

LARDING AND BONING.

By PHILLIS BROWNE, Author of "The Girl's Own Cookery Book."

LARDING is one of the advanced operations in cookery. It is performed by cooks who are adepts at their business, and who bring a light heart and a skilled hand to their work. When we hear a young cook say "I can lard," we feel as we do when we hear a young artist say "I sketch from nature," or a young musician say "I play music at sight;" that is, we know we are in the presence of an individual who has made progress in her art, and we feel respectful accordingly. Cooks who have never tried to lard feel when conversing with those who are accustomed to lard, as occasion arises, humble and lowly-minded, as before a superior who has attained to heights of proficiency inaccessible save to the initiated. Would it be possible to convey an idea of larding by means of descriptive words? I do not see that there need be any difficulty about the matter. If the girls of our cookery class will pay attention and do their best to comprehend, I will try to do my best to make the subject clear, and between us let us hope that we shall arrive at a satisfactory understanding.

Fortunately for both sides, it is not so much clearness of expression or quickness of perception that is required here as practice. The theory of larding is simple enough. It is the process of inserting slips of bacon, called lardons, into lean meat by means of a larding-needle—that is, a piece of wire pointed at one end and split at the other. The operation is supposed, and rightly, to improve certain meats in appearance, and to render those which would otherwise be dry and tasteless succulent and juicy.

Nearly all lean meat may be larded with advantage; but the breasts of dry white birds are most frequently selected for the purpose. Sometimes truffles, slices of tongue, ham, fillets of anchovies, and pieces of fat meat are employed instead of bacon, but bacon is most usual. It should, however, be cured according to a special method—that is, without salt-petre; otherwise a red tinge may be imparted to the meat. Larding bacon is sold by many dealers, or the bacon required may be prepared at home. The following is the celebrated Miss Acton's recipe for the preparation of bacon for larding:—

"Cut the bacon (say 14 lbs.) from the pig with as little lean to it as may be. Rub it well in every part with salt (14 ozs.) which has been dried, reduced to powder, and sifted. Put the layers of bacon close against and upon each other in a shallow wooden trough, and set in a cool but not damp cellar. Add more salt all round the bacon, and lay on a board, with a very heavy weight upon it. Let it remain for six weeks; then hang in a dry and airy place."

The first thing to be done in larding is to prepare the lardons. The bacon is best taken from the back, and that which lies nearest the rind is the firmest. The length and thickness of the lardons must be determined by the use to which they are to be put. Thus for birds, hares, and fricandeaux the bacon should be two inches long and the eighth of an inch square; for small pieces of meat, sweetbreads, and fillets of game or poultry they should be an inch and a quarter long and an eighth of an inch square. Sometimes meat is larded in the centre instead of on the surface, the larding-needle being put right through the meat, leaving the ends just out of sight. In this case the lardons must be a little less wide than the meat they are intended to enrich.

The method of cutting the lardons may be thus described:—Lay the block of bacon, cut

to the requisite width, on the table, the rind underneath. Press it flat, then with a sharp knife cut slices across, parallel to the rind, an eighth of an inch apart; press these close together, then cut slices downwards, also an eighth of an inch apart, thus making every piece of bacon exactly the same size.

Years ago I heard a learned lecturer on cookery say that larding was very much like rug-work; anyone who could do the one could accomplish the other. This is quite true. The stitches in both are very similar. Just as you take up the threads of canvas in one case, so you take up with the larding-needle as much of the flesh as will hold the bacon firmly, and draw the needle through. The pieces of bacon are laid into the ends of the larding needle one at a time, and they must only be drawn through far enough to leave the ends even at each side, when they must be freed from the needle and left in the meat. The stitches, too, must be taken at regular intervals, in lines which intersect each other. Thus the first stitch of the second row must be put on a line a little distance away from the first row, but not opposite the stitch of the first line—rather opposite the space between the two first stitches. The perfection of larding depends in great measure upon its regularity; yet, as I said before, skill in accomplishing this can only be obtained by practice. I do not think it is possible for a girl to lard properly the first time of trying. There are little movements of the needle which can only be gained by experience; therefore let no girl be disheartened if she fail the first time. Perseverance will ensure success.

It is a great point in larding to have the bacon firm and hard. If it is soft, it drags or breaks, and then the meat looks very untidy. On this account it is well to perform the operation in a cool place, and to handle the bacon as little as may be. It is very usual for cooks to dip the breasts of poultry into boiling water for a minute, in order to make the flesh firm, and this is a very good plan.

Cooks who are afraid to lard the breasts of game or poultry, frequently content themselves with *barding* the same, in order to prevent dryness. *Barding* is, compared with larding, like—what shall I say? Will it be considered a desecration of poetry if I say it is as "moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine"? This is really a statement of the fact, however. It is an attenuated form of the same thing. In *barding*, the flesh likely to dry in cooking is swathed in a slice of fat bacon, instead of having the bacon inserted in it. This is easy enough; but care must be taken to have the bacon cut thin, and also to put it down before a quick fire during roasting. Also, the bacon should be removed a few minutes before the bird is taken down, otherwise the breast may not be properly browned.

