

FOOD FOR PEOPLE WITH LIMITED INCOMES.



PERHAPS it may be considered strange that when addressing girls I should speak about providing food for people with limited incomes. I think, however, that this is quite a legitimate subject for our consideration here. I have no doubt that the majority of the girls of our class have again and again been obliged to put aside all idea of preparing

certain dishes which they would otherwise have been glad to try because "mother could not spare the money for them." I feel fully justified, therefore, in attempting to give a few hints to girls who wish to help their mothers to furnish good, wholesome food for the family at a moderate cost.

We hear a great deal of talk nowadays about the desirability of living within one's income, and putting away for a rainy day, &c., &c. With all this I agree entirely. Not only do I think it right to save, but I regard it as absolute folly and madness not to do so. But I do not think that the saving should be effected out of the money which is necessary for purchasing a sufficiency of wholesome food for the family. I am not now advocating the purchase of luxuries in diet. I do not say that there should be so many courses at each meal, and that people should have what they fancy, whether it is in season or out of season, cheap or dear. But I say that if health, strength, and energy are to be maintained, there must be a sufficiency of good wholesome food; and that those who endeavour to "withhold more than is meet" from the butcher and the baker are only arranging to pay a little more to the doctor than there is any occasion for.

Of course there are people in the world who can order dinner without needing to think of its price. For everyone so circumstanced, however, there are hundreds and thousands who know what it is to heave a sigh for the cost of every dish they cook, and who spend their lives in the weary endeavour to make sixpence do the work of a shilling. And when, notwithstanding all the efforts made, the sixpence will not prove as elastic as could be desired, how often do these people try to make up any deficiency there may be by doing without necessary food! They brew a cup of tea and try to work on that, or, worse still, they take a good draught of beer and trust to the false strength thus obtained. I wonder how many hard-working women there are in England who have a cup of tea instead of dinner, and how many men and women both there are to whom beer has become a curse, and who never would have cared for it if they could have had a good well-cooked meal set before them every time they felt faint and weary?

But it is not of people who are in danger of thus yielding to temptation that I am now thinking; I purpose rather to address those who prepare meals as a matter of course, yet find the expense thereof a serious difficulty.

Writers on cookery and domestic economy are usually a little hard upon the English cook and housekeeper of the day. They make odious comparisons between her and her French sister, and say that all her failures arise from the fact that she will not give time

and trouble to the preparation of her dishes. Now I am gradually arriving at a different opinion from this. I am inclined to think that English women (mothers and mistresses of households) do the best they can, and that when they err it is through want of knowledge, not through idleness. More than this, it is my experience that they are most willing to receive ideas, and they will listen with eager interest to anyone who will show them what to do.

My sympathies flow out freely towards a woman who is trying to manage a house and bring up children on a limited income. The difficulties she has to contend with are so manifold, and the appreciation of her work is so limited. It is an aggravation of her trials that she should continually have held up to her for imitation the traditional French woman who "regales her family with a great variety of dishes made from one small bone with a little mace and lemon-juice," and that she should be told that it is only idleness and ignorance which keep her from following this brilliant example. It may be that all the time the English wife and mother is working early and late; she has an inefficient maid to look after; the great foe, dirt, to keep under; four or five small children to make, mend, and arrange for; and an anxious, careworn husband to cheer and inspire. How can she keep one eye continually on that much-talked-of saucepan, which is to simmer away without ever stopping, to the delight of theorists and dreamers?

If I could obtain a hearing from the much-enduring one I would say—Take heart, my friend. Let those who do not understand what work like yours is, talk. If only you are doing your duty bravely, you furnish, for those who can understand it, a sublime spectacle. It is only when looked at from a distance that sublimity appears splendid. When we come near, we generally find that it is but a harmonious collection of uninteresting details. Listen to what one of the greatest writers of the century says:—"The common callings of the mass of men are the means by which mankind gets the mastery of the world. Let us do our duty in the kitchen, the market, the street, the home, as faithfully as if we stood in the front rank of some great battle, and knew that victory for mankind depended on our bravery, strength, and skill. Then the humblest of us will be serving in that great army which achieves the welfare of humanity!"

You have, at least, one little piece of consolation—your toil will not last for ever. Your daughters are growing up around you, and they appreciate the situation. They are learning to cook and to sew, and are not only willing, but anxious to take a part of the household burden upon their strong young shoulders. Let me talk matters over with them, therefore, and see if I cannot help them by giving them the benefit of my experience, and (returning to the idea with which I started) tell them of a few homely, easily-prepared, yet wholesome dishes, which may be procured at a moderate cost.

