

HOW TO WAIT AT TABLE.



o much of the success of a dinner depends on how the waiting is managed, that it is worthy of the utmost attention of both mistress and servants.

It is a sort of torture to some people to be noisily or roughly waited upon. Of course, in the case of experienced servants, everything is easy enough, but there are so many who have not experienced people about them, and there are so many young servants who are willing to learn, but whose mistresses are

unable or unwilling to teach them, I trust that to some of these a few plain directions may prove useful.

I will, as I did in "How to Lay a Dinner-table," begin with a dinner *à la Russe*. We will suppose a dinner for twelve people, which, served in this way, can be well managed by having three servants in the room, one to carve and one for each side of the table. Of course, everything must be brought to the dining-room door by a fourth person. Supposing there is only one man-servant (a butler) in the house, and two hired waiters or two women servants to wait; when all the guests have arrived the soup and plates are placed on the side table, and the butler announces that "dinner is served." The chairs are placed sufficiently far from the table to allow the guests to pass between them and the table and seat themselves; as they do so the waiters on either side of the table see that their chairs are close enough in for them to be comfortable.

It is otherwise very awkward for a lady with a great deal of skirt to get a heavy dining-room chair up to the table. The servant must, when his help is needed, take hold of the back of the chair and gently push it forward.

We will suppose the dinner to consist of two soups, two kinds of fish, two entrées, a relevé, a joint, a roast, two entremets (sweet dishes), cheese, ramaquins, ices.

The butler helps the soup, and the waiters begin simultaneously handing it to the ladies on the right and left of the master of the house; they go straight down the two sides of the table; each waiter carries two plates of soup, one of each kind; he goes to the left side of each guest, and would say, "Clear soup or thick, ma'am?" or else name the two soups, as "Spring soup or oyster, ma'am?" But he would never say, "Will you have" or "Will you take." He simply names the dishes offered, saying sir, or ma'am after. It is the same



"TURNING THE COVER WELL UP."



"TAKE HOLD OF THE BACK OF THE CHAIR, AND GENTLY PUSH IT FORWARD."

with wine. When the soup is served the butler takes round the sherry; he goes to the right side of each guest, commencing with the lady on the right-hand side of the host, and pours the wine into the glass as it stands on the table; he proceeds straight round the table, for at a formal party ladies are not helped before gentlemen, but the seats are taken by rotation in serving. The soup plates are removed as they are finished with, and the butler helps the fish, and at the same time puts on each plate the sauce to be eaten with the fish on it. The waiters again take a plate of each kind of fish in either hand, and proceed, as with the soup, naming the fish to everyone.

When there is cucumber, that is handed, not put on the plates. As the fish plates are removed hot meat plates are substituted for them, ready for the entrées. With the fish, the butler takes round the sherry and hock; with the entrée he takes the champagne; and it is his duty, during dinner, to replenish the glasses from time to time; this he does in the intervals when he is not carving.

A tablespoon and a large fork are put into each entrée dish. Supposing there are two dishes of each, the waiters take them down the table, changing the plates as they are emptied, and giving a clean plate, with a knife and fork on it, to each person. But supposing only one dish of each entrée is provided, it is best for one waiter to hand one dish down one side of the table, while the other entrée is handed down the other side. When they meet at the end of table, the two change dishes, and the second entrée is offered to those who have not partaken of the first. Those who have taken the first handed have their plates changed as soon as they have finished it, and are offered the second entrée. Plates are removed as finished with; knives and forks are given as required, being placed on the table, the knife to the right and the fork to the left. The butler then proceeds to carve the joint; he puts a nice slice on each plate, with gravy, &c.; sometimes, if the potatoes are served dressed, he puts one with the meat, so as to leave only the other vegetable or vegetables to be handed. More knives and forks are put on as the meat plates are removed, and the next course is served in the same way. Should there be a salad or green peas, it is customary to offer them to those who refuse the "rôts," as well as to those who take it. After this

course, as the plates are removed, pudding plates, with spoons and forks in them, are given ready for the sweets, which are handed for people to help themselves (with the exception of a fruit tart, should there be one, which the butler serves at the side table). The waiters proceed, as with the single dishes of entrées: one is taken down one side of the table, another down the other, and changed at the end of the table.

