

# ROUND THE LONDON RESTAURANTS.

BY W. J. WINTLE.

Illustrated by WILL OWEN.



*Nation* newspaper of New York ventured thirty years ago upon the statement: "There are no restaurants in England. There are one or two eating-houses in London which have

the air of restaurants, until a fair trial shows the hollowness of their pretensions. There is no nation in Europe where there is so much bad cookery and so little good as in England." If this were ever true—and the writer apparently held a brief for a famous American house—thirty years have made a change, and to-day the catering of London has no need to fear comparison with that of any city in the world.

To estimate the number of establishments devoted to the replenishment of the outer man is a bewildering task indeed. The

hotels and public-houses. Allowing each of these establishments two hundred customers a day—a very moderate estimate—we find ourselves faced with the startling total of nearly 600,000 meals a day supplied by the London caterers. That this estimate is but a fraction of the reality there is abundant evidence.

The houses are as varied as they are numerous. Between the turtle soup of

Romano's and the humble kipper of Shadwell are many stages and degrees of culinary excellence, or its reverse. A hungry man may lounge in marble halls and dine to the



IN SHADWELL.

tune of high-class music and a five pound note, or he may wedge himself between the table and the straight high-backed partition of a coffee-house in Pentonville, and feast his eyes upon a flaming placard bearing the equivocal inscription, "Dine here once, and you'll never dine anywhere else." If his purse be a long one he may relieve its weight at any of the restaurants in Regent Street or Piccadilly; if he suffer from the *res angusta domi* he may test the qualities of Harris's sausages or Lockhart's cocoa. But if he has any pretensions to a working knowledge of the great metropolis he will wend his way to Soho and take his place at a modest *table d'hôte*, where for a shilling he will get five courses admirably served and plentiful in quantity. It is a pleasant little place, is the *Restaurant aux Bons Frères*—though that is not its real name—and the company remind one of the Latin Quarter as they chat with Madame, who presides behind the tiny bar, while Monsieur



ROMANO'S.

London Directory gives a list of 414 refreshment-rooms, 762 dining-rooms, and 1712 coffee-houses, making a total of 2888 eating-houses, without including the great host of

waits upon his patrons. But I must not give away its real name, for I sometimes go there myself, and have no wish to see the "Good Brothers" crowded out by the inrush of a London multitude.

How London feeds is a problem wreathed in mystery. The attempt to solve it ends in desperation and brings one to the state of mind to which I reduced a caterer by the single question, "What is a Vienna steak?" When he recovered from the shock he piously replied, "Heaven only knows." One cannot measure up the sea, but one may deal with samples of it, and so the catering of London may be dealt with in departments.

Resolving to make a good beginning, I called on Messrs. Buszard of Oxford Street,



OUTSIDE BUSZARD'S.

and was soon deep in conversation with their genial representative Mr. Ansell. The air was redolent of cake. Stacks upon stacks of bridecakes stood around us piled upon shelves from floor to ceiling. Some were disguised in wondrous robes of gleaming sugar, others were simply coated with thick layers of almond icing, and some were still *in puris naturalibus*. They were of all sizes, though uniform in shape, and ranged in price from 13s. 6d. to infinity. Towering in the midst stood a replica of Princess Beatrice's wedding cake. Built in tiers and weighing half a ton, it was a perfect marvel of confectionery. Passion-flowers formed the staple decoration, and the leaves,

which numbered several thousands, were each one carved from solid sugar. The monograms and heraldic designs, all wrought in many-coloured sugar, bore witness to the fact that genuine artists had employed their skill upon them. Hard by were several assistants busily packing pieces of bridecake in the familiar three-cornered boxes. In answer to a question Mr. Ansell said, "No, we never have complaints of the cake disappearing in the post. Our method is very simple; we cut a slice that will fill the box and so make a solid parcel. Now most people put a morsel in a large empty box, tie a piece of ribbon round it, and then consign it to the post. Of course the box breaks beneath the stamping process, the fragment escapes, and the disappointed recipient talks about the dishonesty of postmen. The trouble is entirely due to the carelessness of the public. I may add that we have sent pieces of bridecake to all the Courts of Europe. The custom shows no sign of becoming obsolete in exalted circles."

