

For more than five hundred years the old oak at Addlestone has stood the storms of many a season of tempest and the drought of many a burning summer, but neither fierce winds, nor scorching sun, nor chilling frost have been able to quench its vitality—it stands as a true type of the Gospel of Christ; and as we look upon the tree in its greenness and age we may learn a lesson of faith and hope.

The old oak at Addlestone may tell us, too, how in times past of doubt and peril, when gross darkness covered the people, or a cold formalism crushed the life out of religion, it was found that the simple preaching of the sin and loss of man, and of the infinite love of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, won its way to the hearts of the people with instant conviction of its truth. Faith was to them but as the natural putting forth of the tendrils of the fallen creeping-plant, as soon as it is directed to its true support; and men believed with their whole heart and soul and gave themselves to the Lord, in spite of all that might be urged against the truth of Christianity or the attacks of hostile philosophers.

ITALIAN COOKERY.



Fear that the most partial of our friends could not yield us the palm in matters of the kitchen—neither in skill nor economy. The French are, by unanimous consent, supreme in both respects, and the Italians certainly rank second, having two invaluable points in common with them—ingenuity at making a good deal out of very little, and a talent—innate one might really say—for frying. They will make a crisp, dry (in the sense of not greasy) *frittura* or *frittata* out of anything, and all, young or old, male or female, trained or untrained can do it. That terrible person, “a maid of all work,” has no terrors for us in Italy, for, whatever her other shortcomings may be—and they will not be many—she will put before one a palatable meal. Indeed, much could be said in praise of the Italian serving class; even the least competent invariably have good manners, are good-natured and sympathetic. They force one to take them more as friends than servants, yet very rarely would one meet with forwardness or perversity.

The men too, of all callings, have a natural aptitude for cooking. Once the writer and her sister were left for a while to the tender mercies of an individual who here would be called a “washing man”—one who carries the linen to and from a laundry—in this instance his wife’s. His cookery was so excellent that curiosity as well as gratitude led us to ask him whether he

had ever been a cook. It proved that he had never had a lesson, yet his skill was well known, and more than once he had been offered a cook’s place at a hotel. In Italy the class who keep no servants do not seem to portion out the work of the household as it comes quite naturally to us to do. No doubt the men there, as elsewhere, are usually the bread-winners outside, and the women attend to the work indoors; but in their spare hours the males are nothing loth to do whatever comes to hand, let it be cooking, cleaning, washing, or looking after the babies. In this last occupation they excel, and on the Sundays and *fiesta* days it is quite the exception to see the wife carrying the baby or even leading young children by the hand. Indeed in all classes *babbo* (papa) is far oftener on the lips of the little ones than mamma.

The *frittata* and *frittura* above alluded to are generally cooked in oil, butter and lard being very sparingly used in Italian cookery. It also frequently substitutes butter in pastry—not sweet pastry—but for patties or pies, and particularly for crust for frying. A table-spoonful, or even a little less, of olive oil rubbed in to a half pound of flour will make a very excellent crust, and in these days of expensive butter it is an idea worth imitating. Our dislike to the notion, particularly for frying purposes, is in truth only prejudice. If the oil is sweet and the fry properly drained, even a delicate palate would find it difficult to distinguish the difference of flavour. Omelets—also called *frittate*—are much eaten, and what we should call an economical omelet, in the hands of a skilful frier, is an invaluable aid to any meal, and can be prepared in a few minutes. Two eggs are sufficient—one even will do, the rest is made of flour, a little milk, and the requisite flavouring of chopped parsley or any other herb, or minced ham if at hand. Frequently artichokes cut in six pieces, with the choke removed, are fried in with the egg mixture and make a very nice dish.

Perhaps no one—unless, indeed, she has mixed a good deal with the poor of various countries—can quite realise of what inestimable value an aptitude and general intelligence for cooking, or a little cultivation in the art is. It conduces to a wholesome, even refined taste among a set who in England would be boors with a coarse taste and no palate to speak of. And it does more than that: the difference of good or ill cooking to the wearied bread-winner helps to make or mar the peace of many a household; and no woman, whatever her class, whatever her calling, should forget how much is, in this respect, in her hands.

