

HOME MADE PICKLES.



HOWEVER I am about to describe how pickles should be made, I by no means wish it to be understood that I am an advocate for the use of pickles. I know quite well that there are a great many people who would be made ill if they were to eat anything of the sort. Let these good folks therefore leave them alone. There are others whom these relishes do not seem to affect injuriously, and who are very partial to them. I know no reason why these fortunate individuals should not have them. This I know, however, that whether you and I approve or not, pickles will be eaten, and therefore it is well that cooks should know how to prepare them, so as to render them as little harmful as possible.

I do not believe that, so far as economy alone is concerned, much is gained by making pickles at home. I have again and again calculated the cost, and I have found that when good materials had been procured, the best vinegar and spices had been bought, no allowance at all being made for the trouble, home made pickles cost a halfpenny or a penny more than pickles of the same pretensions could have been bought ready made. Do you think this has made me out of love with home made pickles?—Not at all; it has made me rather more in favour of them than I was before. For, if the manufacturer who has to pay for labour, materials, and advertising, and to make a profit into the bargain, can sell his productions at the price for which I can simply buy the materials, is it not probable that his article is not quite so excellent as mine? Of course he buys in quantities and therefore buys to advantage, but I do not think this fact quite accounts for the difference.

A fine appearance in pickles is not to be desired. When these preparations look bright, sparkling, and clear, the probability is that the vinegar has been boiled in a metal vessel, and this by itself would be sufficient to render the article unwholesome. And herein the special advantage of making pickles at home consists. You may at any rate feel certain about the quality of the work of your own hands. I once heard an old cook say, "I know what sheep's head is, and unless I have cleaned it myself, I will never touch it." This is the sort of feeling we have about pickles; we know what they may be; if we have made them ourselves we know what they are; not particularly digestible perhaps, but at least not partly poisonous.

Having therefore decided after due consideration that we will make our pickles at home, what points have we to be careful about? Really very few. Like a good many other things, pickling is very easy when once you understand all about it. Only be careful to procure good vegetables in perfect condition, not over ripe, and the best vinegar; to use an enamelled saucepan or a stone jar for heating the latter, avoiding altogether metal vessels of every kind; to do whatever lifting there may be with a wooden spoon, to put the pickles when made into small stone or glass jars, ("small," because the quality of the pickle deteriorates after the jar has once been opened, and "glass," because the vinegar acts dangerously upon the glaze surface of earthenware;) and be exceedingly careful to keep the pickle always entirely covered with vinegar, and to store it in a dry place, damp being especially injurious to all kinds of

pickles. Now follow the recipes I am about to give, and I do not think you will have any difficulty about the matter.

The best time for preparations of this sort is for the most part from the middle of July to the middle of August. There are variations depending upon the seasons and the climate, but the period named is the one in which the good housekeeper is on the alert and looking out for suitable vegetables for pickling. In making these purchases she should be particularly careful to avoid everything that is overgrown, running to seed, or in the slightest degree withered. Unless this point is attended to, there is little likelihood that the pickles will prove satisfactory.

Red Cabbage is one of the most wholesome, as it is one of the commonest of pickles. Old housekeepers say that the cabbage should not be taken until the frost has touched it. I do not agree with this. If the cabbage is firm and sound and freshly cut, excellent pickle may be made of it without any consideration of frost. Remove the outer leaves from the vegetable and slice it across as thinly and evenly as possible. Put it into a dish or bowl and sprinkle it plentifully with powdered salt. Let it lie for forty-eight hours, then squeeze the salt as thoroughly as possible from it, and three parts fill jars or glasses with it. Intermix with each pound of cabbage 12 peppercorns and one bay leaf, or if preferred an ounce of black peppercorns and an ounce of whole ginger may be used. Fill up the jars with good vinegar to cover the cabbage entirely, tie down with bladder, and keep in a cool place. The excellence of the colour in this pickle depends upon the thoroughness with which the salt liquor is squeezed out. Some cooks add a few slices of half-boiled beetroot to it in order to improve the appearance.