Upstairs we found the large refreshment saloon, a place much frequented by lovers of turtle soup. Many come solely to taste the dish beloved of aldermen. Occasionally a novice is disappointed, and once in a way remarks have been overheard about "such a confounded lot of beastly fat," much to the amusement and contempt of the initiated. The soup here is made exclusively from fresh turtle, the dried article being strictly tabooed, and as a consequence it is greatly in demand for city banquets. Notwithstanding the reputation for solid feasting which attaches to these occasions the caterers find but little call for substantial old English fare. Light made dishes and entrées have displaced the time-honoured joints, and men eat less than did their fathers.

Descending to the public department we found a vast assortment of sweet things on every side. Piles of chocolates of many flavours, forty kinds of *petits fours*, rout biscuits in endless variety, crystallised fruits and flowers, ices designed to closely mimic fruits and vegetables, and cakes without number were spread before us, mingled with side dishes of every kind. There is a busy scene here at eight o'clock on week-day mornings. Sometimes as many as 200 children and poor folk attend for the purpose of buying yesterday's pastry and the odds and ends of dainty food for trifling sums.

*De haut en bas.* It is a long stride from Buszard and turtle soup to Pearce and Plenty, though the distance is not great from

Oxford Street to Farringdon Road. Here I found Mr. John Pearce, the managing director of Pearce's Refreshment Rooms, Limited, and of the British Tea-Table Company.



THE BEGINNING OF "PEARCE AND PLENTY."

Sitting in the board-room, surrounded by framed photographs of the forty-six houses under his control, Mr. Pearce was very willing to chat about his remarkable career.

"You see," he said, "I went to work when I was nine years old, through the loss of both my parents, and I have had to work hard all my life. In 1866 I started with a coffee-stall at the corner of East Road and the City Road, and for thirteen years I was there every week-day morning at four o'clock. I always had a notion of trying to attract the working classes, so I called my stall 'The Gutter Hotel,' and the name caught on famously. You see I keep a drawing of the concern hung up in my office to remind me of the pit from whence I was digged. Well, by being very careful I managed to save a little money, and in 1879 I opened a shop in Aldersgate Street, but moved in 1882 to Farringdon Street, where I started the big place with the two bent mirrors in front, to show the public how they looked before and after trying my beef-steak puddings.

"I ran this place myself for four years, and supplied 6000 meals a day, so I fancy I know a little about how the working-classes feed. But in 1886 a few wealthy gentlemen,

who were interested in the experiment, formed a company, and now we have twenty-two houses, while the British Tea-Table Company, which is an outgrowth of Pearce's Refreshment Rooms, Limited, and is under the same management, has twenty-four houses, making a total of forty-six establishments. Fourteen of these have temperance hotels connected with them.

"In Pearce's Refreshment Rooms we supply 50,000 persons every day, consisting almost entirely of workmen. You will be interested to know that my experience proves that they live up to their income. Here is a curious fact. If you show me our takings for any day, I can at once tell the day of the week. On Monday we get plenty of large silver, but it gradually dwindles from day to day, until on Friday we take more half-pence than anything else. Monday is our worst day, because so many of the men bring cold meat with them to their work, but the next worst day is Friday, when we find a great demand for haddocks and eggs. I used to put this down to religion, for many of our customers are Irish Catholics, until I noticed that the men who have such a light dinner on Friday often come back in the evening after paytime and indulge in a good square meal. So it is evidently more poverty than piety.

"In our class of business we find no falling off in the demand for solid food. The



THE COMIC MIRRORS.

working-man likes to know what he is eating. Though our sausages are home-made and thoroughly genuine, we have comparatively little call for them. Our customers prefer

to see their dinner cut from the joint. We make a speciality of beef-steak puddings, of which we sell an enormous number during the year. We give our customers half a pound of thoroughly good beef and a well-made crust for fourpence, and if you were to try one you would find it filling at the price. When I first commenced in a shop the largest of the three urns was kept for coffee, but now we find that tea is the favourite beverage, probably because, owing to its greater cheapness, we are able to supply a better article. The demand for cocoa has also largely increased of late years. You will notice that we only use Fry's Concentrated Cocoa, and at first our customers thought it was poor stuff because the spoon would not stand up in it, but they have learnt better now.