The chief difficulty which housekeepers with limited incomes have to contend with is the butcher's bill. Do not imagine that I am about to advocate vegetarianism when I say that we place too high a value on butcher's meat alone. Other foods which cost very much less are quite as valuable. Milk, for example, contains everything which the body requires; flour, oatmeal, ground rice, peas, beans, lentils, haricot beans, furnish food both excellent and nutritious. Mrs. Buckton, in her little book entitled "Health in the House," puts the facts about these foods in a very striking way when she says: "Flour, oatmeal, ground rice, peas—one pound of any of these vegetable flesh-formers will give a man as much strength as three pounds of lean beef, or three pounds of

veal, or three pounds of ham boiled, or nine bottles of Bass's pale ale, or six bottles of Guinness's stout—tenpence per bottle."

How many housekeepers have realised what a statement like this means? The substances here mentioned are very cheap and very easily cooked; almost everyone knows how to prepare them, yet though they are so valuable they are comparatively much neglected. Let us bear them in mind, and when we feel inclined to complain of the cost of food, make more use of these materials than we have been accustomed to do.

It is not likely, however, nor to my thinking is it desirable, that our appreciation of lentils and peas should lead to our disregarding beef and mutton. John Bull loves a joint, and long may his children enjoy one in perfection! We all know that to him the joint, *par excellence*, is a sirloin of beef. But this superlative dish costs a shilling a pound, and its purchase is not compatible with the resources of a limited income. What substitutes then can we suggest for it?

Almost instinctively, the first dish which is mentioned is beef-steak pudding. This I consider a most profitable and economical dish. It is wholesome, nourishing, and satisfying. A pudding made with a pound and a half of steak and half a pound of bullock's kidney will be sufficient for half a dozen persons, and there will be plenty of gravy, which the children like. The following is an excellent recipe:—

Beefsteak Pudding.—Make some stiff paste with a pound of flour, 6 oz. of finely-chopped suet, a little salt, a small teaspoonful of baking-powder, and water. Take 1½ lb. of bullock or chuck steak and half a pound of kidney. A little beef skirt may also be used with advantage; it helps to make the gravy good. Remove the skin, cut the meat into small pieces, and roll each one in a mixture of a tablespoonful of flour, a teaspoonful of salt, and a teaspoonful of pepper. Take one-third of the quantity of pastry for the lid, and roll the rest out to a round shape twice the size of the top of the pudding basin. Grease the inside of the basin with dripping. This can be done most effectually and quickly with the fingers, and when the hands are perfectly clean it is not objectionable.

Line the basin with the paste, put in the pieces of meat, and pour on a small teacupful of water or good gravy. Wet the edges of the pastry, roll out the piece that was left for the cover, then lay it on the top and press the edges well together. Dredge flour over the top, wring the cloth out of hot water, dredge it also with flour, tie it on tightly by passing a string round the rim of the basin, turn the corners of the cloth over and tie them together. Put the pudding into a pan of boiling water, being careful that it is covered entirely, and keep it boiling with the lid on for 3½ or 4 hours. If it is necessary to add more water, put it in boiling. When done, let the pudding stand a minute or two, or else dip the bottom of the basin in cold water for a quarter of a minute, to keep the pastry from bursting. Remove the cloth, have ready a hot dish, put it on the top of the pudding, reverse it gently, and lift the basin off carefully. If liked, an onion boiled and minced may be added for the sake of the flavour. Indeed, all sorts of improvements may be introduced. A few oysters or mushrooms, or a grouse or partridge, may be added, or rump steak instead of buttock steak may be employed, but in these cases the pudding will not be so economical as if the above instructions are followed.

If any of this pudding is left, and it is required for the next day, the following is the best way of warming it. Put it into a greased basin and lay a plate on the top. Put it in a pan with boiling water to come half-way up the basin, and let it boil for about an hour, or

till it is hot through. Serve it with gravy in a boat.

Meat puddings and pies are such a valuable resource for housekeepers of limited income that all sorts of variations have been made. Here is an excellent one:—

Potato Pie made with Neck of Mutton.—Take $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of the middle of the neck of mutton, the portion which lies between the scrag and the fatty part. Cut this, bones and all, into pieces of about one inch square. Place these in a pie-dish with plenty of thinly-sliced potatoes, putting first a layer of meat, then one of potatoes, then another layer of meat, and plenty of potatoes at the top. Add a seasoning of salt and pepper, and fill the dish with milk. Lay a fairly-thick suet crust over all, and bake for about an hour and a half.

The lady who first gave me this recipe, and who is herself an excellent cook, told me that her servants liked this pie as much as they liked sirloin of beef. I must say that I found difficulty in believing this statement, but, nevertheless, potato pie thus made is a very appetising dish.