The institution in a saving household called “hot pot” is nearly unknown in Italy. The frying-pan takes the place of the “pot,” and pieces of meat, bones, cold vegetables, slices of stale bread, everything that there may be, fried all together make a dish that generally ends the day and which few would find unsavoury. Poultry is also fried sometimes, the chicken being of course limbed and the body cut in suitable sized pieces. In the Italian markets one can buy half a chicken or even one piece, a leg or a wing, if one wishes. In many parts of Italy, however, the fowls are of a poor quality. Fish one does not see in great quantities, nor is it cheap, with the exception of red mullets, which one gets—usually stewed—to satiety. Soups are made out of everything and nothing, and fish soup (the recipe, with others, will be given at the end) is a favourite one.

Minestra or *zuppa* (soup) is quite a national taste, and everyone—labouring classes included—will begin their dinner, and if possible their supper too, with a basin of *zuppa* or *brodo* (broth). Clear soup is very rare; they always put in vegetables or some sort of *pasta*. This word includes rice, macaroni,

vermicelli, and a score of other things of that class, varying in name according to shape, such as *stelle* (stars), alphabets, &c.

Among the nobility and at all the first-rate hotels and restaurants (*trattorie*), French cookery is much adopted, and, strange to say, even a few thoroughly English dishes are much in fashion, such as beef-steak (bifstecka, as they Italianise it) and roast-bif, cooked more or less as we like it, underdone.

The national food, however, varies in the different parts of the country. In Naples and in the South generally, macaroni forms part of almost every mid-day meal, and is largely eaten by the poor. In the Venetian States *polenta* takes its place. This is a kind of porridge, rather thicker in consistency, made from the flour of the Indian corn (*gran Turco*). It should be stiff enough to turn out, which is usually done, on a wooden platter. They do not touch it with a knife, but divide it in slices by a thread of strong cotton. It is very cheap indeed, and more eaten by the labouring than the wealthier classes, and where an English labourer would take a hunch of bread-and-cheese a Venetian one would take slices of *polenta*. In the Apennine districts, chestnut-flour, usually made into large, flat cakes, is almost the sole food of the peasants; and in Florence and higher north beans (*fagioli*), are more partaken of by far than *polenta* or even macaroni. They boil them in, or thicken soup with them, they eat them as a vegetable, or dress them as a salad. Chopped parsley is generally added to them when dressed for salad, and eaten with fried fish. At the corners of the streets people can buy a penny-worth of beans—strictly, ten centimes—already cooked, as one can buy chestnuts here, and it is no mean allowance. Meat is not very cheap, and a pound of fish costs the same as a pound of meat. If one does not pay ready money, the custom with the butcher is to count up at the end of the time how many pounds of meat of all prices he has sent, and then he strikes the average. This would vary, according to the locality, from sixty to ninety centimes, but it must be borne in mind that an Italian pound’s weight is only twelve ounces. Almost everything is sold by the kilogram (*chilo*) as they say, which is thirty-six ounces or three pounds.

Puddings seldom form part of an Italian dinner; fruit, which is cheap and plentiful, almost entirely takes their place. The word even is not in their language; *dolce* (sweet), and *pasticciera* (pastry), do duty for every sort of pudding.

Fruit is not so good as it is here; the very best generally finds its way to other markets, also much of it grows with little aid excepting Nature’s own. They have all the varieties, known in England and a few more. Japanese medlars, a small yellow fruit looking something like our yellow plums, but having the stones of the medlar, is a very refreshing fruit; and in their season, which is often prolonged to the end of August, mountain strawberries are most abundant, and preferred to the garden ones. Their most important produce are grapes, figs, and chestnuts. In the Apennine districts there are miles upon miles of Spanish chestnut woods. In a good year they are sufficiently abundant that a considerable quantity can be stored to help until the next harvest of them. They are made into flour, which in its turn is made into cakes, more than equal to bread in nutritive powers. The general aspect of the inhabitants—whose chief sustenance it is—and more especially the appearance of the girls, is a guarantee of the excellence of this food. The water there too is most pure, and keeps them in good health. People live to a great age there, and a ridiculous story to exemplify this fact is told, of how once an old man verging upon three-score and ten was found crying by the way—

side, and, on being asked what ailed him, answered that his father had scolded him. The young and middle-aged men, however, do not as a rule look as healthy as the women, indeed many of them are miserable-looking and shattered in health. The reason is that with the exception of the labour that the chestnuts bring there is little to do, and the men have to seek work elsewhere. They are in their own mountain homes little more than three months, the remaining time is spent in the quarries or in the *maremmi* (the unhealthy, marshy land of Italy), where the poor fellows almost invariably contract intermittent fever.

