

THE DINNER YEAR BOOK.

FAMILIAR TALK WITH THE READER.

"Do not laugh when I tell you that one of the most serious perplexities of my everyday life is the daily recurring question, 'What shall we have for dinner?' " writes a correspondent.

I do not smile at the naive confession. I feel more like sighing as I recollect the years during the summers and winters of which the same query advanced with me into the dignity of a problem. There were several important ends to be compassed in the successful settlement of the question. To accomplish an agreeable variety in the family bill of fare; to accommodate appetites and individual preferences to the season and state of the local market; to avoid incongruous associations of meats, vegetables, sauces, *entrees* and desserts; to build fragments into a structure about which should linger no flavor of staleness or sameness; so to manage a long succession of meals that yesterday's repast and the more frugal one of to-day should not suggest the alternation of fat and lean in the Hibernian's pork, or the dutiful following of penance upon indulgence; to shun, with equal care, the rock of parsimony and the whirlpool of extravagance;—but why extend the list of dilemmas? Are they not written in the mental chronicles of every housewife whose conscience—be her purse shallow or deep—will not excuse her from a continual struggle with the left-overs? Such uncompromising bits of facts do these same "left-overs" appear in the next day's survey of ways, means, and capabilities, that timid mistresses are the less to blame for often winking at the Alexandrine audacity with which the cook has disposed of the knotty subject by emptying platters and tureens into the swill-pail,—which should stand for the armorial bearings of her tribe wherever found,—or satisfied indolence, and what goes with her for humanity, by tossing crusts, bones, and "cold scraps" into the

yawning basket-of the beggar at the basement door.

One of these days I mean to write an article, scientific and practical, upon the genus "basket-beggar." For the present, take the word of one who has studied the species in all its varieties,—who has suffered long, and certainly not being unkind in the acquisition of experience upon this head,—and prohibit their visits entirely, and at all seasons. "Cold cuts" and the "heels" of loaves belong to you as certainly as do hot joints and unutilized pies. Issue your declaration of independence to the effect that you choose to dispense charity in your own way, and that, as an intelligent Christian woman, you can better judge by what methods to relieve want and aid the really worthy poor, than can the ignorant, irresponsible creature who lavishes what costs her nothing upon every chance speculator whose lying whine excites her pity. Sympathy which, by the way, would generally lie dormant, were the listener to the piteous tale obliged to satisfy the petitioner from her own purse or wardrobe.

Returning from what is not, although it may seem to be, a digression, let us talk together more briefly than is our wont in these familiar conferences, of the considerations that have moved and sustained me in the preparation of this volume, and which will, I hope, make it a welcome and useful counsellor to you. First, then, the suggestion and interrogation of sincere seekers for helpful advice pertaining to that most important of the triad of daily meals—"THE FAMILY DINNER," superadded to my own observation and experience of the difficulties that beset the subject. Secondly, the discovery, that so far as I have been able to push my investigations—and my searching has been keen and extensive—no directory upon this particular branch of culinary endeavor has been published, at least none in the English language. We have had books, some of them admirable helps to skillful, no less than to inexperienced housekeepers, upon dinner-giving, and company dinners,