

In the corner is a Welshman who dreams every night of his "angel bride," and lives on her daily letters, written in Welsh, with a grateful postscript in childish English to the nurse. The love between these simple couples lasts on till they can sing together, "John Anderson, my jo, John," or compete for the fitch of bacon. Listen to this old pensioner.

"Have you had a happy afternoon, daddy?"

"Ay, a nice long court to-day, nurse," and his face flushes beneath his silver hair as his "missus" comes into the ward on visiting-days. And she, dear old lady, is far from being jealous when he says to his nurse, "Oh, my dear, you'm enough to charm the heart of a snail!"

Just now the comic characters of the ward are two men who are convalescing from severe operations, and they pace the ward together, nicknamed "The Comedians," for Nature was in a humorous vein when she moulded the quaint figure of the old bachelor, and the crinkled face of the young one. The young comedian is a coachman by trade, and it is his boast that he is going "to drive nurse to her wedding, white ribbons and a'," though in sadder moments, looking at his arms in splints, he puckers his absurdly childish face and meditates, "I'll be a poor hand at the ribbons after all!" The other comedian is an old fox-hunting butcher, with a face like a nursery rhyme. He has fallen from the opulence of butcherdom and the proud possession of a hunting hack to abject poverty, but nothing can quench his inborn drollery. He assumes a courtliness, too, that is very funny.

"Pretty well this morning, nurse?" he asks deferentially. "Well and pretty, nurse, well and pretty." Indeed, he is something of a gallant altogether, and romances of the old times when he was "trigged up in Sunday best with a flower in his buttonhole. And many's the mile I've been courting, in the happy old days, down country lanes." He makes a great affair of his daily toilette, carefully brushing the patched, blue tail-coat and threadbare velvet collar, as if he were getting himself up in pink for the chase. He shuffles about the ward in the old slippers, which have a little spring left in them, as if they still were dancing-pumps, and it is his great ambition "to dance a hornpipe with nurse." Unfortunately, that is not commensurate with nurse's idea of professional dignity, though sometimes, in mad moments, she can imagine herself skimming the polished

floor between the beds, keeping step with this agile, old-world comedian.

Oh, God bless you, dear, honest, great-hearted simple fustians!

II.

It is night without. In the children's ward the firelight flickers on the folded cots. A little group is gathered round the fire by a baby wailing faintly. The dying infant lies on the nurse's knee, its little head moving from side to side in pain. Beside it kneels the fair little Sister, trying to coax the pet of the ward with spoonfuls of brandy and milk, and the young doctor leaning against the nursery-guard with grave face and professional air, is concentrating all attention on the wee, wailing baby.

It is one of the poor little "not wanted" lives; but if medical skill and nursing care can save it, it shall be saved.

Then the mother is sent for from the work-house, not far away. She looks a wild Irish girl as she, too, comes into the glow of the firelight. She is picturesque, in spite of her roughness, in a big blue apron, and shawl pinned across her breast, ruffled black hair, and head unbonneted. Her words are careless enough.

"S'pose I should feel it, first going off," she says, alluding to her baby's death; yet, with a mother's heart within her, she passionately kissed the little one, then sits rocking herself to and fro, her head buried in her apron.

Ah, bright-eyed Jessie! Poor, unkempt, erring Jessie! In you culminates the sigh of pitiful, perplexed humanity!

The house-surgeon turned back as he left the ward to say to the Sister—

"Send for the chaplain if the baby is not christened. It will not live till morning."

III.

CHRISTMAS in the wards, undeniably Christmas, kept up as Christmas used to be.

First, Christmas Eve, the good, old-fashioned Christmas smell of holly; and a very old-fashioned litter of decorations in new-fashioned, germless, aseptic wards. Every patient hangs a stocking to the bed-head, even such old souls as are dubbed "Grannie" and "Daddie," with all the expectant glee of children. Later, "in the stilly watches of the night," a nurse, or, it may be, an impersonated Santa Claus, steals round with presents labelled for each patient

according to their age and tastes, but spied by a wakeful patient here and there. For instance, Grannie, whispering delightedly—

"I see'd ye, my dear; ye can't catch Grannie napping. Oh, my! What a Christmassing to be sure! Never haven't hed such encouragements and indulgences ever since I was a—barn." And she looks round benignantly on the lofty ward, "like a fairy palace, zure," hung with flags and ivies, the firelight reddening the holly-berries, and casting mischievous lights on the mistletoe bough.

