cook, must think occasionally of other things than eating and drinking, and it is a poor thing for a human being to sacrifice all other interests in life to the elaboration of daily meals.

Nevertheless, we must beware of carrying this philosophy too far. There is no denying that the neglect of the daily meals leads to ill-health, low spirits, want of energy, discomfort, and unhappiness—yes, and even to immorality, because badly-cooked and ill-chosen food leads to drinking. Also there is no denying that, with a very slight alteration, there are numbers of families who now sit down to humdrum meals, who might have their enjoyment and satisfaction in life considerably increased, and at the same time gain both in health and vigour. So long as we live in a world where eating and drinking is the rule, it is useless to turn our backs upon the subject, and pronounce it beneath our notice. We shall be much wiser to take it up bravely, deal with it reasonably, and try to make it an elevating, pleasurable, and refining influence, as well as a means of gaining health and strength, and of building up the body.

To do this, the first thing that is wanted is forethought. Our meals are too happy-go-lucky; they are what they are because the dishes which compose them happen to be more convenient than anything else for the time. If we wish to raise our standard of living, we must think the meals out beforehand, and try to make one meal work in and prepare for another, in every case using up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost. The necessity for forethought in this matter is indeed so great, that it is a very good thing that in our National School of Housewifery housekeepers have been encouraged to draw up a bill of fare for a week, which is to come within a certain sum, because the experience may suggest to them that they would find it an advantage if they would make a practice of doing the same thing constantly all through the year. The fact is that

tasty, refined, health-giving food is not necessarily expensive food—expensive, that is, so far as regards the current coin of the realm. Its chief cost has to be paid in time and trouble. This is why many housekeepers are afraid of it. They know that they have as much to do as they can get through, and they dare not attempt more. Yet if they would arrange the family fare beforehand, they would find that it would be quite possible to arrange also to reduce trouble as well as expense, by killing two birds with one stone now and again. For example, when the oven was hot for one dish, they might let it partially cook another; when making gravy for to-day's hash, they could make a little stock for to-morrow's soup, and so on. By wise forethought we may save steps as well as labour and money, and every saving thus made would be a gain. But if we have not calculated to-day what our needs will be to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, we shall certainly never think of preparing for them.

After giving forethought, the next thing we housekeepers need to do, if we want our weekly bill of fare to improve our standard of living, is to get out of our grooves, and in the culinary line to venture into fresh fields and pastures new. We have too much accustomed ourselves to think that certain dishes, large joints and substantial puddings, are *the* thing; that they are wholesome and excellent; and that to limit ourselves to them is a sign of virtue. It is nothing of the kind; it is a sign of prejudice. Large joints are most costly; cold meat is less nourishing than warm meat; these are facts which there is no gainsaying.

Numbers of housekeepers are faithful to the orthodox *régime* because they are in favour of plain and simple food as more health-giving and less likely to lead to mischief than rich and complicated dishes. They are right here; simple diet is the best. The mistake they make is in thinking that because a dish is new, and has a fine name, therefore it is not simple. Some of the French dishes that have names most absurdly long are made of the simplest and most homely ingredients. There are English people who hold that it is a pity that French names should be so freely given in cookery; and there is a great deal to be said for the opinion. At the same time we have to remember that the French excel all other nations in cookery; and they excel the English far and away. Very often, too, it has happened that the French have given a title to a dish to honour the memory of some person who made a fortunate discovery concerning it. Thus Béchamel Sauce, to quote a familiar example, though simply superior white sauce, was named after Louis de Béchamel, who invented it; and Cutlets à la Maintenon, which are cutlets cooked in an envelope of buttered paper, were thus named because Madame de Maintenon found out that meat was made more succulent by being wrapped

in oiled paper whilst it was being cooked. Why should English-speaking housekeepers lose the advantage of a discovery of this kind merely because the author thereof was French? Housekeepers would, indeed, show their wisdom by trying a new dish once a week—no matter what its name is. They do not want for recipes, because recipes abound in these days. They know very well, however, that those recipes only are of value to themselves which they have made their own by trying and proving. Let them add continually to the number thus proved, and they will insure variety in the daily fare. More than this, they will lessen the drudgery of cookery and elevate it into an art. We housekeepers are in error when we say that servants will not take trouble in cookery. As a rule they are glad to make experiments, and they like to add to their knowledge as much as we do. When there is never a thought of change, they grow weary of the monotonous round, (as which of us would not?) but they like the excitement of something new. One way of making a good servant "settle" in her situation is to give her the opportunity of learning new ways.

In carrying out bills of fare, economy is best effected by choosing food wisely; and to this end the housekeeper should if possible go to market and choose her food—she should not order it. This point has been so much insisted on of late years by experienced writers on domestic management that it need not be dwelt on here at any length; it is, however, of great importance. As the Spanish proverb says, "He who wants a thing goes for it; he who would miss a thing sends for it." The housekeepers who send for food miss more than they know.

Last, but not least, in drawing up her bills of fare the housekeeper should try to anticipate difficulties, so that she may smooth them away before they arise. For example, she should keep her stock of saucepans well in mind, and refrain from setting down a preparation for the making of which there is not a suitable utensil. She should have a thoughtful regard for the little peculiarities of the kitchen stove, and not try it beyond what it is able to bear; and she should endeavour to prevent one dish being a stumbling-block in the way of another, as would be the case if a fried dish succeeded immediately another fried dish, or if the whole of a dinner had to be cooked in the oven, whereas it is easier when one portion is cooked in the oven and another portion is boiled or stewed. Attention to small details of this kind paves the way to success, and success is a great incentive to perseverance and a very delightful experience. We respect ourselves more when we succeed. Let us hope that

every housekeeper who feels inspired to introduce variety into the family meals may be rewarded by an abundant share, not of success only, but also of applause and appreciation from the admiring members of her family.

PHYLLIS BROWNE.

. Our readers are reminded that, according to the curriculum published in December last, March 10 is the latest day for receiving MSS. in the "Bill of Fare" Competition.

NEEDLEWORK COMPETITION.—(SECTION II.)

The Prize of One Guinea is awarded to
Mrs. ADELINE DAY, Lenham, Maidstone.

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Pridham, Lilla	Weybridge.
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Shute, Clara M.	Bristol.
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Wassell, Rosalie	Bradford.
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The successful candidates may have their Certificates posted to them, on their sending to the Editor a fully-addressed label, together with two penny postage stamps, to defray cost of postage and roller. The Editor cannot be responsible for loss or damage to Certificates in the post.

