

THE TEACHING OF COOKERY IN BOARD SCHOOLS.

WHAT an easy thing cooking does seem—before you try it! In happy confidence you start out gaily with an attempt to make some dainty French trifle—all sugar and eggs. Mother and cook smile, and say you are beginning at the wrong end, but in the cookery book it looks such a simple little affair, you feel quite capable of making it in spite of them. Hence you are considerably pained and astonished when, instead of your airy nothing, a black, shrivelled-up, funny little object appears, uncanny to look upon, and fearful to taste. Then, while brothers jeer and inquire if that last “sponge-cake” you made was a specimen of best concrete, you begin to realise that cooking is an art after all, and must be studied from simple beginnings.

After several woeful experiences similar to the above, I discovered that cooking is not only one of the arts, but that it is the very greatest of all, which is the reason why women have to study it. This was borne in upon me through witnessing the effects produced by my early efforts upon the tempers of the family, particularly as regards its male members. Among other wise reflections consequent upon this grand discovery, it struck me what a splendid thing it would be to teach the women and girls of the working classes how to cook properly. It would work a revolution, and produce greater effects than the Salvation Army has done, or even the eloquence of Sir Wilfrid Lawson. But it was somewhat mortifying to find that I was by no means the first to project such a scheme; many others had forestalled me. In fact, the London School Board has been so much before its time as to have instituted an excellent system of instruction in cookery in the girls' schools under its control, some fifteen years ago.

I was much attracted by this scheme, and felt I must see it in working. So for this purpose I visited one of the schools in the West Lambeth division of London.

The Board has done the thing thoroughly, I am bound to confess. All the arrangements made are simple, yet very complete. The cooking-school, I found, is in a building detached from the main body of the school, specially provided for the purpose. Everything within the room is scrupulously neat and clean, you might eat with perfect safety off the boards: at least, before the children arrive on the scene with their dirty boots. The teacher stands behind a demonstration counter, facing the girls. A stepped gallery, with desks, is provided for the class, so that everyone can see if they choose. As far as possible



A STRUGGLE WITH A PUDDING.

all the cooking operations are carried on with the aid of a gas-stove placed in the middle of the counter. There is, however, a kitchen range also provided, which can be resorted to if necessary. On one side of the room, between the desks and the counter, is a black-board, on which, before the lesson commences, are carefully written all the ingredients of the different articles to be cooked during the lesson.

The Board has decreed that no girls shall be taught cooking who are under the age of ten, and these only when they are in Standard IV. and upwards. But, with all due respect to the Board, I don't think even little girls of ten derive much benefit from the instruction. They pay very little attention to the mistress, however good she may be, and it looks as if a large part of the energy she devotes to her work were wasted. Should her eye be turned from them for an instant, her pupils seize the opportunity to hold earnest

conversations together, though not, I should fancy, on cookery. Pulling one another's hair, thrusting their elbows into each other's ribs, and scribbling remarks and notes on the desks and on scraps of paper, seem to be occupations of infinitely greater interest to them than their legitimate subject of study. They have, besides, one very distressing peculiarity: that of answering all at once a question addressed to one alone. In reply to a simple question, one child gave a very comical answer. The question ran—When you lay tough meat into vinegar, what does it make it? Of course what the teacher wanted to elicit was that it would make the meat tender. But the answer she got was—"Mutton." A forest of hands went up in response to every question, but frequently when the owner of one of those most vigorously shaken was personally addressed she looked blank. The hand-raising was merely a matter of form.

After the teacher had gone carefully through all the items set for the day's lesson, the children came down to the counter to try their hand at producing the same articles and dishes themselves. Much of the food cooked serves for the dinners of the teachers in the big school. Hence the mistress must keep a sharp look-out over her small pupils' proceedings, or the consequences would be disastrous.

I can't say I think the position of teacher of cookery in a Board School is one to be coveted. Not only must a candidate be a properly certificated cook, but she must also be able to market economically, and keep correct accounts; all this without speaking of the numerous qualities required of her as a teacher.