Onions.—The smaller the onions are the better for this purpose. What are called Reading onions or silver button onions are usually preferred, and they are at their best just after they are harvested. Peel them and be careful not to cut the bulb, and throw them into an equal measure of boiling vinegar, to each quart of which two teaspoonfuls of salt and an ounce of whole white pepper have been added. Simmer them till they look clear, which will be in three or four minutes. Put them into jars, pour the pickle over them, and when they are quite cold tie them down in the usual way. Eschalots may be pickled in the same way, but they will not need to simmer more than a couple of minutes in the vinegar. They are more expensive and also more delicate in flavour than onions.

Cauliflowers.—Divide some sound white cauliflowers into small sprigs of equal size. Throw these as they are broken off into cold water to preserve the colour. Drain them, throw them at once into a stewpan of boiling water which has been lightly salted, and boil for four minutes. Drain them once more, turn them into a bowl, and pour on as much boiling vinegar as will entirely cover them. Lay a plate or dish upon the bowl and let the sprigs lie in the pickle until the next day. Drain again and put the cauliflowers into glasses or stone jars; boil the vinegar with a teaspoonful of salt for each quart. When partially cool, fill up the jars and tie down in the usual way.

Gherkins.—Choose gherkins of equal size, about two inches long, and be careful that they have been gathered on a dry day, and before the frost has touched them. Take off the blossoms, put them into a stone jar, and pour over them brine which has been made by boiling three-quarters of a pound of salt with two quarts of water for one minute, then allowed to go cold. Throw a cloth over the jar and leave it till the next day. Drain the gherkins, put them into a clean jar, and pour over them

boiling vinegar which will more than cover them, and which has been boiled for five minutes with half an ounce of salt, half an ounce of whole ginger, and half an ounce of black peppercorns to each pint of liquid. Again throw a cloth over the jar and leave the gherkins another day. Drain off and boil the vinegar once more, let the pickle stand for four days, at the end of which time the gherkins may be put into jars, and the vinegar after being boiled and partially cooled may be poured over them, to cover them entirely. Tie down with bladder or wash-leather and store in the usual way. When bladder has been used for tying down pickles, it is a good plan to damp it each time a jar is opened before putting it on again.

Cucumbers.—Peel the cucumbers, cut them lengthwise into quarters, remove the seeds and divide the quarters into slices half an inch thick. Put the cucumber into a bowl in layers, and sprinkle powdered salt plentifully over each layer, shaking it occasionally, and let it lie for eight hours. At the end of this time drain away the brine, put the cucumber into jars with some whole pepper and one or two bay leaves. Fill the jars with vinegar which has been boiled and allowed to go cold, cork the jars securely, and tie bladder over the corks.

India Pickle.—This pickle is particularly convenient for those who have a garden, and who are in the habit of receiving vegetables in quantities which they cannot immediately use, because additions can be made to it of almost every sort and at any time as the ingredients come into season. Cauliflowers, white cabbage, French beans, cucumbers, young and old carrots, onions large and small, beetroot, radishes from which the green part has been cut away, radish pods, nasturtium seeds, and small green apples may all be employed for the purpose. Prepare the vegetables which require it, before using them; that is, divide the cauliflower into small pieces, slice the cabbage as thinly as possible, peel small onions and slice large ones, slice also beetroot, cucumbers and apples; in short, act as common sense dictates in this matter. Put the prepared vegetables into a stewpan with brine which is sufficiently strong to bear an egg. Let it simmer for one minute, then drain and dry perfectly. Make pickle to cover the vegetables entirely as follows:

Put two quarts of good vinegar with 1 oz. of bruised ginger, 1 oz. black peppercorns, 1 oz. Jamaica pepper, 1 oz. cloves, and 1 oz. peeled garlic (if liked). Boil the vinegar and spices gently for five minutes. Mix an ounce of mustard, an ounce of turmeric and half a teaspoonful of cayenne smoothly with a little cold vinegar, stir the mixture into the hot vinegar and pour the whole boiling upon the dried vegetables. When these have soaked all the vinegar add more. Before vegetables are added to this pickle they should be prepared, simmered in brine, and dried as in the first instance. India pickle will improve with keeping, and should by rights be kept for twelve months before using.