After the sweets, clean pudding plates are again given, with small knives and forks in them. Rapaquins, or some other cheese or savoury dish is handed, after which cheese, butter, and biscuits are offered; these are either handed in a special dish with three divisions, or in small glass dishes placed on a silver salver. After the cheese plates are removed, all the glasses (full as well as empty ones), salt-cellars, water-bottles and knives, spoons and forks are taken from the table. One waiter carries a tray, and the other puts the things on it off the table; they then go one to the top, the other to the bottom of the table, fold the slips (without brushing them) in three, so that the crumbs will not fall out, draw them down the table and remove them, then the small slips from the top and bottom of the table are taken off, and grace is said.

The dessert plates are put on table, and ices are handed, water ice on one side, cream ice on the other, the waiters again changing dishes at the end of the table, and handing the second ice to everyone, as most people eat cream and water ice together. Wafers or vanilla biscuits are handed with ices. The ice plates are removed, and the fruit is handed. If there are grapes, the butler divides the bunches, and they are handed on a plate; the same with any fruit that has to be cut up. Some people take two or three kinds of fruit on to their plates. The butler takes round the after-dinner wines. When every one is served, he places the decanters in front of the host and leaves the room, followed by the other servants. He takes care that the decanters are replenished if they need it before he puts them on table, and if more wine is required after he leaves the room, it is rung for.

The butler and another servant take the coffee to the ladies in the drawing-room, and then to the gentlemen in the dining-room. The servant carries a tray with coffee cups, cream, milk, and sugar, and the butler follows him with a coffee-pot on a silver salver. The guests take cups, into which they put cream and sugar; then they put their cups on the butler's salver, and he pours coffee into them.

After the gentlemen join the ladies, tea is handed.

A dinner *à la Russe* may be much longer or shorter than the one I have supposed. If there are few people in proportion to the number of servants, more waiting is done. For instance, sauces can all be



"HE PUTS HIS GLASS ON IT."



THE FISH SAUCE.

handed; but I doubt whether there is any advantage in being more waited on; it interferes a good deal with conversation.

We will now take waiting at table where it is a parlour-maid only. Women servants in announcing dinner say "Dinner is on table." It sounds rather less pretentious than "Dinner is served."

The door should be opened wide enough for people to leave the room; it is most objectionable to speak round the door.

As people seat themselves, the parlour-maid pushes the chairs up; then waits behind the master's chair until grace is said. She then removes the cover from the soup or fish, turning the cover well up as she takes it from the table, so that the steam from it shall not drop. She then takes the plates from the carver. Supposing there are guests at table, she goes first to the lady on the right-hand side of the host, then to the one on the left, then straight round the table, it not being customary now to help ladies first, except where there are only the family or very few at table. It is less likely to cause confusion to go straight round the table.

After handing the fish and sauce, the cruet is taken round; then the water or wine is poured out.

Though all dishes and plates, and also ale, are offered on the left-hand side, water or wine are poured out on the right side without removing the glasses from the table. It requires some little practice to pour out wine well—to fill the glasses and not drop the wine on the cloth.

If draught ale is drunk, the maid takes the jug and a silver salver, which she holds on the left side of the guest. He puts his glass on it; then the ale should be frothed in pouring it out. Bottled ale is poured out at the sideboard, as it is necessary to hold the glass a little slanting in the hand to fill it. It is handed on a waiter after it is poured out.

Fish is not put on table until the soup is removed. After the meat is served the maid hands the vegetables and sauces, taking a dish in each hand; then the cruets are handed. A parlourmaid is always expected to be on the alert to notice when anything is required. When a plate is empty she says, "A little more chicken?" or whatever it may be, not "Will you take," or "Will you have." When finished with she removes the plate, puts the knife and fork in separate sides of the knife-box, and the plate in the plate-basket, if she has one, if not, makes a pile of plates on her tray. The host's plate is always the last one removed, and after it is taken off she brings her knife-tray or a plate to the table, and removes the carvers and knife-rests. The carvers and spoons, after every course, are taken off in this way, then the dish is removed.

If there is a vegetable course, it is ordinarily served after the meat, though it may be served as an entrée before the joint, whenever one is to be handed; or if there is an entrée, a hot plate with a knife and fork

on it must be placed before each person, when the dirty plate is removed. When the pudding plates are wanted they are put on with a pudding spoon and fork in each, as the plates from the preceding course are taken off. The same is done with the cheese plate and knife. After cheese the table is cleared. A small tray can be carried in the left hand and filled with wine glasses, &c., then the cloth is brushed, or the crumbs are removed with a scoop, and the parlourmaid pauses to allow grace to be said before she puts dessert on table. The white cloth is left on, and she first arranges the dishes of fruit, then puts the plates, with finger glasses, &c., round, then the wine glasses. She puts as many glasses on a small tray as she conveniently can, then puts them on table from the tray; lastly she puts the decanters of wine between the host's plate and the fruit, she then leaves the room. Coffee is handed in the dining and drawing-room, but it is poured out before being taken into the room, and handed on a tray with milk and sugar.