Giblet Pie with Apples is an old-fashioned but inexpensive and savoury dish. Giblets may frequently be bought at the poultryman's for two or three pence. To make it, throw the head away and wash the giblets several times in lukewarm water. Take the gall from the liver, skin the gizzard and neck, and divide each into three pieces. There is a sort of pipe leading from one side

of the gizzard to the other, and this must be cut from end to end. Put the legs and claws into boiling water to loosen the skin, and draw this off entirely and divide the heart and liver into halves. Put the giblets into a saucepan with cold water to cover them; let the water boil, then throw it away. Pour on fresh cold water, add two onions minced, and a sprinkling of pepper, and stew gently for about an hour and a half till the meat is tender. It is an advantage to stew the gizzard and feet a little longer than the other giblets. Add salt to taste and leave the giblets in the liquor all night. The next day prepare apples as for a pie, and fill a dish with alternate layers of giblets and apples, pouring gravy over all. Cover the pie with pastry in the usual way, and bake slowly for about an hour and a half. This pie may be served hot for dinner or cold for breakfast.

An excellent savoury dinner dish may be made from giblets stewed with vegetables. The following is the recipe:—

Stewed Giblets.—Prepare the giblets as in the last recipe. When thoroughly cleansed, dry them and roll them in flour. Put the gizzards and feet into a stewpan with half a pint of water and six peppercorns. Stew gently for three-quarters of an hour, then add the rest of the giblets, another pint of water, a bunch of parsley, a sprig of thyme, a bay leaf, and the red part of a large carrot scraped to pulp. Stew an hour and a half longer, take out the herbs, and serve the giblets on a hot dish with the gravy poured over them and toasted sippets round.

Irish Stew is another economical dish. I need not describe how this is made, for I think everyone knows it. It is not everyone who thinks of making the stew of the remains of a joint, that is to say of the bone when nearly all the meat has been taken from it. Cut the meat off in as neat pieces as may be, fat and lean together. Break up the bone and put it with the meat, then put all into a saucepan with plenty of sliced onion, twice as much raw potato peeled and sliced, and cold water or stock to cover. Simmer all gently for two or three hours, season liberally with pepper and salt, and serve in a soup tureen. If necessary, a little flour may be added to thicken the stew, but it is probable that this will not be required.

Liver and bacon are strongly recommended by some as economical food. I cannot say that it is a favourite dish with me; it is so rich and indigestible, though it is certainly savoury and appetising. Far better to my mind is haricot beef or mutton. To prepare this, soak a cupful of haricot beans overnight, then the next day throw into a saucepan of cold water, add a small piece of dripping, and boil gently for a couple of hours or till tender. Procure from the butcher one pound of "pieces" of meat, beef or mutton. These consist of cuttings and scraps from joints. They may be bought for from 6d. to 8d. per pound. Fry them in a little dripping till lightly browned; take them up, and fry very gently an onion cut into rings. Put meat and onion in a clean saucepan with a carrot and turnip cut into pieces, and pour over all a pint of water which has been mixed smoothly with a tablespoonful of flour, pepper, and salt. Stir the stew till it boils, skim it, draw it back, and simmer gently for an hour. Lay the slices of meat in a circle on a hot dish, arrange the vegetables in the centre, and pour the gravy over all. Draw the water from the beans, and serve these separately, or if preferred put them into the stew. This is an exceedingly nourishing dish. If liked, small suet dumplings may be laid round the meat; or lentils may be substituted for the beans, and served in a tureen. Suet dumplings are made with suet, flour, salt, and water, mixed to a stiff paste, formed into small balls, dropped into boiling water, and boiled quickly till done. The water in which the haricot beans are boiled must be saved for soup.

A usual and excellent way of making meat "go" further is to serve pudding with it. Yorkshire pudding and suet pudding are very good eaten with meat and gravy, and their use is decidedly economical.

One very important means of saving expense in the purchase of food is to avoid buying too much of anything. A housekeeper who has to provide day after day for the same people should learn to calculate how much they will require, and then purchase that weight and no more. When small portions are left from a meal they are in danger of being wasted, or they have to be warmed up, and *rechauffés* are never so satisfactory as is meat freshly-cooked.

Above all things, also, the housekeeper who desires to be economical should avoid waste of every kind. This is a large subject, and in English households with English servants brought up as they are, it is very much easier to talk about avoiding waste than to do it. Nevertheless, the girl who will energetically and perseveringly set to work in this direction may very soon save in small things as much as will make all the difference between an ample sufficiency of provision and stint.



FIG. 1.

PHILLIS BROWN.