Nasturtium Seeds.—Nasturtiums are very often found in English gardens. The seeds if gathered when small and pickled form an excellent substitute for capers, so constantly required in making sauce. Put the seeds as they are gathered into a jar, cover them with vinegar which has been boiled with salt (a handful to a quart), and allowed to go cold. When the jar is full, cork it down, tie bladder over the cork and store. Unless the seeds are kept well covered with vinegar they will be spoilt.

Radish Pods may be pickled like nasturtium seeds.

Walnuts.—Choose green walnuts which have been gathered before the shell has begun to form. If the nuts can be pierced with a

strong needle they are in good condition for the purpose required. Make brine to cover them by boiling six ounces of salt in each quart of water needed, and carefully clear away the scum as it rises. When cold put in the walnuts and stir them night and morning with a stick. Change the brine at the end of six days and let them remain six days longer, or if time is a consideration let the walnuts lie in brine for nine days and change the brine three times during that period. When they have been salted sufficiently drain them in a colander, and then spread them on a dish and lay them in the open air until they turn black, which they will do in about twelve hours. Pour over them enough hot vinegar (which has been boiled with spices for five or six minutes) to cover them; and divide the spices equally amongst the walnuts. When quite cold, tie down securely and store in a dry place. The pickle may be made by boiling two quarts of vinegar with a teaspoonful of salt, two ounces of black pepper, three ounces of bruised ginger, three blades of mace, six cloves stuck in three onions and an ounce of mustard seed. This pickle should be kept for six months before using; it will improve with keeping.

Small and even sized capsicums, also barberries, are very good when pickled according to the recipe given for nasturtium seeds. These brightly-coloured vegetables are very useful for garnishing. The barberries should be gathered before they are quite ripe, and should be put with the stalks into pickle, the leaves having been previously removed.

There is only one more recipe which I should like to give. The pickle made from it is so excellent, and I believe so uncommon, that I hope some of the girls who belong to our cookery class will be induced to try it this season. It was given to me by an English lady who was brought up in Germany; I have made it several times, and I do not remember having met with more than two people who, on tasting it, have not been enthusiastic in their appreciation of it. Here it is.

Sour Plums.—Take three pounds of what are called in Germany Zwetschen (a long, blue autumn plum, the nearest approach to which procurable in England is called late damson). Rub off the bloom, prick the plums with a needle, and cut the stalks short. Take as much vinegar as will cover, measure it, and for each pint allow a pound and a half of sugar, three (the original recipe said "a few") blades of mace, one stick ("a few sticks") of cinnamon, and half a teaspoonful ("a little") of allspice. Boil the vinegar with the spices, pour it through a strainer over the plums, and let them stand for twenty-four hours. The next day boil the vinegar and pour it over the fruit, and afterwards put it on the fire with the plums to simmer for a few minutes. Cover close down whilst hot. These sour plums may be used with roast mutton or with hare instead of red currant jelly. Strictly speaking, they are more suited for purposes of this kind than they are for eating with cold meat.

PHILLIS BROWNE.



FEMALE CLERKSHIPS IN THE POST OFFICE.



HE recently expressed intention of the Postmaster General to extend the employment of female clerks in the Savings Bank Department of the General Post Office has evoked some criticism as to the wisdom of the policy which was initiated by Lord John Manners. The feeling displayed by some of the critics can only be compared to that which was shown by some members of the

medical profession when it was first proposed to allow ladies to qualify as medical practitioners. To judge by the opinions expressed and the fears which are entertained in some quarters, one might suppose that to be of the gentler sex was a disqualification for all employment requiring an ordinary amount of common sense. One journal devoted to the interests of the Civil Service states that when Female Clerks were first appointed to the Savings Bank Department, "The susceptibilities of the male clerks were soothed by official assurances that it was only intended to employ them on mechanical work," and complains that this understanding was not adhered to, and that important work in this Department has since been entrusted to females. We are unable to see on what ground females should only be entrusted with mechanical duties, unless it be the exploded idea that they are incapable of performing higher work. We believe that the steps taken by the Postmaster-General will meet with general approval, and that the verdict of the public would be in favour of throwing open some of the posts in other offices also to the competition of ladies, where a similar experiment might be tried with an equal prospect of success.