Even in the parts where food is more plentiful and more varied, the Italian working classes eat little. Wages are low and the climate does not require high nutrition. Meat is by no means eaten daily, and they seem to thrive very well upon about two ounces twice a week. So long as they have their beloved *zuppa*, two pennyworth of red wine, a hunch of bread and a helping of *fagioli*, *macaroni*, or *polenta* they need scarcely anything more. This would be their mid-day and practically only meal. Coffee in the morning, for those who can afford it, and a little bread and fruit for supper would be an average day of meals. In the agricultural districts, however, they do not fare so well. The misery there is very great. A franc (tenpence) a day for the men and an occasional *soldo* (sous) for the women and children are the average earnings of a family.

Many of the Italian dishes are quite appreciated by us foreigners, but there is nevertheless much in their cookery, besides the free use of olive oil, which does not seem to suit the English taste. For instance, sauces are too plentifully used and almost take the place of gravy. Also they give them regardless of a monotonous sameness of flavour. Often the soup will be flavoured with tomato, the meat will have tomato sauce poured over it, the rice or whatever *pasta* there is will be smothered with it, and not impossibly the salad will have one or two raw ones cut up into it. This last, however, is a very nice dish, and indeed needs no green salad addition. They can be simply peeled and cut into slices (across) and then dressed with oil and vinegar, etc., or they can be first scalded with hot water.

The varieties of green salad are considerable, and make one see that many other kinds might with advantage be cultivated in England. Another objection to the sauces, particularly those which are bought and not made at home, is that they are too salt and induce thirst—a thing to be avoided in that country.

Lesso everyone has heard of, and most English people grumble at the constant appearance of this dish upon the table; yet when well made it is very good, and very suitable for a hot country, more especially in the summer, when appetite for rich or heavy food languishes. The soup that is brought up will have been made off it, but great care should be taken only to boil the meat until it is tender, and not until it is in rags, and it is important that there should be some fat with it. It should, when cooked, be cut in slices (not thin) and placed in the middle of a plate with a little of the liquor, and surrounded by pieces of carrot, turnip, *zucchini* (something like vegetable marrows, but not

bigger than a finger length, and cooked whole), and served separately; there should be tomato or caper sauce according to taste.

Mushrooms (*funghi*) grow in enormous quantities, and so in their season are very cheap. They are very large, and they generally cut them up in pieces and stew them. Sometimes they are sufficiently large that the dish has the appearance of hashed mutton. Parmesan cheese may be grated over them, or chopped onion stewed in. The Italians are very fond of them, but, as a rule, the English find them too rich.

Once we were asked by a servant girl, who came from rather an out-of-the-way country village, whether we liked broad beans, and, on being answered in the affirmative, she procured some and brought them in at dinner-time with the pleasant expression which she always had, rather increased by the feeling of doing something which would be agreeable to us. They were uncooked, in their natural state, pod and all, and we were to cut them up and dress them as salad! We made a worthy effort to do justice to this novel dish, but they were neither very palatable nor very digestible.

The hours and meals of the upper and middle classes are as follows:—Many people take nothing but a cup of black coffee in their room, or even before rising; but they who make something of a breakfast would take *café au lait* at eight in the winter, and seven, or even six, in the summer, and a roll—seldom butter. They do not call this *colazione* (breakfast), but *caffè*. The *colazione* comes at eleven, or thereabouts, and at this meal is taken wine, a dish of meat of some light description, but more usually a *frittata*, some *pasta*, salad, and abundant fruit. The dinner is at four, five, or six, according to the season of the year—soup and two courses, one of which is frequently *lesso*; where it is desired, a *dolce* as well, and then the usual fruit. Generally a cup of black coffee follows the dinner, which is the best meal of the day. They do not as a rule go to bed early, but they prefer to go to rest fasting. In the summer this rule is often broken by the custom of sitting out in the air at one of the various *cafés*, when a cup of coffee is partaken of, or an ice, or glass of lemonade, or some such cool drink. In the beautiful long summer evenings even the English have to give way to the necessities of the climate and give up their late dinner. After the exhausting heat of the day, when windows have been shut tight and venetian blinds drawn to keep the rooms even tolerably cool, one is forced to order the dinner at such an hour that oneself and one's household can go out and breathe and enjoy from seven until bedtime out of doors.