Except in children's nurseries, Christmas is nowhere so ideal as in the wards. "Good-will" certainly abounds; the sick forget their sickness in the general gaiety, and the querulous their plaints. It is the nurses' delight to add in every way to the festivities, and their spirits are exuberant, hospital discipline being relaxed. At the Christmas Day dinner the steaming turkeys and the flaming puddings are followed by dessert and crackers and songs. No wonder such unwonted feasting draws from the Welsh lad "Taffy" the remark—

"It's my seventeenth Christmas, nurse, and the nicest I've ever had yet."

And an Irish sailor chimes in—

"I'm coming back next year with the wife and all the family, and if ye put me out at the door, I'll come in to the window."

"Christmassing" does not end with the feast of the nativity; concerts last through the week, and the spirit of festivity dies hard. Boxing night is devoted to carol-singing (the whole day having been a sort of expanded grin after Christmas fare). There is an unusually fragrant aroma in the male wards, where the patients are propped up in bed smoking long pipes; this unwonted privilege is more prized than all the rest of the season's good things. Presently the wide doors open, and a whole orchestra of nurses, in their spotless uniforms, troops in. Lights are lowered and windows opened, and the sound of carols fills the ward, the echoes floating to the street outside (where many passers-by, to whom Christmas has brought no joy, pause to listen to the sweet singing, and feel it would be no hardship to be within those great walls, cared for and "tended" in a little hospital bed). The men hum in unison with the nurses' singing, or click their pipes to the quaint tunes.

But they knock out the ashes and listen reverently to a hymn which recalls the Christmases of childhood—

"O come all ye faithful."
(To be concluded.)

WHAT TO COOK, AND HOW TO COOK IT.

PRESERVING AND CONSERVING. AROMATIC HERBS AND SPICES.

By L. H. YATES.

"But happy they, thrice happy, who possess The art to mix these sweets with due address."—*W. Hone.*



In England "to preserve" means, five times out of six, to boil our fruit to a jam or jelly. Even in large factories only a small proportion of the stock of fruit used is set aside for bottling or canning. In America the opposite is the rule; to can and bottle is quite a matter-of-course with the American housewife—jellies and jams with her are a luxury. To sterilise or can fruit, they say, retains its flavour far more perfectly than any other mode, and

this process is both less troublesome and more economical than the "old-fashioned" method of preserving fruit pound for pound with sugar.

This may be true, but it is also true that in England we cling to our old fashions, however much others may decry them, and we are loth to give up our beloved sweet, even if it is troublesome and costly. We might, however, with advantage keep our jellies and jams for table use only, making them extra good on this account, and use more "canned" fruit for cooking purposes. (By canned fruit we mean also bottled fruit).

Fruits may be canned (or bottled) with or without sugar, but as the sugar, unless it is previously boiled to a syrup, has no preserving quality, and as the fruit itself retains its fresh-

ness and flavour better without sweetening, it is best to leave it out.

To have a supply of bottled fruit in store enables us to indulge in tarts and compotes in winter that are but little inferior to those we enjoy in summer; but we find the indulgence to be a luxury if we have to buy the bottled fruit, as partly on account of the initial expense of the bottle and canning apparatus, and partly because this kind of stock is of a bulky and perishable nature, grocers and others charge more for them in proportion than for jams.

For home purposes, however, once the bottles with their screw tops have been purchased, there is no great expense afterwards. Large-mouthed glass jars should alone be used. If rubber rings are fitted to these as well as screw tops, see that the former are in

good condition each season, renewing them if necessary.

Only perfectly sound and freshly-gathered fruit should be used for bottling purposes. If bruised or cracked they will mould and taint all the rest. It is a good plan to set aside the best and finest fruit for this purpose when about to make jam, as the less perfect will boil down for the latter, and for jelly.

There are two ways of bottling fruit, *i.e.*, to cook the fruit until it is tender in water or syrup, then to fill the heated bottles while the fruit is boiling hot, fastening down at once; or to pack the prepared fruit into jars, filling each jar or bottle with cold water, placing the lids loosely on the top, standing the jars in a pan of cold water deep enough to allow of the water coming quite up to the neck, and bringing it very slowly to boiling-point. As soon as the water boils, lift the jars out, screw the tops down tightly, and set them aside (out of the draught), to cool.

