A GOSSIP ABOUT CORNISH COOKERY.

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EVERY county in England has, in one form or another, certain dishes peculiar to itself. We have Yorkshire cakes and Yorkshire puddings, besides the famous Yorkshire pies. There are Norfolk dumplings, as well as Suffolk dumplings and Suffolk buns. There is Leicester pie and Leicester pudding. Devonshire is famous for its cream, its cider, and its junkets. Of all counties, however, Cornwall probably possesses more distinctive dishes than any other in England, many of these being of extreme antiquity.

Cornwall is famous for its vegetables ; and if Kent has been called the "garden of England," Cornwall may well claim to be considered the market garden, supplying as it does, with assistance from the Scilly Islands, a great proportion of the vegetables for the London market.

The principal reason of the productiveness of Cornwall is the climate, the peculiarity of which is its equability. In winter the glass rarely goes below 50°, and in summer seldom rises above 70°. It is a small peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic, and its shores are warmed by the Gulf Stream. A mist floats over it in winter and keeps it warm, while a similar mist in summer acts as a species of umbrella, and keeps it cool. Scarlet geraniums are in full bloom all the year round ; while last, but not least, the cattle have always plenty of grass, snow being almost unknown.

From this it will be well understood that vegetables and milk form a distinctive feature in Cornish cookery. The most popular dish among the country people in Cornwall is what is known as Cornish Broth, the chief feature of which is a huge slice of one of those gigantic cabbages which abound, and which Cornishmen and Cornish cows seem to enjoy with equal relish. These cabbages are not green, like the ordinary ones, but quite white, and in the autumn of the year often attain a size larger than a nine-gallon cask. Indeed, we have known prize cabbages, exhibited in agricultural shows, as big round as a wheel of a cart, and weighing over twenty pounds.

Cornish broth is made by boiling a huge slice of one of these cabbages with some turnips (swedes), carrots, parsnip, parsley, and onion. Leeks are better than onions, and, as we were informed by a Cornish countrywoman who was making the broth in question, in her Cornish dialect : "We 'belong' to put leeks in it," which meant we "ought" to put leeks in it. On all great occasions, such as the Sunday dinner, a piece of beef is boiled with the vegetable, and eaten after the broth according to the French custom.

Another staple diet in Cornwall is Cornish Pasty. These meat turnovers make their appearance at most of the railway refreshment rooms soon after leaving Plymouth, and are far more honest than the ordinary railway meat pie. They are made in the shape of a turnover, and are generally about eight inches long, and the inside is composed of slices of meat, either pork or beef, mixed with potatoes cut in slices, also slices of swede turnips and shredded onions. The pastry is the ordinary dripping crust, similar to that used to make a large meat pie suitable for the children's early dinner. The only seasoning is a little pepper and salt. No gravy is added, but the inside is generally moist owing to the juices from the turnips, potatoes, and onions. These Cornish pasties take about an hour to bake in a fairly brisk oven. They are extensively used by the miners and outdoor labourers who have to take their dinner with them ; and many who are in the habit of taking their luncheon might do worse than give them a trial.

A very popular dish in Cornwall is known as Heavy Cake, which, among the juvenile inhabitants, supplies the place of the ordinary plum cake elsewhere. It is a very plain and wholesome cake, and is made as follows :—

To every two pounds of flour is added half a pound of currants or half a pound of sultana raisins, three table-spoonfuls of moist sugar, a pinch of salt, one ounce of lemon candied peel chopped very fine, and about a quarter of a grated nutmeg. Half a pound of dripping or lard, or a quarter of a pound of each, is added, the flour being rubbed well in, and sufficient water to make the whole a thick stiff paste which can be rolled out. The cake is rolled out about an inch thick on a baking-sheet, and baked in the oven.

As the name implies, the cake is very heavy and very substantial, and often forms the dinner of a labouring man.

At the season of Christmas, when throughout England people are preparing the mincemeat and plum pudding, the Cornish housewives are busy over the manufacture of the famous Saffron Cakes, which seem peculiar to this county. Probably the custom is of great antiquity, but it is a curious fact, and shows how customs are handed down, that Cornish miners who are engaged in the mines in South Africa and Mexico—and there are many thousands who have gone thither—make a point of having saffron cakes at Christmas.

The following are the ingredients of a saffron cake made last winter in a place near Helston :—Six pounds of flour, three pounds of currants, half a pound of candied peel, two pounds of either dripping or lard, one pound of butter, one pound of moist sugar, two nutmegs grated, three eggs, a quarter of an ounce of saffron, and a pint of barm, this barm being a species of yeast.

