



## Cheap Dinners.

THERE is a popular impression that every one is well fed in this country, that poverty never sinks low enough to prevent any one from enjoying three pretty good meals every day, excepting by their own will. But this is far from being the case. Were all food well prepared, were all waste food well distributed, and did all poor women and those who supply the wants of the poor know how to put material to its most profitable use, all would, indeed, be well fed, but this is a condition as little likely to be realized as the millennium. In the meantime it will not hurt any housekeeper to inquire if she is doing her best to give nourishing food to her household within her limits, and to the extent of her possibilities; in nine cases out of ten she will discover that improvement might be made.

When a number of intelligent ladies in New York wished to provide dinners at a very low rate for the families of a squalid neighborhood, who does any one suppose they went to for advice as to how to get the most and best soup out of a dollar's worth of material? Why, Delmonico. Yes, they wisely went to the great caterer, the proprietor of what is supposed to be the most expensive hotel and restaurant in the City of New York, for counsel and direction, and they received kindly aid and information that was of inestimable value to them. They were told how to make a soup for a dollar that would feed thirty-five persons; how to make puddings, that for the same sum would add an excellent pudding to the soup for the same number. The idea was to furnish a dinner of soup and pudding for five cents, and it was found by experience that it could be done, and pay all the cost of material and labor, except that of distribution and rent.

The soup is composed of bones, and soup pieces of meat boiled gently in a copper for six hours, the scum carefully removed as it rises, and an abundance of chopped vegetables—leeks, carrots, parsnips, outside leaves of lettuce, celery tops, and cabbage—put in, and cooked long, until it becomes a part of the concoction. Pea soup and bean soup are made with bone stock, and all day cooking, with pork to flavor; and mutton broth, with the shank ends of legs of mutton, to which a beef or veal bone may be added, and rice or tomatoes, in place of the varied list of vegetables given above.

It is generally found, however, that soup thickened with vegetables is preferred to any other, except pea soup. The empty, half-starved stomach wants something "fillin'" at the price, and nothing is found so satisfactory as soup and pudding, or soup and hot buckwheat cakes. The point is to have all well prepared, hot, and neatly served. The bones must be fresh and broken up, the vegetables clean, the cooking long and gentle, and every bit of good gotten out of the material and put into the product. Soups and stews are the most useful forms in which foods can be made and served at cheap dinners. Good stew costs more than good soup, requiring more meat and less vegetable; but a dish of stew for four cents, with bread for a penny, makes an excellent and hearty meal for five cents, and does not need to be re-enforced by pudding. The actual ingredients of the stew are coarse beef, or neck of mutton or lamb, potatoes and onions as the accompaniments of the beef, and rice or tomatoes, and a flavor of onion (with the tomato) for the mutton. The meat should be trimmed, the larger bones taken out, made into stock for use instead of water; and the flavoring tested before stew, in individual or collective quantity, is sent to table.

Puddings for cheap dinners are better liked when they are solid—a fact very necessary to be borne in mind, not only when working for the poor, but also when getting up dinners for hungry boys and girls. A bowl of good, nourishing soup, a piece of bread (no butter), and a plate of well-boiled "suet," currant, or apple dumpling, with hot, sweet sauce, would be infinitely better

than the meager tough steak, the cold, hard boiled bit of beef or pork, the soggy potato, and thin slab of stale pie or watery rice pudding, which is the average dinner. What are called "delicate" dishes are often more difficult of digestion than ordinary food. *Soufflés* are thrown away on a really empty stomach, plainly, but healthfully cooked eggs would be much more satisfactory. The puddings best liked by five-cent diners are the well-known English "jam roll," "suet" or "currant" dumpling, and apple pudding, the crust also made with chopped suet, the pudding boiled, and eaten with hot, liquid sauce.

The essentials in making suet puddings, or puddings in which suet is an ingredient, are to select fine, firm suet, free it from skin, mix it with enough of flour to chop freely, and reduce nearly to powder, and long boiling. Pastry made with suet may be boiled any length of time without becoming heavy, and almost replaces meat in the amount of strength it furnishes to the youthful energies or the scantily fed frame. In England they are employed by thrifty mothers of families to supplement a small supply of meat, or a dinner of broth or soup without meat, "meat" days not being supposed to require a solid dessert, or, perhaps, any dessert at all.

The proportion of suet to flour, or bread-crumbs, the latter being frequently used for "currant" dumplings or plum pudding, is a half-pint cup chopped and strained to a pint of either; the crumbs always from a stale loaf, needing a table-spoonful of flour to "bind" them, and both being the better for the addition of a well-beaten egg. Milk, or water, or milk and water, with a saltspoon of salt, will furnish the medium; and the flavor, supplemented by the sauce, which is a highly important part of boiled pudding. A teaspoonful of flour, blended with a table-spoonful of cold water, butter the size of a walnut, half a teacup of sugar, a little nutmeg or grated lemon peel, and a pint of boiling water. Pour the boiling water upon the other ingredients, after blending them, then pour all back into the saucepan, boil up once, and the sauce is ready.

Eggs and Fish may both be used to vary the invalid's bill of fare when solid food can be taken; but there are only three ways in which eggs can be properly cooked for a delicate and weakened stomach. The first of these is poaching, a simple method, but one rarely achieved with success. To poach eggs, have a shallow saucepan of water, *boiling*, into which drop the whole inside of the egg after breaking the shell. The yolk of it will form a central, globular mass, around which the white will set, and when this is done, or in two to three minutes, the egg should be removed with a skimmer, placed on the slice of hot, slightly buttered toast, waiting upon a warmed plate to receive it, dusted with salt, covered immediately with a hot saucer, and served. The white part of the egg should not be eaten, only the yolk; and the value of cooking it in this way is that the sulphuric fumes of the egg come in contact with the air and are dissipated, so that persons can eat eggs poached, who are unable to eat them cooked in any other way.

A very nice way to "soft" boil them is to place them in a saucepan of boiling water, and allow them to stand in it, where they *will not boil*, for seven minutes. They will then be deliciously cooked, soft but set, the yolk remaining in a liquid form, the white forming a jelly. In this condition the white part may be eaten unless forbidden. The third method is to boil fresh eggs for fifteen minutes, at the end of which time the yolk will be carried past the "hard," dark, waxy stage, and restored to a light color and to a powdery substance, which is very rich in flavor and greatly enjoyed by those who like "hard"-boiled eggs, while it is so easy of digestion that it may be taken with impunity by persons who can hardly digest any other food.

**Lyonnais Potatoes.**—Cut up a small onion and fry it in butter until a light tan color; add three boiled potatoes, sliced small; shake the pan occasionally to prevent burning, and when of a good brown color turn them out on a hot dish as you would an omelet. Strew over them a little salt and chopped parsley, and serve.

**Cold Mutton with Purée of Tomatoes.**—Reduce one or two quarts of fresh tomatoes to a pulp or purée, put half of it in a small buttered pan, slice the cold mutton and add it to the dish; cover with the remaining purée; strew over the top salt and pepper and a layer of bread crumbs; put in the oven long enough to lightly brown the top.