A short account of the progress of the movement since its introduction, and the existing regulations as to appointments, will be of interest to many of our readers. In the early part of 1881, the Postmaster-General determined, with the assent of the Lords of the Treasury, to throw open these appointments in the Savings Bank Department to public competition. Previously to this date, for all female appointments in the Post Office, only candidates were admitted to compete who had been "nominated" by the Postmaster-General, and such nomination could only be obtained by those candidates who possessed influence, direct or indirect, in the right quarter. Under this system of limited competition, only a few candidates were allowed to compete for each post, and the ordeal was thus less difficult, and reserved only for favoured competitors. For clerkships in the Savings Bank Department, however, the competition is open to all subjects of Her Majesty who comply with the following conditions:—(a) that their age on the first day of the competitive examination is not less than 18 nor more than 20 years; (b) that they are unmarried or widows; (c) that they are duly qualified in respect of health and character; and (d) that they have passed a preliminary test examination.

The preliminary examination is intended to ascertain that the candidate possesses a fair knowledge of Handwriting, Spelling, and Arithmetic (including Vulgar and Decimal Fractions). For the convenience of candidates, it is usually held in London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Hull, Leeds, Birmingham, Norwich, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Swansea, Belfast, and Aberdeen. Before candidates can be admitted to this examination, applications must be made to the Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W.; by whom an order for admission is forwarded. In due course, the candidate is informed whether she has successfully passed the first examination; and full instructions are then given to those who are admitted to the severer contest. That the preliminary examination is not mere child's play to all, it may be mentioned that at the first open competition held in Sept. 1881, out of 747 candidates, 525, or 70 per cent., failed to pass this test, the remaining 222 competing for the 76 appointments which were to be made.

The competitive examinations are held only at London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. The subjects of examination and marks allowed for each are as follows:—Arithmetic, 150; Compound Addition, 50; Orthography, 200; English Composition, 100; Geography, 150; and English History, 150. In this examination, no matter how high the average excellence of the candidates may be, only the best of them can be successful. Since the examination in September, 1881, two other competitions have been held, one in May and June last, for 35 vacancies, and another on October last for 40 vacancies. It is probable that another examination will be held very shortly. A fee of 1s. is charged to each candidate attending the preliminary examination, and 1s. 6d. to each candidate attending the competitive examination.

The salary of a female clerk on appointment to the Savings Bank Department is £65 per annum, rising by £3 per annum to £80. Promotion to vacancies of a higher class depends on merit. The following statement (which is taken from the Parliamentary Estimates for the current year) shows the proportion of higher appointments:—

- 1 Superintendent. Salary £180, rising to £300.
- 48 Principal Clerks. Salary £120, rising to £170.
- 17 First Class Clerks. Salary £85, rising to £110.
- 138 Second Class Clerks. Salary £65, rising to £80.

Every effort appears to be made by the Post-office authorities to provide proper accommodation for the ladies in their employment, and the fact that it is intended shortly to increase their number, shows that the Government are satisfied with the success of the experiment, and that the ladies employed have made good their claim to the possession of the requisite ability. The authorities of King's College have made arrangements for the preparation of young ladies desirous of competing for these vacancies. The evening class which is carried on with this object is held in a large airy room, with a separate entrance and cloak-room, the latter being in the charge of a female attendant; and the number of students from this College who have been successful in the examinations shows that the care bestowed upon them by the authorities has not been thrown away.

We must not omit to mention one important regulation which is not referred to above, viz., that any female clerk who marries is required to resign her appointment.