

SOME ECONOMICAL IRISH DISHES.

By the Author of "We Wives," etc.

"HELEN, dear! will you give me some recipes for the things you have in Ireland? They would do so nicely for the servants' hall!"

The speaker—a regal-looking dame in blue velvet and rosepoint—looked at her niece sweetly as she spoke. She seemed quite unconscious of the hidden meaning in her speech. But all down the glittering table in that old banquetting-hall ran a ripple of laughter. Helen's aunt was always putting her foot into it. Now she was insinuating that the food in Irish homes was only fit for the servants' hall!

Helen did not mind. Not she. But a cousin sitting near—a Major, he of the — Regiment, stationed in Cork—looked quite furious. He was engaged to a lovely blue-eyed Irish maiden—so perhaps his views on the subject were not impartial. He had his mother reduced almost to tears before he had done decanting on the generous, dainty hospitality extended to many in the Emerald Isle. But all the same, Helen made out a list of economical Irish dishes, and left her aunt to use them when and where she would.

The first on her list was, of course, the famed *Irish Stew*. None of your sloppy, watery, greasy compounds. In Ireland such a thing would not be tolerated. Helen's recipe produced a savoury, toothsome, unique dish—much to be appreciated on both sides of the Channel.

For this stew Helen's aunt would have to lay in a lean, juicy bit of mutton. The best part of the scrag end does very well. It must be cut into neat chops, with most of the fat and all gristle trimmed away. Carelessness in this matter or false economy will render the stew indigestible and stringy. To every pound of meat two pounds of whole, peeled potatoes and half a pound of sliced onions. Helen told her aunt that most cookery books tell the amateur to boil meat and potatoes together. The real Irish way is to simmer the meat and onions in one pot with only a little water. Potatoes brought to a boil in a separate pan—strained, and added with pepper and salt to taste. This insures the ingredients being well cooked, yet guards against sloppiness. When all the stew is thus mixed, cover down tightly, and never lift the lid again for one hour and a half. Juice from the onions, gravy from the meat, and steam from the potatoes will give enough moisture to cook the whole.

Result—A savoury, rather dry stew.

Another way of cooking this dish (Helen left both recipes), which makes it still more fit for delicate palates, is to put all the ingredients, without any water, into a brown earthenware crock. (The lid must have a hole in it to let out steam.) Place the jar in a moderate oven and cook for rather more than two hours. This will be a browner, drier stew than even the first one, and I believe the husband of Helen's aunt—(sounds like a phrase from *Le petit Précepteur*, doesn't it?)—considers it far too good for the servants' hall!

Colcannon.—I wish Helen's aunt (or my readers) could have heard the rich Kerry brogue in which Helen's cook, Dinah, let her into the secrets of this truly Irish dish. It was strong enough to stand on, and thick enough to cut with a knife! So Helen said, and we must believe her.

Colcannon is a dish universally partaken of in Ireland on All Hallow E'en. In its smooth, soft depths a ring is hidden, with all its prophetic bliss for the finder thereof. But col-

cannon without a ring is eaten all the year round whenever a cook can be got who does not mind the trouble of making it.

Potatoes and curly cabbage form its component part. Well wash and peel the former, letting them lie to whiten in fresh water for a short time before cooking. Dinah's suggestive remark was, "They must be cleaner than usual." Chop the cabbage "as fine as snuff." (This is Dinah's expression.) When the potatoes are parboiled add the cabbage with a tiny—a very tiny—pinch of soda.

Boil all together for ten minutes. Have at hand a wooden masher and pound the mixture well after having, of course, drained all the water off.

Smooth as cream, green as grass, your colcannon ought now to be, and when to it is added a goodly lump of butter, no better vegetable could be desired. A sprig of parsley as a bonnet will accentuate the colour and decorate at the same time.

Bacon and Cabbage.—It seemed as if there was no need for Helen to put such an obviously simple recipe on the list of Irish dishes for her aunt. But Helen knew otherwise. When she first married and went to live in the Emerald Isle, she took an English cook with her. Now Helen's better half hails from Paddyland, and his favourite (it really might be spelt in capitals) dish is bacon and cabbage. Helen thought him vulgar, I am afraid; also she despised his taste. Bacon and cabbage as cooked by Mrs. Jenkins was certainly most unappetising! Meat served on one dish. Vegetable in another. Neither well done. Bacon stringy. Cabbage with a bone in it.