All small fruits like strawberries, raspberries, and currants, apricots, pared peaches, and some pears, may be bottled in this latter way with advantage; but for plums, greengages, apples, and cooking pears, a cooking in syrup or water is much to be preferred.

When filling the jars, take care to have slipped these sideways, rolling them round in boiling water, and let them be as hot as possible at the time of filling. If the fruit is of a large kind, use a wooden spoon, taking care that one piece does not push another out of shape. Let the jars or bottles be full to overflowing with liquor, and see that no air-bubbles are on the top; then screw on the lids immediately. The fruit should not be stirred while it is cooking, as stirring spoils the shape.

The secret of jelly-making, to be truly successful, lies in taking the fruit at the time when the greatest amount of pectose is to be found in it, as it is this principle which makes jelly.

For instance, apples contain so much of this principle that but little labour or care is involved in making a jelly from them, but with other fruits this principle is present in a so much less degree that it vanishes to a mere nothing when the fruit is over-ripe. When any fruit has reached maturity, then this principle is present in its greatest strength, and taken for the purpose then, a jelly that will set firm may be made from almost any fruit. It is safer to err on the side of under-ripeness rather than let the fruit hang too long on the tree. Jelly made from currants a little under-ripe, if taken fresh from the bush, will set almost before it is cold; but if the currants are black ones the acidity will be too strong, and this kind it is absolutely necessary to allow to hang until the sun has ripened them fully.

It is not necessary that currants for jelly should be picked from the stalk. Wash them and drain well, then put them in the preserving kettle and allow them to come very slowly to a heat, that all the juice may be drawn away. Almost better than a preserving-kettle is a large glazed earthenware jar with well-fitting lid, that can be set in a corner of the oven to cook at its leisure.

When the fruit has reduced to a mash, strain all through a large hair sieve into a pan, then fix the jelly-bag in a safe position (say between two chairs), and place another pan underneath it. Empty the contents of the first pan into this bag slowly, and let it drip through to the one below. Measure off this strained juice, and to every pint allow a pound of the finest lump sugar.

Put the juice into the preserving kettle and set it where it will come rather rapidly to a boil. Let it boil twenty minutes before adding the sugar. While the juice is boiling the right weight of sugar should be spread out on tins and put into the oven to become hot; if it

melts a little in the process it will do no harm. The reason for this is that the juice may not be retarded boiling by having cold sugar emptied into it. When the sugar is added, stir until it has quite dissolved, then remove the spoon. Allow the juice to boil up for just a moment, then pour without loss of time into very hot, small glass jars, and set aside out of a draught.

Jelly made thus will be found of a full fruity flavour, bright in colour, and will set almost before it is cold.

The key to the preservation of flavour and beauty of colouring lies in this—boiling well the juice or fruit, but not the sugar, as the key to the secret of obtaining a firm jelly lays in taking the fruit at the right moment.

Contrary to the rule which we must follow in bottling fruit, *viz.*, covering tightly while the contents of the bottle are at boiling-point, jellies or jams should not be covered until they are cold.

If any moisture is found on the top before the paper is put on, wipe this off with a soft linen cloth. Cover with tissue paper drawn tightly and cut neatly to shape, fastening with fine string or strong thread, then pass a moist sponge over the whole surface when affixing the label, as this causes the paper to shrink when it is dry, thus forming an excellent cover.

In making jam, as we cannot wash the fruit, it behoves us to be all the more careful to pick it scrupulously over, and to see that it is gathered on a dry day while the sun is upon it. Here again we must remember that it is the fruit that requires cooking, and not the sugar; and at no time should the jam boil longer than twenty minutes after the sugar has been added, as boiling sugar passes so quickly from one degree to another. Take care that the fruit is sufficiently well-boiled before ever the sugar is added at all.

Jam should be stored in a cool and perfectly dry place, but not one into which the steam and odours of cooking will enter, unless there is ventilation enough to carry them away again.

Another way of preserving fruit is by desiccation or drying. This process is not one that the amateur can carry out successfully, moreover, as the best way of drying fruit is by exposure to the air and sun, and therefore warmer climates than ours are needed to carry out the process. The Americans achieve good results in the drying of hardy fruits like apples, but it is to the countries of the sunny south that we must go to learn what is the perfection of the art of drying.