What will strike most persons is the very small proportion of eggs to the very large quantity of flour, but we give the recipe as it was made in a small country house, and we were assured that poor people never used more, as at Christmas-time eggs were very dear. As, however, the cake when baked has the appearance of having been composed almost entirely of yolks of eggs, the small quantity does not matter so far as looks go, and very likely the saffron was originally introduced from motives of economy. The saffron is used as follows :—A quarter of an ounce is placed for about five or ten minutes in the oven to get dry. It is then crushed with a rolling-pin and broken up into a powder. This powder is placed in a basin, and about a pint of boiling water poured on it. Afterwards more water, and sometimes) milk, is added, in sufficient quantity to enable all the ingredients to be mixed together. The cake is then baked in tins in the ordinary way. At Christmas-time, throughout the greater part of Western Cornwall, the bakers' shops are filled with these bright yellow cakes, while in the windows of the grocers' shops heaps of saffron are exhibited in conjunction with the raisins, and currants, and candied peel.

Sweet Giblet Pie is another well-known dish among Cornishmen, and shows how very much their cooking resembles that of the Continent. Those who have travelled in Belgium and Germany will remember how common it is for fruit to be served with meat. Stewed prunes are sometimes handed round with pork sausages. Preserved currants are always served with veal. Giblet soup in Germany is made with apples, and sometimes, instead of apples, very small new potatoes are served in the soup whole. Giblets are also, in Germany, cooked with pears and turnips. Space will not allow us to enter into the details of these German recipes, but we may mention that they are all to be found in "Cassell's Dictionary of Cookery." It is, however, a curious coincidence that the sweet giblet pie peculiar to Cornwall is made like the ordinary giblet pie, with the addition that raisins, or apples, or potatoes, or turnips form one of the ingredients. When apples are added, raisins are not used, and *vice versâ*.

Scalded Cream is perhaps the most popular of all Cornish dishes. It is eaten in a variety of ways, and it seems to be an essential point in hospitality to have a dish of cream at every meal where there are guests. In summer-time the cream is served with fruit, but in winter it is often eaten quite plain, being spread on bread like butter, and a little sugar sprinkled over the top. This scalded cream very much resembles what is known in Devonshire as clotted cream, the scalded cream being thicker and richer. This cream is easily prepared as follows :—The milk is collected in a large round metal vessel, containing about two gallons. This is allowed to stand for several hours, so that the cream may settle at the top. The vessel is then placed on a shut-up stove and the milk allowed to get hot, but not to boil. This generally takes some time, which, of course, varies with the quantity of milk and the heat of the stove ; but as soon as one or two bubbles begin to rise the vessel is removed from the fire, and at the same time the cream at the top will be observed to turn more yellow, and get what we may call crinkly. The length of time one must allow the milk to stand before it is put on the fire can be judged from the following facts:—The milk taken from the last milking at night is put on the fire the first thing in the morning. The early morning milk is usually put on the stove about one o'clock in the afternoon. It is wonderful how prolific in milk are some of these Cornish cows. We are personally acquainted with one that yields three gallons of milk in the morning and two and a half in the evening. Two gallons of milk will produce about a pound and a half of scalded cream. It is always best to allow a whole day for the milk to get cold before taking the cream off. After the cream has been removed, of course the milk remains. In London and most parts of the country it is called "skimmed" milk, or "separated" milk, the latter word being derived from the machine used in dairy farming called the "separater." In Cornwall it is called "scald," or "scalded" milk. In towns it is sold at three pints a penny, and in the country four pints. Large quantities are given to the pigs. What a pity it is that it cannot be transported, and sold at this price at the East End of London ! Perhaps the day may come when huge blocks of frozen milk—not separated—but pure, will find their way to the London markets from Devonshire, Cornwall, and Ireland, like the frozen mutton from New Zealand.

In conclusion, we will describe how to make a genuine Cornish Junket. The recipe is so simple that we do not know how anyone can fail to succeed. Take, say, a pint of fresh milk and warm it in a saucepan till it is rather hotter than blood heat, add two teaspoonfuls of Cornish rennet, and pour it into a glass dish and let it get cold. The milk can be first sweetened and flavoured with vanilla, &c., or can be used quite plain.

When it is cold it forms a solid. In fact, a junket is one solid mass of curd as smooth as a piece of blanc-mange, only far lighter. A slight quantity of whey will form in the dish round it. In making a junket, you should calculate the time as nearly as possible, so that it is eaten directly it gets cold, as after a time it gets watery. It is also apt to get more watery after it is cut. For instance, were you to make a junket and pour it into a glass dish an inch and a half deep, very little whey would form round the edge, but if you were to take out two or three spoonfuls the holes would gradually fill up with whey. The custom in Cornwall is to serve the scalded cream with the junket. It seems to strangers a funny mixture, but it is the custom of the country. Junket is extremely nice served with stewed fruit, especially with stewed raspberries or stewed currants and cherries. Whether it would be possible to make a junket out of London milk we cannot say — the experiment might be tried ; but we all remember the story of the London milkman who told the cook, on her complaining of the thinness of the cream, that it only wanted stirring up, as the cream had settled at the bottom. It is evident that our milkman was not a Cornishman.