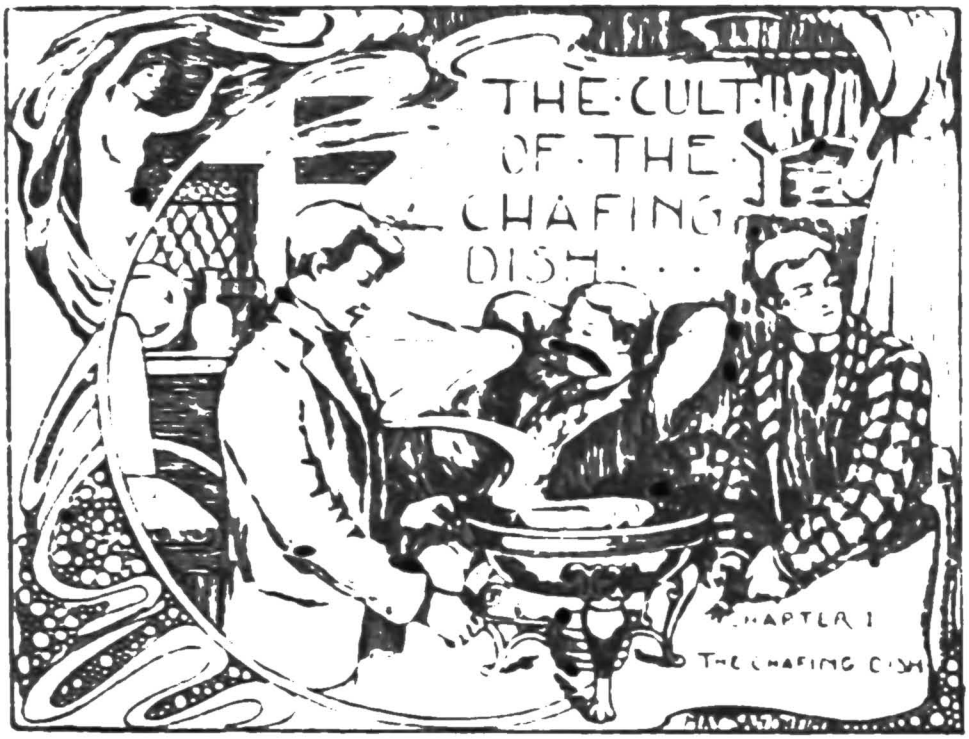


"There does not at this blessed moment breathe on the Earth's surface a human being that willna prefer eating and drinking to all ither pleasures o' body or soul."—THE ETTRICK SHEPHERD.

EVERY bachelor has a wife of some sort. Mine is a Chafing Dish; and I desire to sing her praises.

My better half—I love to call her Chaffinda, and to dwell upon the doubled consonant—is a nickel-plated dish on a wrought-iron stand, with a simple spirit-lamp wherewith to keep herself warm. I bought her at Harrod's Stores for twelve shillings and ninepence—and she has sisters.

It has been borne in upon me that many quite nice folk may be glad to learn something of the possibilities of Chaffinda. Whether married or single, there are moments in the life of nearly every man and woman when the need of a quick, hot, and light little meal is worth much fine gold. To such I would politely address myself.

The ordinary domestic cook is a tireless enemy of the Chafing Dish. She calls it "fiddle-faddle." Maybe. But inasmuch as it is clean, economical, speedy and rather simple, it would naturally not appeal to her peculiar sense of the culinary art.

To bachelors, male and female, in chambers, lodgings, diggings, and the like, in fact to all who "batch"; to young couples with a taste for theatres, concerts, and homely late suppers; to yachtsmen, shooting-parties, and picnickers; to inventive artists who yearn for fame in the evolution of a new entrée; to invalids, night workers, actors and stock-brokers, the Chafing Dish is a welcome friend and companion.

It has its limitations, of course, but they are few and immaterial, and its obvious

advantages and conveniences far outweigh its trivial drawbacks. At the same time it must be remembered that it is a serious cooking apparatus, and by no means a mere toy.