Turkey, the Grecian Archipelago, Italy, and France all send out their stores of figs, dates, raisins, plums, currants, apricots, and apples; Normandy, the country most nearly resembling our own, has its own special export of pressed and dried "pippins"; Jamaica and the West Indies, Ceylon and India, send us ginger dried or preserved, the cocoanut both in its natural state and desiccated, with various other special products. The Cape and our Australian colonies have more recently opened up what promises to be a rapidly developing industry in the exportation of their fruits, both as fresh fruit, dried and canned.

For our spices and condiments we have long been under obligation to the far East, and to the West Indies. No plants that come to maturity in the open air of this climate possess sufficient aromatic flavour to enable them to rank as a spice, hence the tropics have the monopoly of the spice trade.

Spices, the chief of which are peppers, cinnamon, cloves, nutmegs, mace, ginger, and allspice, are all highly stimulant, heating, exciting to the palate, while pleasant because of their fragrance. Whether they fulfil any other function than a medicinal one in our temperate climate is doubtful, but since we may be said

to range over the whole surface of the globe in quest of nutriment, it may not be inadvisable that with foreign aliment we should mix foreign condiment. The best quality that spices have is to stimulate the appetite, while their worst effect is to destroy by degrees the tender lining to the stomach if habitual use or indulgence is allowed.

Of aromatic herbs we have a longer list, and there is hardly one of the many that is not capable of cultivation in our climate, if indeed it is not indigenous to the soil. A broad classification groups them into two divisions, medicinal herbs, and those used for culinary purposes. The first-named is a list altogether too lengthy and too technical to be cited here; the second is much shorter, and as it belongs to our subject we may pause to consider it awhile.

Herb-lore, almost forgotten in our day, used to be of great interest to our foremothers; the housewife of earlier days, into whose hands so many industries fell, gave sedulous care to the cultivation of her herb-garden, as from its plot came the brews for the sick, the fragrant waters for the toilet, as well as cordials for the closet, fresh leaves to flavour the "sallet-bowl," and dried ones for the pickle and posset.

The gathering, storing, and arranging of these herbs was no light or inconsequential matter. In country districts some remnant of the practice still lingers, but there is comparatively little store set by this harvest compared to what was formerly the case. Cheap drugs and patent medicines have replaced the homely brew, and the spice-bottle or the ready-made sauce has assumed the place of favourite on the pantry-shelf.

"The art to mix these sweets with due address" is one that but few care to keep in practice.

A chemist in a country town once gave me a hint to this effect, that was all the more kindly on his part as it went against his interest to give it. I was asking for a remedy for a cold resulting from damp, naming the district where I lived, and which I believed to be too marshy. "Go and look in the hedgerows," said he; "you'll find there both dulcamara and aconite. I go and gather them for my shop, why shouldn't you do the same?" And once, when I asked the same dispenser for a liver tonic, he rounded on me with the brusque command, "Go and get ye some dandelions in the fields round about ye!" He did not actually anathematise me, but I saw the glare in his eye, and fled.

The gathering of herbs, like the gathering of fruit, has its noonday of ripeness, which, when passed, means a decline of strength and virtue. Not the actual period of flowering, but just before, is the time when the fullest and finest flavours may be captured. They should be gathered and the roots cut sharply off, the herbs being tied in bunches, the stalks left uppermost. Quick drying is essential for culinary herbs, that bright colouring may be retained as well as flavour. For this reason to dry them over the kitchen stove is sometimes preferable to drying out-of-doors in the sun.

When perfectly dry, rub them through a fine wire sieve and store them in wide-mouthed bottles with well-fitting corks. Keep in a dark place, and see that the different bottles are plainly labelled.

The latter end of July and August is the time when most of the herbs should be gathered, but orange-thyme, fennel, tarragon, and chervil may be gathered in June with advantage. Parsley may be cut and dried almost any time after it is full grown, and sage may be left untouched till September.

Herbs might be called the flowers of cookery. They are not essentials, nor are they nutrients, but they give the charm, the elusive flavour, and the poetic touch that a flower lends to the table it adorns, hence let herbs have their due place and consideration.