Throughout dinner the parlourmaid rings the dining-room bell when she is ready for the next course. If there are three servants, the housemaid should bring the dinner up into

the room, so that the parlourmaid need not leave the room; if there are only two, a house-parlourmaid and a cook, the cook must bring the hot dishes to the outside of the dining-room door; the cold must all be in the room before dinner. Having to fetch the dishes in, a house-parlourmaid cannot do quite as much waiting, and things must be arranged according to the number to be waited on.

With regard to waiting at table, when a general servant only is kept, what can be done depends so much on the individual servant; but however little is done, let it be done the right way. The following suggestions may be useful to some who wish to know a little about waiting at table.

Never wear boots or shoes that make a noise when you walk. Never be in a hurry; be quick without seeming to be in haste. Remember that it takes as long to put a thing down noisily as quietly. Do not forget that there can never be an excuse for reaching in front of anyone. Endeavour to concentrate your attention on what you have to do, so as not to be distracted by the conversation at the table. Have your dresses made so that there is nothing to catch in door-handles or chair-

backs, and make you nervous. Hold dishes very firmly when you hand them; you can take a serviette in your hand to hold a hot dish on. Wrap a serviette round a champagne bottle to pour the wine out of it.

I must conclude with a few words to young housekeepers with young servants. If you wish to teach a girl to wait, do not begin by telling her everything at once. Were you teaching a child to read, you would begin with little words, and go on to long ones; and so you must do with teaching one who is probably intellectually a child. One day teach her how to do one thing, the next day add something, and so every day, and you will probably make a tolerable waitress of her in six progressive lessons. If one tells too much at once, a girl gets confused and loses courage. Many, too, are very nervous; so it is best, when you are teaching, to shut your eyes to mistakes when they occur, and correct them afterwards; a girl gains more confidence this way, and does not get into the habit of looking at her mistress all dinner-time instead of what she is doing. If a table is properly managed, there will be no occasion for a mistress and servant to look at one another during a meal.



ODE TO KITTENHOOD.

KITTEN mine! how full thy face is
Of the most perplexing graces.
Wingless butterfly thou art,
Lightest throb on Nature's heart.
When I o'er thy sweetness rave,
Or of thee affection crave,
Thou dost give a toss of scorn,
Followed by a—rosy yawn!
I could censure if I would
Such coy pranks of kittenhood!

Life is a chromatic scale
Of scampers after mouse and tail.
And thy gladness never wavers,
Breaking out in sharps and quavers.
For thy days together flow
One perpetual Allegro!
Oh! that Music's measure could
But describe thy kittenhood!

Then that sidelong pirouette,
Dancer never rivalled yet!
And my poet's tongue must fail
To convey that witching tail.
Now a note of exclamation!
Now a curved interrogation.
Point, to indicate each mood
Of a changeful kittenhood.

What a serpentine emotion
Thrills thee at some novel notion;
Head to tail there runs that shiver
In an undulating quiver.

Then to roll—a ball of fur
With a liquid, crooning purr.
Life to thee is all so good,
Optimist of kittenhood!

Thou art but a Merry Thought,
Luring pleasures out of nought.
Shivering shadows thou dost woo,
And the dancing sunbeam too;
For all shadows are to thee
Potent deep reality!

And all the trees in every wood
Just made for blithest kittenhood!

Was thy little silken gown
Spun from floating thistle-down,
With its rings of light and dark,
Each a tiny water-mark?
Wavelet thou from Fairy ocean,
Ever in a bright commotion.

Thou, for wonder, daily food,
In thy dainty kittenhood.

What a spell of witchery lies
In those wide-orbed saucy eyes!
Magic little mirrors blue
That the sky has looked into.
Art thou fay or prison'd Peri,
Thou that never seemest weary?
Not yet art thou understood
Through each maze of kittenhood.
Shadeless glancing kittenhood!
Blue-eyed dancing kittenhood!

V. R.