I have already said that dry meats are the ones usually selected for larding or *barding*. The reason of this is, of course, obvious. So far as birds are concerned, the breast only is operated upon as a rule; in hares, on the contrary, the backs and thighs are covered, and in meats the bacon is inserted into the whole of the upper surface. When meats have been larded they must be either roasted or braised. Braising is a superior way of stewing meat in good gravy, with vegetables and flavouring ingredients. This mode of cookery is very popular in France, where a pan for the purpose is employed, constructed to hold live embers in the lid, so that the cooking can be carried on above as well as below. An

ordinary stewpan with a closely fitting lid is, however, very generally used for the purpose. The meat is placed in a stewpan not much larger than itself, upon a savoury bed of vegetables and herbs, gravy is poured round it, buttered; paper is put over it, and it is very gently stewed till done.

Boning meat and poultry is another of those operations which call for practised skill, and which it is so very desirable that cooks should understand. The unfortunate fact connected with this business is that few but professed cooks are equal to it, while it would be especially valuable to other than professed cooks, because it assists economy. Take, for example, the case of a shoulder of mutton. I have heard experienced housekeepers say, "Under no circumstances is a shoulder of mutton an economical joint. It costs less per pound than the leg; but it contains so large a proportion of fat and bone that it must be unprofitable." Sometimes people who want a small roast are deluded into buying half a shoulder of mutton. What is the consequence? The fortunate individual who is first served gets a handsome slice, the second has one almost as good, and then there is a stop to the proceedings. The carver is in a state of desperation. If he is unaccustomed to his work, he slashes and fumes without effect; if accustomed to it, he turns the joint over and takes a portion from underneath; then he, alas! arrives at a standstill. He turns it back and tries once more, but to no purpose. The joint looks as if it were scarcely touched; but it is a delusion, for little can be got from it. The same disappointment attends the purchase of the fillet end of the leg of mutton. With the bone in it how satisfactory it looks on the dish—how unsatisfactory it is when cut into! When one or two good slices have been taken, there are nothing but scraps to be had. Amateur cooks are often advised to buy a good-sized leg of mutton and use it for three hot dinners—cutlets from the middle one day, boiled knuckle end another day, *roast fillet* a third day. Oh, what a fall is there when the fillet's turn comes round, if the amateur has not been advised to get the joint boned before cooking it! Boned, stuffed with veal forcemeat, tied compactly together, roasted and served with good gravy, the fillet is excellent; cooked in its original condition it is a fraud.

The same remarks apply to loin of mutton. This is generally considered a delicious though an extravagant joint. I am not going to praise it as a profitable one, though I can say that if boned it will go half as far again as if left unboned. Somehow the quantity of lean meat will seem to be increased when the bones are removed. Ordinarily with loin of mutton the diners leave the bones half-picked, cut off the fat, eat the lean piece from the middle of each chop, and get up hungry. But when the joint is boned, and the fat liberally pared away, to be rendered down for frying fat, the diners have a good time, for they receive a goodly slice of delicious lean meat on their plates; the carver has a good time, for he has the easy task of cutting straight through a succulent roll and finding an abundance to dispense to his friends; and the economical spectator has not to endure an agonising time, for he will not see unlimited waste perpetrated. Thus general satisfaction will prevail.

Perhaps it will be thought that after having thus expatiated on the advantages of *boning* meat, I am about to describe the process. Indeed I am not going to do anything of the kind; for, to tell truth, I do not think I am equal to

it. If I were to try to convey the necessary ideas in words, I should lose myself in a sort of descriptive tangle, and everyone who tried to understand what I said would be bewildered. I do not think it is possible for people to learn to bone meat by reading about it. They must see the thing actually done, make trial of it on their own account, make mistakes,

and perhaps cut their fingers, and try again, before they do any good. I may, however, suggest a method which is within the resources of civilisation; that is, that they should get the butcher or poulterer to do the business for them. Indeed, butchers ought to be willing to oblige their customers, for they charge enough for their meat. As a rule, too, they are perfectly

willing to do what is required in this direction, if only the customer will allow due time for the performance, and not ask for it at specially busy times. And if by arrangement or accident the purchaser could remain in the shop during the operation, and watch the proceeding, she would learn more about how to bone meat than any number of written words could teach her.

A KING'S DAUGHTER.

By ISABELLA FVIVIE MAYO, Author of "Her Object in Life," &c., &c.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE LADY'S TOWER."

OF course, Margaret Stewart in Fowlis Manse and the marquis and his cousin in Fowlis Lodge were in daily communication. Mrs. Esselton and Margaret had more than one consultation as to the ways and means for making smooth the way to May Castle's northern visit. Margaret wished her to travel back with her and her father; of course, that would not entail any additional expense on the girl, for Balaclava would pay for the whole party, not in his proprietary, but in his patriarchal character, and would have done the same for a duke's daughter as for the foundling. Mrs. Esselton dreaded to think of her *protégée's* shabby attire and homely appointments. But Margaret, in her grand young unworldliness, would hear of nothing being done to renew or supplement them. "When we go to foreign courts," she said, "we should wear the costume of our own. If we are rich we ought not to dress shabbily to go among the poor. The same rule holds good all round; we may have servants in liveries—there's a grand meaning at the bottom of the custom, fallen as it is, but we don't want friends in livery. If May Castle is anything she will be a friend."

