

LUSCIOUS BONBONS.

BY MONA NEALE.



ONE wet afternoon a short time ago I happened to drop in about tea-time at the house of a young lady friend. Among the many dainties which graced her tea-table there was a pretty crystal dish containing the most delicious-looking bonbons, in the shape of walnuts, candied in some marvellous way. I tasted one, and found it so exceedingly nice that I could not help remarking on its excellence, and, as this was not the first time I had tasted in my friend's house sweetmeats of a novel kind, I ventured to ask if they were home-made.

"Oh, yes," answered my friend, whose name, by the way, is Miss Hanson, "I always make my own confectionery. Do you like these? They are caramel walnuts. I generally keep a supply of them on hand. Most people enjoy a 'goodie' in the intervals of tea and talk, and I always like to have something a little different from other people on my afternoon tea-table. These walnuts are particularly popular among all my visitors."

She then very kindly offered to initiate me into some of the mysteries of her confectionery art, if I came some afternoon, and, as I eagerly accepted the offer, we there and then fixed a day for the purpose.

Accordingly, on the afternoon arranged, I presented myself at her house, and was ushered into the kitchen, where everything was prepared for the demonstration. Miss Hanson herself, enveloped in a huge pinafore, was standing before the table, which was set out with an important array of jars, tins, and various essence bottles, a metal mortar and pestle, numerous plates and basins, and bright flat tins.

"Looks like business, doesn't it?" she laughed, as I appeared. "That is the worst of bonbon-making: such an amount of paraphernalia is necessary."

She then handed me a slip of paper, and told me that she had selected the following items as the subjects for her instructions that afternoon. The list was as follows:—

Caramel Walnuts,
Chocolate Almonds.
Chocolate Caramel.
Cocoa-nut Ice,
American Sweets.

"I had put down Russian toffee, which is one of my specialities, but the preparation is rather troublesome, and I am afraid it would take up too much of our time to undertake it this afternoon; but I will gladly show you how to make it any other day you like—if you like toffee, that is to say; many people do not."

"I am exceedingly fond of toffee," I answered. "In

fact, it is the only sweetmeat I have ever tried to make."

"Russian toffee is vastly superior to 'common, or schoolroom, toffee,'" said Miss Hanson, "and I rather pride myself on my manufacture of it. I have always had a mania for confectionery ever since the nursery days, when we used to make toffee-drops by holding a lump of sugar to a lighted taper and letting the melted drops fall on to the page of an old copy-book. Ugh! the taste of those hard, burnt drops, with the bits of inky paper sticking to them—how well I remember it!

"Then in the schoolroom days I aspired to real toffee, and obtained a wide reputation for the wonderful variety and mystery of my flavourings among my brothers and friends. One day I nearly poisoned them all with eye-lotion, which I took for rose, and then my inventive powers received a check, and I studied the cookery-book, and did not make any more experiments on my own account."

Miss Hanson, having provided me with an apron similar to her own, then proposed that we should set to work at once. There was a small handmaiden in attendance, who was bidden to butter some of the tins and plates in readiness for us, which done, in accordance with Miss Hanson's orders, she retired to the back kitchen with a large cocoanut and a grater, and proceeded to grate down the whole of it.

"We will begin with the wainuts," said Miss Hanson. "I have got them cracked and shelled ready for use, as it takes so long to crack them, and our time is precious. You will notice I have been careful to keep them as whole as possible. I have half a pound here, which makes two dozen caramels. The other requisites are two ounces of sweet almonds (and three bitter almonds added give more flavour), a quarter of a pound of icing sugar, one white of egg. This makes the mixture to fill them, which is all we can do to them to-day. They have to be left a whole day to harden before glazing them."

Miss Hanson then dropped the almonds, which were ready blanched, into the mortar, and, adding a few drops of spirit to prevent them oiling, pounded them vigorously until they were quite smooth. Then she turned the paste into a bowl, and added the sugar and white of egg, mixing it well. The mixture, when finished, was barely soft. She next proceeded to take up a piece of the paste and rolled it into a ball between her fingers. Then she stuck half a walnut on each side of the ball. I helped her to do this to all the rest, and when done they were put on a dish and set aside to harden in a cool pantry.

"If you come in for a few minutes to-morrow morning," said Miss Hanson, "I will show you how I boil the syrup to glaze them. Now we will do the chocolates. You see, I have a supply of almonds, which I keep always ready for use. They are blanched and dried for a few minutes in a cool oven."

She measured out from the tin in which they were kept four ounces of almonds, and directed me to split them into halves. Then she went to the oven and took out the mortar, which had been heating while we prepared the walnuts, and threw into it half a pound of Mexican chocolate, broken into small pieces.