Their Christmas festivities are not marked, as ours, by roast beef, turkey, and plum-pudding. In some parts they have during the week a dish of stewed wild boar, with a sweet and sour sauce thickly mixed with dried currants and *pignelli*, the fruit of the pine. *Pignelli* are something like almonds in taste, which, cut up in small pieces, would make an excellent substitute. Another Christmas delicacy is *mandolato* (almond sweet), and *mostarda*, a hotly-flavoured conserve; but neither of these dishes are universal among them, as our plum-pudding, etc.

Minestra a Pesce.—Take the liquor in which fish has been boiled, then take the head or

some part useless for table and stew a little longer, strain it, then put pepper and salt, chopped onion and parsley. Add rice, boiled in another vessel, or slices of bread, according to taste. If taken clear a small quantity of meat stock should be added.

Riso con Piselli.—Take the liquor from the *lesso*. Previously boil some rice and a handful or two of green peas; stir this into the liquor and boil up all together with salt and pepper. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

Risotto.—Boil some rice with salt. When thoroughly dry place the pot over a clear fire, and stir quickly in salt butter, partly melted, and grated cheese. When sufficient butter and cheese are in, a flaky substance will come up in the spoon while stirring. This dish often precedes the dinner in the place of soup.

Macaroni.—The best quality of macaroni should be procured. Boil one pound in water, slightly salted and without any other seasoning. Drain it, and arrange it in a dish which can bear the heat of the fire. Sprinkle each layer with grated Parmesan cheese, pour in some very strong meat gravy, and cover the top with a thick layer of grated cheese, on which pour two ounces of tepid melted butter. Place the dish over the fire only long enough for the cheese to melt, and serve in the same dish.

Castrato or *Montone*.—Take some mutton (usually a shoulder), bone it, pare off the skin, and remove some of the fat. Smooth and stretch it as much as possible. Sprinkle inside with salt, pepper, and chopped herbs; then roll it up and tie it. Put into a saucepan the bones, two carrots, two onions, and a bunch of herbs. Rub the rolled meat well with butter, so that it will be well browned all round, and place it in the saucepan. Pour over a cup of strong meat gravy, and a glass of white wine. Cover the saucepan, and let it stay on a slow fire for two hours. When it is cooked, pass the gravy through a sieve, take away the fat, and add an equal quantity of tomato sauce. Stir this mixture over a hot fire, place the rolled mutton on a dish, and pour the sauce over it. If the sauce is too thin, lay the meat on spinach.

Entrée.—Cut some *ris de veau* and some marrow into small pieces, and stew in a good meat gravy. Boil vermicelli, and when it is sufficiently cooked to adhere together, pour into mould—made for the purpose—with hole in centre. Put in oven until it takes the shape. Turn out of mould into dish, and fill centre with stew.

Cotelette.—Dip six cutlets in melted butter, then cover them with breadcrumbs, well seasoned with salt and pepper. Beat up six eggs, dip the cutlets into them, and roll the cutlets a second time in breadcrumbs mixed with Parmesan cheese. Fry in butter or oil until they are a good colour; arrange them upright in a circle, and fill the centre with macaroni dressed as above. Pour over the whole tomato sauce, or rich gravy mixed with half a glass of madeira.

Dolce.—Whip some cream flavoured with vanilla; pour into a glass dish, and sprinkle it with coloured *confetti* (sweetmeats). Hand round rolled wafer biscuits, such as are eaten with ices.

Or another *dolce*, with custard instead of cream. Pour custard into an open glass dish; spread some raspberry preserve over some ladies' fingers, and float them on the surface of the custard. MARGARET MUDIE.