"Of course the weather makes a great difference in such a business as ours. A fall in the temperature means a rise of twenty-five per cent. in the sale of bread and butter. So much is this the case that we take careful note of the temperature every morning, and regulate our supplies accordingly. Our annual output is scarcely credible. The weight of beef, mutton, pork and veal consumed by Pearce's Refreshment Rooms during the course of a year would equal the weights of a drove of oxen numbering 995, a flock of sheep numbering 1002, a herd of pigs numbering 1415, and 121 calves. Here are some more startling figures for the year. We consume 990 tons of potatoes and 902 tons of flour. The eggs total up to 1,870,000, and as we sell them slightly under cost price, taking the year as a whole, this represents a very considerable loss in our annual accounts. We use 99,000 gallons of milk,  $13\frac{1}{4}$  tons of cocoa, 58,300 pounds of tea, and 385,000 pounds of sugar, while we get through 110 tons of jam,  $2\frac{1}{4}$  tons of pepper,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  tons of mustard, and 2640 gallons of vinegar. As a small offset against the profit of all this I may mention that we break 30,060 cups, 27,432 plates, and 12,648 saucers every year. You will bear in mind that these figures refer to Pearce's Refreshment Rooms only, and do not include the British Tea-Table establishments.

"As to order, we rarely have any trouble with the genuine working-man. When difficulty occurs it is usually with someone who fancies himself a little superior to the ordinary run of the community."

"And now, Mr. Pearce, will you tell the readers of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE something about the British Tea-Table Company?"

"Yes; that was started in September 1892 in order to cater for young City clerks and others who, while requiring something superior to the arrangements of 'Pearce and Plenty,' yet found themselves unable to pay high prices. We have now twenty-four houses, and supply 15,000 meals every day. The catering is distinctly lighter than in the other establishments. Eggs on toast, ham, and salad, are most in demand during the summer, while in winter we do a brisk trade in soup, chops and steaks.

"Most of our cooking for both companies is done at Farringdon Road, where we keep forty bakers hard at work. Our total staff numbers over 800, and I am proud to say, from close personal observation, that there are not two idle ones amongst them. We try to treat them well, and they repay us by faithful service. On an average we have twelve fresh applicants for positions as waitresses every day, most of them from domestic service, and I should like to take this opportunity of saying to the public, as the result of a long experience with young women of this class, that the one great reason why they so often neglect their work and finally go to the bad is that their lives are spent in practical slavery. If they had

more time for themselves they would devote far more energy to their employers' service.

"One other fact may be of interest," Mr. Pearce added in parting, "we take all our employes to Ramsgate for a day in July,

and the whole of the funds are provided by the sale of our kitchen refuse, grease, bones, and the rest. There is a lesson in domestic economy for you!"

From the heat and bustle of the crowded establishment in Farringdon Road it was a decided change to find myself in the spacious coolness of Olympia. The afternoon performance had commenced in the arena, and the long arched corridors and the gaily-decorated gardens were well-nigh deserted.



AT RAMSGATE.

Outside, in the crystal walk, many thousands of cut-glass lustres kept up a musical tinkling as they were stirred by the breeze, and in the lofty grill-room the many waiters were enjoying a welcome rest after the exertions of the luncheon hour.

Here I found Mr. Isidore Salmon, the enterprising secretary of Messrs. J. Lyons and Co., whose great reputation for popular catering in London seems to have sprung up in a single night. Every *habitué* of the London streets is familiar by this time with the graceful arrangement in white and gold which distinguishes the restaurants of the firm. Though fifteen years old in the provinces, they have only appeared in London during the present decade, yet already the refreshment houses number seventeen, in addition to Olympia and the Trocadero.

Mr. Salmon had some interesting figures ready to hand. It was in the height of summer when our talk took place, and at that time the daily consumption of strawberries reached 900 lbs., while 3000 lemons were converted into squash and 500 quarts of ices were disposed of every day. One may call to mind in passing that no part of the business of a caterer yields a more surprising profit than does this. A recent case in the courts showed that a profit of from 200 to 300 per cent. can easily be made from ice cream and ginger beer. To return to Messrs. Lyons, they very justly pride themselves upon the vast resources which enable them to undertake, at short notice, feats of catering which are fairly astonishing. Last year they arranged practically all the great balls in connection with the University of Cambridge. At Trinity College they actually built a bridge across the river for the convenience of the 5000 guests, while at the opening of the Imperial Institute at South Kensington they catered for 25,000 guests at a bar 500 feet in length, and served by 400 waitresses. At Olympia they are able to boast that they cater for the public at lower rates than is the case at any other high-class place of entertainment in the country.

