

USEFUL HINTS.

ITALIAN RECIPES.

It is often the case that John Bull, while diverting himself on the Continent, sighs longingly for the substantial joints and plain dishes of his native land; but, on the other hand, it sometimes happens that those who have spent some time in Italy feel, even after their return to the roasts and boiled of their own country, a desire for the appetising plates of the "Sunny South."

Maccaroni, for instance, is an unknown quantity to the average British cook, as far as the correct manner of its preparation goes, and usually only appears at our tables accompanied by cheese and bread crumbs. In Italy, it forms the foundation for numerous dainty plates, both sweet and savoury, affording scope for endless variety.

With regard to the boiling, maccaroni must never be put into cold water, but into that which is already boiling, otherwise it will inevitably be tough. Maccaroni boiled till tender and garnished with chickens' livers, and a little grated parmesan cheese, makes a very piquant dish, also maccaroni and tomato sauce, maccaroni and anchovies, etc., etc. Several changes can be rung on the same theme.

Many people prefer to make their own maccaroni instead of buying it, and certainly it is far more wholesome and nutritious when prepared at home. The following is a good recipe for what the Italians call,

PASTA DI CASA.—Place about a pound and a half of flour (according to the quantity of maccaroni you wish to make) on a pastry board, making a hole in the centre of the flour. Take three eggs, whites and yolks, and add to flour. Beat with a knife, mixing in sufficient flour to make a paste. Knead well with the hands until the dough is of a good consistency, and then roll out as thin as possible, wrapping it round the roller, and spreading it out to its full length with the palms of the hands. It should be quite transparent. If not to be used at once, cover it with a cloth, but if required immediately, fold it up and cut out in ring-shape and put into boiling water till tender. The rings may be cut any size according to whether the maccaroni is required for sweets, timboles, or for garnishing soups.

Another very nice dish is "Gnocchi," which can be prepared in three different ways and is very popular in Italy.

GNOCCHI DI PATATI.—Boil ten potatoes, and use with two eggs for a large dish, and five potatoes and one egg for a smaller quantity. Mash potatoes finely with a little salt, and beat the eggs with them in a basin. Flour a board, adding a little also to the potatoes, and roll out not too thinly. Cut into small pieces, the shape of miniature sausages, and throw them into boiling water. When they rise to the top they are done, and must be taken out immediately, or they will become tough. Let the water boil up again before putting in the next batch. Serve with either gravy, or tomato sauce, and grated cheese according to taste.

GNOCCHI DI SEMOLINA.—Boil four ounces of semolina with a little over half a pint of milk until it is tender. About ten minutes is usually sufficient. Put it on a dish, and when cool cut it into small three-cornered pieces, and place them in a baking-dish. Strew over them grated parmesan cheese and little pieces of butter, and bake in a moderate oven till it is of a pale brown colour.

This recipe can be also used as a sweet, prepared in the same manner as the above,

with the addition of a little sugar and lemon, or vanilla flavouring to the milk and semolina. While it is cooling, beat the whites of three or four eggs to a stiff froth, and put them over the semolina and place in a moderate oven until the eggs are faintly coloured.

Dolce forte is a very favourite way of dressing tongue in Italy, and the following method deserves a trial.

Cut about three and a half pounds of tongue into slices and put it into boiling water. Fry some onions, and place them in a saucepan, adding a mixture composed of the following ingredients. About half a teacup, or a little more, of vinegar, several raisins, a few prunes, if possible some of the seeds of the fir-cone, a little celery, an olive or two, a few capers, some finely shred candied peel, pepper and salt to taste, and a little grated chocolate. A little gravy may be added if wished. Pour this over the tongue and boil till tender.

Calf's head can also be done in this manner; also boiled fish.

A very favourite and palatable sweet dish in Italy is that called "panna montata," or "whipped cream," which is prepared as follows.

Boil about a pound and a half of chestnuts or more according to the quantity required. Peel and pound them very finely, adding a little white powdered sugar. Place them in a glass dish. Whip two pints, or a little more, of cream, till it is firm and stiff, and place over the chestnuts. Serve with ice wafers. In Italy, whipped cream is sold ready prepared and sweetened, consequently this dish is extremely easy to make. Its excellence, however, will quite repay any extra trouble which its preparation may involve in England.

VERA.

FANCY FLOWER-POTS.