But when Dinah came to rule, things were changed. Pig's cheek and cabbage became a luscious, much-appreciated meal. The secret was only—to boil both together in one pot! If Mr. Editor can overlook the triviality of this recipe and put it in the pages of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER, I can answer for it that his readers will never regret following it. It is the Irish dish *par excellence*, though not as economical as it sounds. Helen knew her servants to choose it for their festival dinners rather than beef or chicken. This is a fact; whilst her husband suggested regaling the bishop on it when last he dined at the parson's!

Potato Cakes.—For this, equal parts of cold boiled potatoes and white flour are wanted. Knead well together with a little milk, if necessary. Flour your pastry board well, and roll out the mixture about half an inch thick. Cut into three-cornered scones and bake on a griddle. These must be eaten hot, with plenty of butter. They are delicious!

Honey Cake.—This is another hot cake fit for supper or high tea.

Mix together half a breakfast-cupful of white sugar and one breakfast-cupful of rich, sour cream (Dinah was always leaving dribbles in jug and basin after afternoon tea or Helen's morning cup. It was not difficult for enough to get sour very frequently). Dredge into the mixture two breakfast-cupfuls of finely-sifted flour, and about two tablespoonfuls of clear honey. This will flavour the cake nicely, and must be stirred in well, so as to be thoroughly mixed. Add half a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda (it is called bread soda in Ireland), and beat with the back of a wooden spoon until air bubbles appear.

Bake in a buttered tin for three-quarters of an hour, and eat hot.

This may not sound a very economical recipe; but Helen drew her aunt's attention to the fact that neither eggs nor butter are used. As a matter of fact, a cake sufficient to allay the hunger of four or five persons can be made for eightpence—a not exorbitant outlay.

Economical Christmas Cake.—Helen rather doubted if she ought to put this amongst distinctive Irish cookery recipes. Its original birthplace may be England. But it was given to her by a typical Irishwoman, and has only been met with by her in Irish households, so she does not withhold it from her aunt's servants' hall.

The first thing to recommend this cake is, that the longer before Christmas it is made the richer it tastes. It takes all November and December to bring it to perfection if kept in an air-tight box. By this early preparation, some of the fuss and turmoil of Christmas week is done away with—especially if, like Helen, her aunt mixes her plum pudding and mince pies not later than stir-up Monday.

Put half a pound of butter in a large bowl, breaking over it five eggs. Heat until the mixture looks "curdy," and add a handful of coarse brown sugar.

Add this boiling mixture to the eggs and butter, and keep stirring, whilst a second person sifts in slowly one pound and a half of well washed, well dried, carefully picked currants, three-quarters of a pound of flour, and two ounces of citron peel chopped small.

Put into a shape papered, but not buttered, taking care that several folds of paper are lining the bottom of the tin. Bake in a moderate oven for three hours.

To look at, this rich, cheap cake might be prepared for a wedding. To eat it is delicious; but only if kept for at least a month before cutting. Nothing better could be desired for birthday in the parlour, or weddings in the servants' hall.

Buttermilk Bread.—Helen's aunt greatly prided herself upon her home-made bread. Helen thought it vastly inferior both in looks and taste to the flat cakes she was accustomed to in Ireland. So she just jotted down a rule of thumb recipe for the latter, and inserted it slyly at the end of her instructions.

To every pound of whole wheatmeal (or brown flour) add a handful of seconds, a spoonful of salt, a small pinch of baking soda, and as much thick, sour buttermilk as will make an ordinary cake mixture.

Flour the pastry board and lift the dough on to it. Knead very thoroughly and lightly from outside to inside, working the mixture always towards the centre. Now, with a firm turn of the wrist, roll out the dough from the centre outwards, pressing firmly and evenly. When one inch thick, flour thickly with the hand, and bake in an oven or griddle. This bread ought to rise and be quite four inches thick when done. One slice of this is as satisfying as four or five of baker's bread, and far more wholesome. If brown bread is not liked, white flour can be used in the same way.

Helen has not paid a visit to her aunt since she sent her these recipes. But she hears, on good authority, that her Irish stew is not relegated to the servants' hall; that her honey cake is much appreciated upstairs at afternoon tea; that colcannon is often introduced to visitors as something quite new and strange; and that the household bread bill is reduced by one-half.