When this was pounded to a paste, she mixed with it half a pound of icing sugar, and we rolled each almond in a small piece of the chocolate paste and set them aside to cool.

These sweets were very quickly made, and I found them exceedingly good to eat afterwards.

"Cocoanut ice and chocolate caramel come next on the list. We will make the ice first, if Annie has the cocoanut ready, as it takes longer to harden."

The small maiden here appeared from the inner kitchen bearing a basin full of the grated cocoanut, and handed it to Miss Hanson.

"Now I want the brass pan, Annie," said Miss Hanson, proceeding to weigh out three pounds of loaf sugar in the scales.

When this was brought, the sugar was put into it, with half a pint of cold water, and brought slowly to the boil. Miss Hanson stood over the pan with a spoon and a saucer of cold water in her hand, and from time to time dropped a little of the syrup into the water.

"I keep on trying it," she explained, "like this, until it reaches the stage which the cookery-books call 'candy high'—that is, when it hardens immediately it is dropped into the cold water."

When it was boiled sufficiently, Miss Hanson drew the pan to the cool side of the stove, and stirred in the cocoanut. Into another saucepan, which had been previously heated, she poured half the mixture, and coloured it pink with a few drops of cochineal. The ice was then poured into two buttered soup-plates—first the white mixture and then the pink on the top of it.

It was then set aside to cool and harden, and we directed our attention to the chocolate caramel.

Into an enamelled pan Miss Hanson put four and a half ounces of grated chocolate, six and a half ounces of sugar, two tablespoons of honey, and a teacup of milk. This was put upon the fire, and stirred well until it boiled.

"When it comes to the boil, keep on stirring, and let it boil slowly for half an hour, until it is quite thick," said my friend. "If you don't boil it enough, it will be sticky."

When the boiling process was over, the caramel was poured into one of the buttered tins, and as soon as it was slightly firm Miss Hanson took a sharp knife and marked it into neat squares, explaining that this was much more easily done while the mixture was still soft.

"I will now conclude my demonstration with the recipe for American sweets. I give you the recipe only for what it is worth. I was staying with some American girls last summer, and it was an invention, I believe, of their own. They initiated me into the art of making them. They are too sweet for my taste, but they look pretty, and are very simple to make. Would you mind breaking one of those eggs into a basin and separating the yolk and white?"

I did as Miss Hanson desired, and handed her the white of the egg on a plate.

She took a quantity of icing sugar in one hand and let it sift gradually into the egg, which she stirred all the time with the end of a wooden spoon. When it was mixed quite thick, she put some of the mixture into another plate, and added a few drops of cochineal. One portion she flavoured with vanilla, and the other with lemon.

"Now comes your chance to show your artistic faculty," said Miss Hanson, taking up a small lump of icing in her hand and forming it into the shape of a cone. "The art is to make the sweets into the oddest and queerest shapes you can invent, and the Americans put all sorts of things into the middle of them—bits of nuts, almonds, preserved cherries and ginger, citron, angelica—anything you like. In fact, there is endless scope for an original mind."

I took possession of one of the plates, and set to work to try my skill. The result was a very satisfactory array of quaintly-shaped sweets, pink and white, set out on a baking-sheet, which had been spread with clean white paper.

They were simply hardened in front of a bright fire, and then were ready. They were very like French fondants in taste, and looked very tempting when piled up on a glass ice-plate and put upon the tea-table.

I thanked Miss Hanson very cordially for her instruction, and after a glance into the pantry to see how our confections looked, we took off our aprons and adjourned to the drawing-room, where I enjoyed a cup of unrivalled orange pekoe, and discussed muffins and the coming bazaar, in which latter we were both involved.

The next morning when, according to my friend's invitation, I went back to see the final result of our afternoon's labour, I found the cocoanut cut into neat squares, ready to be packed away in tin boxes, with a sheet of white paper between each layer. The cocoanut ice was delicious. It turned out quite hard, and the pink was a most delicate shade. It was cut into bars, and arranged on a fancy dish. Miss Hanson told me it should not be kept too long, or it would get too hard to eat with comfort. She presented me with a big slab, and all my family voted it far superior to any that can be bought.

The walnuts were quite ready for the glazing process, which Miss Hanson at once proceeded to show me.

She put half a pound of loaf sugar into an enamelled pan, with half a teacup of water and half a teaspoonful of cream of tartar.

This was boiled until quite thick. When it was ready each walnut was dipped into the caramel and then put on a buttered plate.

When they were cold and hard they were beautifully glazed, and on the plate being set for a minute on the stove to heat, slipped off easily.

I have tried all Miss Hanson's recipes since, and always found them very successful and much appreciated by all my friends as a pleasant addition to afternoon tea.