Amongst the thousand and one trifles that decorate our homes flower-pots play a rather prominent part just now. Many persons are quite content to see and use the "art" flower-pots that are sold by the hundred. Others would prefer to possess something newer. It is to the latter class these few remarks are addressed. No doubt to many of them the pots will have an added charm, when it is understood that the decoration will be the work of their own clever fingers.

Pots do not require much artistic skill to make them look well; but this class of ornamentation needs rather a very dainty touch and a pretty taste and fancy, two virtues all our girls possess.

The first we will take under our notice—the Egypto-Etruscan pot—requires only a nominal outlay; a cheap brush costing about twopence, a finer and smaller at fourpence, a pennyworth of size, and a sixpenny bottle of artist's black complete the outfit. The twopenny brush should be soaked in water at least twelve hours before using, to swell the wood and so prevent the bristles from coming out. Select the smoothest pot and saucer that you can, then take it to the sink and give it a good scrubbing, letting the water run on it while so doing. Then with a piece of broken flower-pot rub every part outside, occasionally wetting the pot to make the work easier. When this is done give the pot a rinse, and let it drain until next day. This preliminary process makes the pot one tone of colour all over, and gives it a smoothness akin to terra-cotta. The next day you can proceed to draw the designs on in white chalk. These can be copied from pictures, but it should be borne in mind that the subjects should be strictly of the Egyptian or Etruscan type. Those girls

who cannot draw an outline correctly may lay a sheet of tissue paper over the picture in a book, and then lay a sheet of blue carbonised paper on the pot with the tissue paper on top. Then with a sharp-pointed pencil go over the outline on the tissue paper, and you will have the clear outline. Next melt a little of the size in a jar and go over the surface inside the outlines with the cheap brush. Give at least three coats, allowing each one two hours to dry. Then give one or two coats of the artist's black. It may now be considered finished unless you like to give the whole pot and saucer three coats of size and one of copal varnish afterwards. This is not really necessary, but it is an advantage, as dust and fingermarks can be sponged off more readily. As it is rather a difficult matter to keep a round pot steady while painting, it is advisable to place it on its side, with a book at each side to prevent its moving; bring it nearly to the edge of the table, and rest the hand on a mahl stick.

Collectors of postage stamps often get quite a number, which, though they may have no real intrinsic value, are too good or interesting to dispose of. These make very uncommon flower-pots. After the pot has been sized two or three times, draw two or three designs on it with chalk—a partly-opened fan, a Maltese cross, and a miniature Cleopatra's needle are all suitable. For the ground it is best to only employ one kind of stamp. The lowest value French stamps look well for this; paste these all over the pot except where the designs are. These should be of a rarer kind, and each article be of different colours. When thoroughly dry, give a coat of size and at least three coatings of copal varnish. Chintz is now in favour again, and there should be no difficulty in getting the required pattern for an Indian toile pot. But first to prepare the pot. Give two coats of size—this is to prevent the porous surface absorbing too much paint—next give it two or three coats of enamel, either Indian red or egg-shell blue; when each coat is dry, get a piece of chintz of the old willow pattern design, not printed in blue but in gay colours. Cut the pagodas, etc., out with a very sharp pair of scissors, and gum them on the pot as fancy dictates; then, when dry, give three coats of copal varnish.

Japanese flower-pots look extremely quaint, and can be treated in a variety of ways. Perhaps the easiest one is to give the pots two or three coats of size and two or three coats of artist's black—more if the surface is not a deep black—then get three or four sprays of maidenhair fern; iron on the wrong side with a warm iron. When quite dry gum on the wrong side and press them carefully on the pot. Wind a strip of calico round the pot, like a bandage, to keep the fronds in position while drying. They should be dry in about four hours. Then paint over the fronds and stems with gold paint, and give a few coats of varnish afterwards until the surface is quite glossy. Other ferns or small-leaved foliage may be also used. With regard to varnish, the worker may put as many coats on the pots as he or she pleases—the more there are put on the glossier the surface will be; but each coat must be allowed to thoroughly dry before putting on another. As an instance of this, I may state that the glossy, shining surfaces of carriages and broughams is obtained by putting on as many as twenty coats of varnish in some cases. These pots should not have the plants put directly into them, as with the frequent watering there would be the danger of the surface peeling; therefore they should only be used as the outside cover.