"All very fine, my dear," said lively Mrs. Esselton, "but I know when I have been going up other people's staircases, it has been a great consolation to me when the luggage following behind was presentable. It was not always, my dear; I have frequently condescended to very neat brown holland to hide sham leather. That was in poor dear Charlie's time, and I believe that sort of thing proved my love for him more than my going to the scaffold would."

And Mrs. Esselton had her way in one matter, keeping it a secret from Margaret, who only found it out much later from May herself. She presented the girl with a plain, handsome Russian leather portmanteau.

"That will hold all you need take with you, except your wraps," she said. "I wanted to give you a parting remembrance, and as I knew you had not travelled before, it occurred to me this was a suitable one, and it will keep you from forgetting your old friend when you are at Dresden and Florence and Rome, and all the other places where I suppose your art studies will take you in time."

To herself she said, "The Balaclava servants will all know that is a good thing; it will pass off her poor little

shawls and alpaca umbrellas, which only the maids will notice. Margaret would be savage with me for thinking the Balaclava domestics of so mercenary a turn, but I know that common human nature is very common all the world over. Haven't I heard whispers about paste diamonds on the very staircase of St. James's Palace?"

It did not strike Margaret that May Castle managed to evade the proposed interview at the manse of Fowlis, nor, if it had done so, could she have imagined the reason thereof. The two girls met two or three times more at Fowlis Lodge, but Margaret found it almost impossible to get May to accede to the proposal that she should travel with her and her father. She said stoutly that she was not frightened of the lonely journey. It was only Mrs. Esselton, who, speaking with the authority carried by accustomed kindness, at last brought her to yield.

Those were busy days to May, to whose small means and experience her preparations seemed great. She made them as quietly as possible, almost stealthily. Of course, everybody knew of the invitation which she had received and accepted. It brought her a good deal of notice and attention, but these revolted her soul almost more than the neglect and indifference to which she had grown accustomed. The school-house people volunteered a promise that she should find her place and her room awaiting her on her return. Nothing but a qualm of sheer prudence restrained May from saying that she would not claim such consideration; for, indeed, the thought of return to Fowlis had grown to her as the thought of its cage must be to a wild bird which has escaped from captivity. She had, indeed, little idea of what might be awaiting her in the world, and if her inexperience screened her from some real terrors, perhaps it exaggerated and even created others. But it seemed as if nothing could be worse than what was to her the uncongenial drudgery of the school-room, the familiar faces without friendliness, the depressing atmosphere of petty gossip and depreciatory criticism. Still, May only said soberly that of course they would hear from her at Balaclava, and that she would not ask them to wait for her if it should prove inconvenient. In the matter of Jock they thought her absolutely mad. Did they not offer to take care of him? But then they only did so after ridiculing "such a fuss over a common cat," and suggesting that

he would be perfectly able to forage for himself, as was the fashion among many poor half-starved beasts about Fowlis. So their kindness was too tardy to be trusted, and May procured, and with her own hands padded, a snug hamper for the favourite. Work of one kind or another wakened her early in the morning, and kept her up far into the night, and she felt that if it had not been so, she could have scarcely tolerated these few days longer of the scenes and society which she had endured, she knew not how, for twenty years. Little did the poor child then dream of the revelation that would come to her at the very last.

What happy days those were for the marquis and Margaret! While May sat at her lonely sewing, and while the old laird of Balaclava sat by the bedside of his sick friend in the manse of Fowlis, the two young people walked or drove through the sunny glades of Fowlis Park, or rested in some of the pleasant corners of the Lodge. There was always so much to say, and yet there were intervals of silence which were so sweet. Of what did they not talk during those seasons? They talked of pictures and books, of poetry and music. The marquis spoke in softened tones of the dear old days, when he had wandered there, a little orphan boy, holding his mother's hand. Those vanished days seemed more real and near just now than they ever had since they had gone past. He told Margaret of many of his mother's stories and sayings, and how they had wrought in his heart and head until they had transformed themselves into plans and aspirations, which he shyly unfolded for her approbation and sympathy. And Margaret talked to him of her free, glad life at Balaclava, of her wild canters by her father's side over the bleak island moorlands, of the exciting morning when the fishing boats drove the whales up the Voe, under Balaclava windows, and sea and shore were dyed crimson with the fierceness of the fray. Or she spoke of the long quiet evenings in the drawing-room, with household readings from Shakespeare or Milton, uninterrupted save by the arrival of doctor or minister, returning from some errand of mercy, and thankful to secure the unfailing hospitality of the house. Sometimes she would sing snatches from the songs with which she would enliven these evenings.

Oh, those were happy days! They knew each other "by heart" before they were ended—the young marquis