

SOME VEGETABLE COOKING.

BY A CERTIFIED TEACHER OF COOKERY.



BEFORE doing anything else, I would advise the reader to get a list of good products from a large dealer in vegetarian specialities, and give a trial order, thus insuring the best quality and—what is very important—freshness: pulse, especially, deteriorating considerably with age. Under the heading “pulse” I include dried peas, lentils, and haricots: of the latter, the white kind are usually seen at the table of the flesh-eater; but the vegetarian indulges in other varieties, and as these constitute what I may term the meat of the non-flesh-eater, it may be well to lay down a few rules for cooking pulse, as, when once the initial process is understood, they may be made available to an unlimited extent:—

(1) All require thorough washing, and soaking in cold water for at least twenty-four hours.

(2) The softer the water the better; if *very hard*, a pinch of carbonate of soda may be added.

(3) All which float should be thrown away, as they are grub-eaten.

(4) Put them on to boil in cold water with a little fat—any kind free from salt—it softens them, and assists the cooking considerably.

(5) Let them boil slowly until quite tender, but unbroken if for the table; if for soups, let them boil to a mash, that they may be the more readily passed through a sieve.

(6) Add no salt until they are soft: it increases the hardness of the skins, and thus retards the cooking.

(7) No fixed time can be given for the cooking, it varies according to the age and quality of the pulse. Of beans, the smallest, as a rule, cook in the least time. Of lentils, the German; next come Egyptian split; whole Egyptian take longest. Of peas, grey or blue, the very best qualities will be found the cheapest.

To enjoy haricots as a vegetable, they should be served with a sauce, such as celery, onion, or parsley; or if some of the latter, finely chopped, and a good lump of butter be stirred into them, with a seasoning of salt and pepper, they are delicious. Fennel, or other herbs, can be utilised in the same way; indeed, in vegetarian cookery every edible herb is brought into requisition: an example which may well be followed, for, unfortunately, many people entertain a very fixed idea that herbs are simply flavourers, and may easily be dispensed with, whereas they possess antiscorbutic properties, and benefit almost every organ of the body. Indeed, it has been said with truth that the salads and herbs which are relegated to the British pigs might save their owners fifty per cent. of their doctors' bills.

To return for a moment to pulse, I would remind

the reader that, of the whole tribe, lentils will agree best with the majority of people unaccustomed to this form of diet, and that, in many cases, pea-meal and lentil-flour may with advantage be substituted for the whole seed.

Of Vegetable Pies there is literally no end to the variety which form standing and favourite dishes at many vegetarian tables, and to quote an authority, they come “as an agreeable surprise to those who make their acquaintance, with a nice crust, covering vegetables skilfully combined and seasoned.” As a rule, pies are best made of vegetables cooked, or, at least, parboiled, and this is true of onions especially. To give what I may term “body” to the pie, tapioca, rice, pearl-barley, &c., first cooked in a little water, are valuable additions, the water being put in also; macaroni, cheese, and hard-boiled eggs, too, are often introduced. I offer the following suggestions, strictly *as suggestions*, and not *recipés*, for very palatable and nourishing combinations:—

(1) Alternate layers of cooked macaroni, celery, and green peas, and some sliced raw tomatoes, or preserved ones will answer, and some of the juice added. Flavour with salt, pepper, herbs, and curry-powder, or, instead of the latter, some grated cheese.

(2) Substantial, suitable for hard workers:—Alternate layers of cooked haricots and mushrooms with barley or tapioca and a couple of hard-boiled eggs, the whole nicely seasoned. A potato crust may be substituted for ordinary pastry, if preferred. Potatoes and onions form the basis of the very plainest varieties, though either may be used with any of them. By way of seasoning for these pies, and also for vegetable stews, tomato sauce, or ketchup, as well as those of walnut and mushroom, are largely employed, so are flavoured vinegars, curry paste and powder, capers, and many other appetisers.

A form of forcemeat, similar to veal stuffing—but with some cooked cereal, as rice and tapioca, instead of suet—is used in many ways. It is fried as “bread steaks”; cucumbers and vegetable marrows are stuffed with it, and tomatoes are cut in two and spread with the mixture, then cooked in any of the well-known ways. Sometimes it is made soft by the addition of milk, and served “fritter” fashion. Omelettes, containing cooked vegetables of all kinds, are very good; asparagus points, green peas, kidney beans, or cauliflowers, broken small, are as good and tasty as any for the purpose, especially if a dash of curry powder be added.