It is quite erroneous to imagine that the Chafing Dish is an American invention. Nothing of the sort. The earliest trace of it is more than a quarter of a thousand years old. "Le Cuisinier Français," by Sieur François Pierre de la Varenne, Escuyer de Cuisine de Monsieur le Marquis d'Uxelles, published in Paris in 1652, contains a recipe for *Champignons à l'Olivier*, in which the use of a *Réchaut* is recommended. A translation of this work, termed "The French Cook," was published in London in 1653, and the selfsame recipe of *Mushrooms after the Oliver* contains the injunction to use a Chafing Dish; moreover, the frontispiece, a charmingly executed drawing, shows a man-cook in his kitchen, surrounded by the implements of his art; and on the table a Chafing Dish, much akin to our latter-day variety, is burning merrily. This was in 1653. The *Mayflower* sailed in 1620.

So much for the antiquity of the Chafing

Dish. At the same time our mitigated thanks are due to America for its comparatively recent reintroduction, for until quite lately, in Great Britain, its use was practically limited to the cooking of cheese on the table. The Chafing Dish is much esteemed across the Atlantic, although one is forced to admit that it is sometimes put to base uses in the concoction of unholy stews, which have not the natural flavour of fish, flesh or fowl, or even good red herring. Still, if the Americans are vague in their French nomenclature, unorthodox in their sauces, eclectic in their flavourings, and over-lavish in their condiments, yet they have at any rate brought parlour cooking to a point where it may gracefully be accepted as an added pleasure to life.

When two or three are gathered together, and one mentions the magic word "Chafing Dish," the second invariably chimes in with "Welsh Rabbit." This is an error of taste, but excusable in the circumstances. Chafing Dishes were not created for the exclusive canonisation of Welsh Rabbits, although a deft hand may occasionally play with one in

a lightsome mood. There are other and better uses. All the same, a fragrant and delicate Rabbit is not to be despised, although it must not be made conceited by too great an elevation into the realms of high cookery.

My Chaffinda has at least seventeen hundred and four different charms, therein somewhat exceeding the average number appertaining to her sex, but it would require volumes to mention them separately, and it must suffice to indicate roughly a few of the more prominent.

I suppose that every nation has the cooks that it deserves, and, if this be accepted as an axiom, the general degeneration of the Plain Cook of the middle classes amply accounts for the growing cult of the Chafing Dish. The British school of cookery, in its mediocre form, is monotony exemplified. Too many broths spoil the cook; and hence we derive our dull sameness of roast and boiled.

Sweet are the juices of diversity, and whilst there is no reason for the Chafer to elaborate a sauce of thirteen ingredients, the cunning manipulation of three or four common articles

of the domestic store-cupboard will often give (intentionally or otherwise) surprising results. This I shall hope to explain more fully later on.

Imagination and a due sense of proportion are as necessary in cooking as in any other art—more so than in some, for Impressionism in the kitchen simply means indigestion. Digestion is the business of the human interior, indigestion that of the doctor. It is so easy to cook indigestible things that a savoury cunningly concocted of Bismuth and Pepsine would seem an almost necessary adjunct to the menu (or *Carte Dinatoire*, as the French Revolutionists called it) of the budding Chafist.

But the demon of indigestion may easily be exorcised with a little care and thought. Three great apothegms should be borne in mind. Imprimis: Never worry your food; let it cook out its own salvation. Item: Use as few highly spiced condiments as possible; and, lastly, keep to natural flavours, juices, and sauces.

Much modern depravity, for instance, I attribute to the unholy cult of Mayonnaise

(or Mahonnaise, or Bayonnaise, or Magnonaise, according to different culinary authorities). At its best it is simply a saucy disguise to an innocent salmon or martial lobster, reminding the clean-palated of an old actor painted up to look young. I once knew a man who proposed to a girl at a dance-supper simply because he could not think of anything else to say, and suddenly discovered that they both hated Mayonnaise. I have no reason to suppose that they are unhappy.

At the same time I am in no wise against trying new dishes, new combinations of subtle flavours, if they do not obliterate the true taste of the basis. An experimental evening with Chaffinda, when one is not sure how things are going to turn out, is, I find, most exhilarating, and a sure cure for the blues. But I am fain to admit that on such occasions I always provide a chunk of Benoist pressed beef as a stand-by in case of emergency.

There is nothing final about the Chafing Dish.