Three times a day the various refreshment houses are supplied with goods from the bakeries at Cadby Hall, Kensington, notably with the far-famed batons of bread which are regularly used by the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York. For private catering the firm possess an immense stock of silver and other goods, and are prepared at a few days' notice to undertake anything, from serving light refreshments at a small reception to carrying out the enormous pre-

parations for a Lord Mayor's banquet. They have indeed performed the latter feat with great *éclat* on the last two occasions.

Reminding Mr. Salmon of this, he at once produced a large folio volume of statistics and plans, from which the entire romance of the great civic festivity, from its inception to its triumphant consummation, might be compiled. Selecting only a few of the many startling figures, it may be noted that on the last occasion the thousand guests consumed 100 gallons of turtle soup, 500 lobsters, 120 turkeys, 200 partridges, 100 pheasants, 300 plovers, 200 chickens, and 20 hams. 700 calves' feet were used for jelly, 2400 ices were in readiness, 350 lbs. of grapes were consumed, and 250 dozen of choice wines proved not greatly in excess of the demand. The service required 15,000 plates, 10,000 silver forks, 9000 knives, and

3 COURSES 6'  
VEGETARIAN DUCK



6500 glasses, while the tables were decorated with 3000 yards of smilax, besides countless roses and lilies.

Once more the scene changes. Not very far from the Guildhall, where the civic banquet takes place, stands a

modest restaurant with windows filled with fruits and pulse, and near the door a conspicuous inscription, "Three courses for sixpence." This is one of the vegetarian restaurants, of which there are now thirty in London, supplying 20,000 luncheons daily. As the oldest of them started only fifteen years ago it is evident that the kind of diet they provide has largely grown in popularity. From conversations with the managers I learn that this is not due to any very widespread acceptance of vegetarian principles, but simply to a preference for light and economical luncheons, the heavier meal being taken in the evening. When the vast number of suburban residents who spend their days in City houses is taken into account, it is evident that the luncheon

question is one of no small importance and magnitude. The fact that a satisfying if not very stimulating meal can be obtained



AT SLATER'S.

for a trifling sum is necessarily a recommendation to those who have to watch closely their expenditure.

At one of these establishments I tried the experiment, and received in return for sixpence a plate of oatmeal porridge, a savoury omelette with green peas, and a portion of raspberry jelly with two slices of tinned pineapple. Yet somehow, after one of these meals, a man never quite feels that he has dined, and we are not surprised to learn that twelve out of the thirty vegetarian restaurants have found it advisable to set apart a room in which those who look back with sighing to the flesh-pots of Egypt may solace their backsliding appetites. The general experience seems to be that customers attend regularly for about a fortnight, and then relapse for awhile, and that the favourite dishes are those which are most disguised to resemble meat, as for example, Vienna steaks, vegetarian ducks, and food reform turkeys. But it is some consolation to know that there is a profit of considerably over a 100 per cent. on vegetarian catering.

In St. Martin's Lane stands a restaurant called St. George's House, mainly frequented by officials from the Government and County Council offices, which offers a kind of half-way house between the two extremes of diet,

Neither fish, flesh nor fowl can be obtained, and yet the bill of fare differs widely from that of the vegetarian restaurant. Egg cookery and Italian dishes are the speciality here, and the coffee claims to be the best in London. It is made on the Vienna system, and a well-known Austrian count may be seen here any morning sipping his favourite beverage. The courteous proprietor, Mr. Hodges, claims that the customers who crowd the house to inconvenience at midday are brought together solely by the lightness of the food and the excellence of the *cuisine*, while certain dishes of tropical origin and fiery character attract a good many Anglo-Indians. In Lent especially the tables are well filled.

We have but space to mention the Cyprus restaurants, now becoming better known as Slater's. Started seventeen years ago by Mr. W. Kirkland, who still manages them with great success, the four City houses now provide 2000 luncheons daily. Each seat is filled six times between 1 and 3 p.m., showing that City men do not linger long over their meals. The houses are conducted on strictly temperance lines, and the manager announces

with gratification that the sale of non-intoxicating beverages has increased three-fold during the past ten years.

We have been the round, and our task is ended. If anything more than another will help the problematical New Zealander to appreciate the vast population which



THE NEW ZEALAND EXPLORER.

once filled the City upon whose ruins he will gaze, it will surely be the great collections of cups and saucers, plates and dishes, knives and forks, *et hoc genus omne*, which he will dig up from the crumbling remains of the erstwhile busy restaurants of London.