The virtues of a good cook, a good housekeeper, and a good teacher seem rather cheap at the price even of a first-class teacher's salary, which ranges between £80 and £100 a year.

In addition to the instruction in cookery which now forms part of the ordinary Board School course, evening classes are held once a week for the benefit of older girls who have left school. The time allotted to this class is not so long as that to the day classes, but it is sufficient to allow the girls to do some practical work. Besides, there is much less time wasted than with the younger children, the girls requiring a smaller amount of watchfulness on the part of the teacher. They are attentive and intelligent, and naturally their mistress feels the difference. In consequence, the tuition of this class is the part of her work she likes best, although it comes at the end of a long day's work, when both head and voice are weary.

It is a pretty sight to watch these big girls at their cooking. They take a lively interest in what they are doing, and, for the most part, set about it in an active workman-like manner. Occasionally a damsel is to be seen shaking her fingers delicately, and puckering up her mouth over her task, generally when it involves the handling of something greasy. But on the whole she is an exception. Buzzing round their teacher, the girls ask eager questions, and catch with wonderful quickness at all her hints and suggestions. They take delight in their own prowess, and gleefully relate all their experiments at home: their successes and failures. If, too, by any chance one of them can show the teacher how to make some little thing she didn't





PRACTICE.

WRAINEY

know before, what a triumph! It makes the fortunate one feel quite an inch taller, and oh! so much more important than her companions. The girls are allowed to buy the articles they have cooked themselves, and take them home as trophies. This is a practice at once gratifying to their pride and economical for the Board. There is one slight drawback to this class. Time does not permit the girls to do any cleaning and scrubbing. This makes them less careful and economical in their use of utensils than they otherwise would be, as the kitchen-maid who cleans up after them knows to her cost.

My experiences in the Board's cooking-school convinced me completely of the excellence of the scheme. The style of cooking taught is plain and economical, and eminently useful. But I felt very sore on one point. These girls of the working classes seemed to me to have advantages which we of the middle class have not, but which we decidedly ought to have. Is it not as important and necessary for us as for them to know how to cook well and economically?

THE GARDEN IN MAY.



SOME time during the month of May our English flower-beds suddenly put on their summer dress. In some cases—more particularly in those that are rigid examples of the bedding-out system—the change is so startling as to give to the hitherto black and deserted beds a sort of “bank holiday” attire in the shape of one unvarying blaze of scarlet geranium.

It may be well, therefore, in this bedding-out month to say something more particularly with reference to a few of the popular bedding-out plants. The spring of the year can hardly as yet be said to have left us; the summer is before us; and some of our enthusiastic young gardeners are probably burning with a great desire to try a few experiments at a time of year when almost anything will grow if, as is vulgarly said, we merely “stick it in the ground.”

Let us, then, commence with the *calceolaria*:—generally speaking, this being one of the hardiest of our stock of cuttings that we have been protecting

during the winter, we begin our first bedding-out morning with this pretty and variously tinted flower. It is right, then, that we should speak of it first. The singular shape of the flower now so familiar to us—that, namely, of a slipper (*calceolus*)—of course gives us very naturally the name *calceolaria*, by which we know it. Now, as it is about the middle of August that we take our stock of *cuttings*, such as *calceolaria*, geranium, &c., so also is this same month perhaps one of the best in which to raise the *calceolaria* from seed. It will, however, be readily seen that if we have by us any good supply of seed, it could as easily be raised in this present month of May. *Calceolaria* seed is very small, and some recommend that the seed-pods should be carefully taken off when they are turning yellow, and should then be laid out to dry thoroughly, but so that the wind does not blow them about. Sow in the usual well-drained pan, but not too thickly, in ordinary green-house compost, taking care to use, however, plenty of silver sand on the surface. If you sow in the early spring, have a hand-glass over your pan, and place it either in the greenhouse or in a garden frame. If, however, you sow in August, your pan, covered with a glass, could stand in any thoroughly shaded part of your garden. And bear in mind that August is a hot month, and that the seed, once sown.