Another point about having a wife in the shape of a Chafing Dish is somewhat delicate

to explain. Coarsely indicated, it amounts to this. Continuous intercourse with such a delicious, handy and resourceful helpmeet tends to a certain politeness in little things, a dainty courtesy which could not be engendered by the constant companionship of a common kitchen-range. Chafing-Dish cookery bears the same relation to middle-class kitchen cookery that the delightful art of fencing does to that of the broadsword. Both are useful, but there is a world of subtle differentiation between the two. The average rough and tumble of the domestic saucepan contrasts with the deft manipulation of the miniature battery of tiny pans.

And politeness always pays; moreover, it it vastly becoming. I gave a little tea-party recently to some dear children. Some of them were twins. Edith, a female twin of nine, asked me to help her to some more blackberry jam. "Certainly, Edith," I said; "but why don't you help yourself?" The maid was even politer than she was hungry: "Because I was afraid I should not take enough." And thus we learn how things work among manikinkind.

There are some who delight in the flavour of onions. I do myself—but then I am a bachelor. Politeness and onions form one of life's most persistent inconsistencies. His Most Gracious Majesty King George IV., it is recorded, attempted to kiss a royal housemaid, who said: "Sir, your language both shocks and appals me; besides which, your breath smells of onions!" And again, in a Cambridge dining-room, a framed notice on the wall stated: "Gentlemen partial to spring onions are requested to use the table under the far window."

Nevertheless, the benefits of onions toward the human race are probably not less than those attendant on the discovery of steam. It is a vegetable whose manifold properties and delights have never been properly sung. As a gentle stimulant, a mild soporific, a democratic leveller of exaggeration in flavour, a common bond between prince and peasant, it is a standing protest of Nature against Art.

On my wall, as I write, hangs a delightful oil study of a clump of onions in flower, which the deft artist aptly dubs *Le Fond de la Cuisine*. Dr. William King said that

"Onions can make even heirs or widows weep"; and the "Philosopher's Banquet," written in 1633, seems to meet the case excellently:

> "If Leekes you like, but do their smelle disleeke,
> Eat Onyons, and you shall not smelle the leeke;
> If you of Onyons would the scente expelle,
> Eat Garlicke, that shall drowne the Onyon's Smelle."

I would not go quite as far as the poet, but I confess to a weakness for chives. A judicious touch to many salads and made dishes is very desirable. Chives are to onions as the sucking-pig is to pork, a baby scent, a fairy titillation, an echo of the great Might Be.

Charles Lamb had a friend who said that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple dumplings. In the plural, mind you, not the singular. Appetites have vastly changed since then, probably not for the better, but the test even to-day seems adequate and noteworthy. I do not propose to recommend either onions or apple dumplings as Chafing-Dish experiments, but merely

adduce them as worthy examples of the toothsomeness of simplicity.

The late lamented Joseph, of the Savoy and elsewhere, once said in his wisdom, "Make the good things as plain as possible. God gave a special flavour to everything. Respect it. Do not destroy it by messing." These are winged words, and should be inscribed (in sugar icing) above the hearthstone of every artist in pots and pans.

The Chafing Dish is a veritable Mephistopheles in the way of temptation. It is so alluringly easy to add just a taste of this or that, a few drops of sauce, a sprinkling of herbs, a suggestion of something else. But beware and perpend! Do not permit your culinary perspective to become too Japanesque in the matter of foreground. Remember your *chiaroscuro*, take care of the middle distance, and let the background assert its importance in the whole composition. "I can resist anything—except temptation" is the cry of the hopelessly weak in culinary morality.

Lest I should be hereafter accused of contradicting my own most cherished beliefs, let

me hasten here and now to assert that condiments, esoteric and otherwise, were undoubtedly made to be used as well as to be sold ; and I am no enemy of bolstering up the weak and assimilative character of—say —veal, "the chameleon of the kitchen," with something stronger, and, generally speaking, of making discreet use of suave subtleties to give completeness to the picture. But the watchword must always be Discretion ! To those who muddle their flavours I would commend the words of the Archbishop in Gil Blas : "My son, I wish you all manner of prosperity—and a little more taste ! "

Sidney Smith thought Heaven must be a place where you ate *pâté de foies gras* to the sound of trumpets. There is a late Georgian ingenuousness about this which is refreshing. The liver of the murdered goose and the scarlet sound of brass ! Nowadays a Queen's Hall gourmet would compare the celestial regions to a continuous feast of *Cailles de Vigne braisées à la Parisienne* to the accompaniment of Tschaikowsky's "Casse Noisette" suite, which is more complicated, but perchance not less indigestible.