With regard to fresh vegetables served as separate courses, few words are necessary by way of recommendation, and it has been truly remarked that the taste for them develops with culture, a dish of well-cooked vegetables being really as complete in itself as a plate of fruit. I wish to give due emphasis to one item regarding the cooking of celery: viz., that

under no circumstances should the liquor in which it has been cooked be thrown away, though again and again recipes have fallen into my hands in which the reader was advised to drain off the liquor. It would be just as sensible to make some good beef-tea, strain it off, and give the meat (?) to the patient. A good plan, in the case of stewed celery, is as soon as it is tender to keep it hot while the water is thickened with flour and butter in the usual way. Milk improves it, and it should be seasoned with salt and pepper and a dash of nutmeg. This, either alone or with onions, will make a nice toast; the onions should be scalded, or the first water, after a minute's boiling, poured off, to get rid of the oil, which disagrees with many people, and causes the pain that follows the consumption of raw onions by those whose digestive powers are not of the strongest. Carrots require well brushing and scraping, but whenever possible, peeling should be avoided, the best part being nearest the surface; when young, it is wise to cook them in their skins, which can afterwards be removed with a clean cloth. They are delicious if finally tossed in hot butter, with a sprinkling of sugar, parsley, chopped capers, salt, and pepper. For soups, it is quite worth while to grate carrots: they cook better, and are more digestible; and we may with advantage follow the French *chefs* example in adding sugar to most vegetables during cooking.

Concerning carrots, I heard a story lately which serves to illustrate the part played by the imagination in the enjoyment of food. A gentleman who has travelled far and wide, and has the reputation of being a *gourmand*, especially prejudiced against vegetable cookery, came across a dish at a French restaurant which pleased him so much that he determined, if possible, to obtain the recipe, which he did after some trouble, only to find that its foundation consisted of grated carrots, with which herbs and spices, Oriental pickles, curry, raisins, and rice were cunningly mingled! I remember, too, at a food exhibition in London a few years ago, a well-known lecturer on cookery delighting her audience with a dish of curried lentils, and their surprise upon hearing how much, or rather how little, it cost.

While speaking of *Vegetable Curries*, I would suggest the addition of grated cocoa-nut, when obtainable, also lemon-juice or flavoured vinegar, to give piquancy. Cream is a valuable adjunct if a dish is of the white variety, consisting of such vegetables as potatoes, celery, onions, marrows, haricots, turnips, artichokes, &c. For brown curries, the vegetables and curry powder or paste should be fried in hot fat, and the whole seasoned with sauce, ketchup, or chutney; and among other accessories for heightening the colour of brown dishes generally, browning salt or liquid browning, burnt onions, *pastilles des legumes*, and soy are harmless and useful.

Of *Vegetable Salads*, the name is legion, and they afford every facility to the careful housekeeper who wishes to use up previously cooked edibles. The ordinary salad dressings are well known, and any are suitable; but I would just say, for the benefit of those

who do not care for oil, and are, perhaps, unable to obtain its usual substitute—cream—that a little good milk, mixed with enough condensed milk to make it as thick as cream, is not to be despised; and a floury potato, first roasted in its skin, is a good foundation for the dressing. Speaking of potatoes, all who would derive full benefit from this much-abused vegetable will do well to pin their faith to this last-named method of cooking them, chief among many reasons being:—(1) That in this way only are the starch grains completely ruptured. (2) All the mineral matter is thus preserved. (3) Solanine, the poisonous substance found in potatoes, is only thoroughly destroyed by *dry* heat. (4) Potatoes contain seventy-five per cent. of water, so it is well to prevent their absorption of any more, and this is not easy when they are peeled and boiled in the ordinary way.

In adding milk to *Vegetable Soups* care should be taken to boil it separately, and add it just before serving, otherwise a curdly soup may be the result; and when eggs are put in for the sake of increasing the colour and richness, they should be well beaten up with a little cool soup, then put into the tureen, and the hot soup added by degrees, the beating being continued for several minutes. All vegetable *purées* are improved by being passed through a sieve. An excellent thickening medium for *purées* generally is a French preparation known as crushed tapioca—especially if time is an object, as it is cooked in about twenty minutes.

As to porridge, an adult, on making trial of it, very often finds it disagree, and throws it up in disgust. This is especially true of oatmeal porridge, and where that cannot be digested, a trial should certainly be made of hominy or crushed wheat. No words can over-rate the good properties of hominy, while wheat is a gentle laxative, and not heating to the system; but let no one believe in the efficacy of the twenty minutes' cooking sometimes recommended.

No list of dishes *minus* meat would be complete without reference to macaroni, which, being rich in nitrogenous matter, is valuable; and although perhaps best known in England in combination with cheese, it will be found delicious with a *purée* of tomatoes, or, if cooked in any other way, these serve the same purpose: *viz.*, the counteraction of the constipating properties of macaroni.

A last word about cheese: not as a superfluous adjunct to a good meal, but *as* a meal. It is very palatable, and rendered more digestible if mixed with any well-cooked farinaceous food; and many people, with whom it disagrees in its natural state, find that, when combined with starchy matter, it causes no discomfort; and although, for the sake of their flavour, Parmesan and other varieties are largely employed in the concoction of such dishes, the softer kinds, whether English or foreign, are to be recommended.

The space at my command necessarily limits much which I would fain mention, but I trust that this brief outline of dishes *maigre* may induce a trial of at least some of them.