The typical crude British cookery, if carelessly performed, is a constant menace to its disciples. If well cooked there is nothing more wholesome, save perhaps the French *cuisine bourgeoise*, but—"much virtue in your If." As a matter of fact, in nine households out of ten, in the middle-middle classes (and the upper too) the fare is well-intentioned in design, but deadly in execution, with a total absence of care and taste.

There is a curious old book, probably out of print nowadays, which deals tenderly, if severely with the shortcomings of British cookery. It was published in 1853, and is called "Memoirs of a Stomach, written by Himself." A typical passage runs: "The English system of cookery it would be impertinent of me to describe; but still, when I think of that huge round of parboiled ox-flesh, with sodden dumplings floating in a saline, greasy mixture, surrounded by carrots, looking red with disgust, and turnips pale with dismay, I cannot help a sort of inward shudder, and making comparisons unfavourable to English gastronomy."

This is fair comment, and brings me back

to the advantages of the Chafing Dish. An old German fairy tale, I think one of Grimm's, says : "Nothing tastes so nice as what one eats oneself," and it is certain that if one cooks so as entirely to satisfy oneself (always supposing oneself to be a person of average good taste), then one's guests will be equally satisfied—if not more so.

In dealing with Chaffinda we may, after a minimum of practice, be almost certain of results. If one is naturally clean, neat and dainty in one's tastes, then one's cooking should display the same characteristics One's individuality shines forth in the Chafing Dish and is reflected in one's sauces. Chaffinda conveys a great moral lesson, and, as a teacher, should not lack in honour and reverence.

The late Prince Consort, being on a visit, wrote to a friend : "Things always taste so much better in small houses" ; if one substitutes small dishes for small houses the Prince predicted the Chafing Dish.

The kitchen is the country in which there are always discoveries to be made, and with Chaffinda on a neat white tablecloth before

one, half a dozen little dishes with food in various stages of preparation, a few select condiments, an assortment of wooden spoons and like utensils—and an inventive brain—there are absolutely no limits to one's discoveries. One is bound by no rule, no law, no formula, save those of ordinary common sense, and though it might be too much to expect to rediscover the lost Javanese recipe for cooking kingfishers' or halcyons' nests, the old manner of treating a Hocco, or the true inwardness of "the dish called Maupygernon"; yet there are illimitable possibilities which act as incentives to the enterprising.

There is a Chinese proverb to the effect that most men dig their graves with their teeth, meaning thereby that we all eat too much. This is awfully true and sad and undeniable, and avoidable. The late Lord Playfair asserted that the actual requirements of a healthy man for a seven-day week were three pounds of meat, one pound of fat, two loaves of bread, one ounce of salt, and five pints of milk. What a contrast to the chop-eating, joint-chewing, plethoric individual who averages five meals a day, and does

justice to them all! Sir Henry Thompson says: The doctors all tell us we eat too fast, and too often, and too much, and too early, and too late; but no one of them ever says that we eat too little."

The proper appreciation of Chaffinda may ameliorate this, for in using her one speedily becomes convinced of the beauty of small portions, an appetite kept well in hand, and the manifold advantages of moderation. It is easy to feed, but nice eating is an art.

Bishop Wilberforce knew a greedy clergyman who, when asked to say grace before dinner, was wont to look whether there were champagne glasses on the table. If there were, he began: "Bountiful Jehovah"; but if he only espied claret glasses he contented himself with: "We are not worthy of the least of Thy mercies."

Of course growing children and quite young grown-up folks require proportionately more food than real adults, for they have not only to maintain but to build up their bodies. But to such the Chafing Dish will not appeal primarily, if at all, and they may even be

found impertinent enough to look upon it as a culinary joke, which it is not.

Chaffinda hates gluttons, but takes pleasure in ministering to the modest wants of the discerning acolyte, fostering his incipient talent, urging him to higher flights, and tempting him to delicate fantasies.

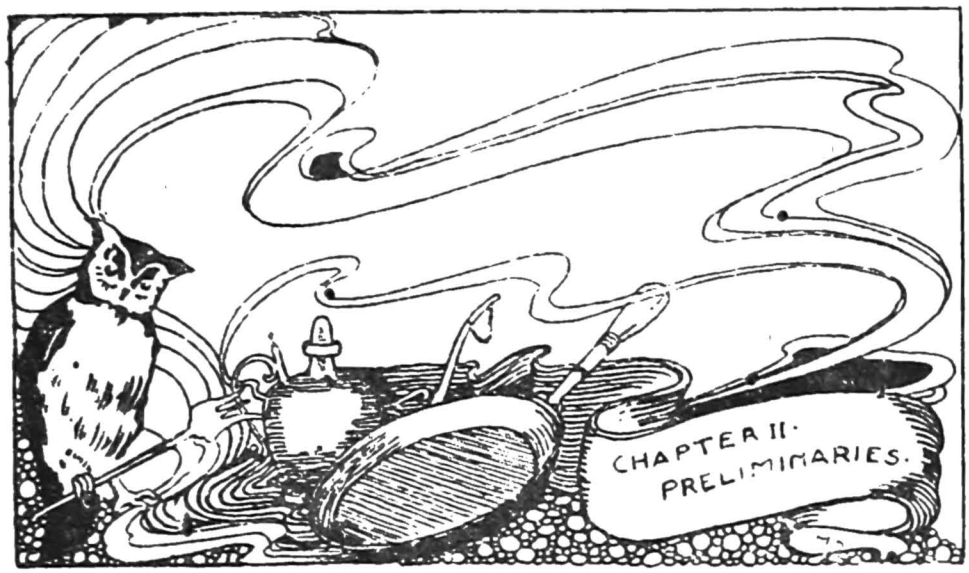
"Do have some more; it isn't very good, but there's lots of it." So said a friend of mine to his guests about his half-crown port. This is the sentiment of the man who knows not the Chafing Dish. "Lots of it" is the worst kind of hospitality, and suggests the quantity, not quality, of the cheap-jack kerb-stone butcher. Little and good, and enough to go round, is the motto of the tactful house-husband. A French cook once said that it was only unlucky to sit down thirteen at table if the food were but sufficient for twelve.

There is such a deal of fine confused feeding about the ordinary meals of even a simply conducted country house that imagination boggles at the thought of the elaboration of the daily menus. With four, or possibly five, repasts a day, few of them chaste, most

of them complicated, a careful observer will note that the cook has been listening to the pipings of the Great God Sauce, and covers natural flavours with misnamed concoctions which do nothing but obliterate nature and vex the palate.

There are some few houses, great and small, town and country, where the elemental decencies of the kitchen are manfully preserved, where wholesome mutton does not masquerade as *Quartier d'Agneau à la Miséricorde*, and the toothsome lobster is not Americanised out of all knowing. To such establishments, all honour and glory.

But to those whose means or opportunities do not permit of a carefully trained cook, a home-made artist, I would in all diffidence recommend the cult of the Chafing Dish, whose practical use I now propose to discuss.



"Tout se fait en dinant dans le siècle où nous sommes,
Et c'est par les diners qu'on gouverne les hommes."—CH. DE MONSELET.

CHAFFINDA'S cooking battery is small, but select. The Chafing Dish proper comprises the stand and lamp, and the dish, called the "Blazer," which has an ebony handle; and there is an ingenious spirit diminisher which enables one to reduce the flame to a minimum, just enough to keep the flame simmering, or to put it out altogether. A second, or hot water pan, belongs to the outfit, and an asbestos toast-making tray may be bought for a trifle. In addition, a couple of green or brown dishes of French fire-proof china, an egg-poacher, a marmite, and

perhaps a casserole, all of which are best from Bonnet in Church Street, Soho, will come in very usefully. To these may be added the usual complement of plates and dishes and several wooden spoons of different sizes; a fish-lifter is also desirable, so is a strainer, and a pair of graters come in very handily. This practically completes the gear of the budding Chafist, though additional items may be added from time to time as occasion demands.

The makers of the Chafing Dish sell a useful methylated spirit can, with a curved spout to fill up the asbestos wick. It will be found that a good filling will burn for thirty to forty minutes, which is ample for all ordinary purposes. Much of course depends on the quality of the spirit used, and, further, the wick will only become thoroughly saturated after half a dozen usings, and will subsequently require rather less spirit. I have found that water boils in the "Blazer," or handled Chafing Dish, in about ten minutes, and instructions on bottled or preserved food, soups and the like, must be slightly discounted. Thus if one is told to boil for twenty minutes, it will be found that