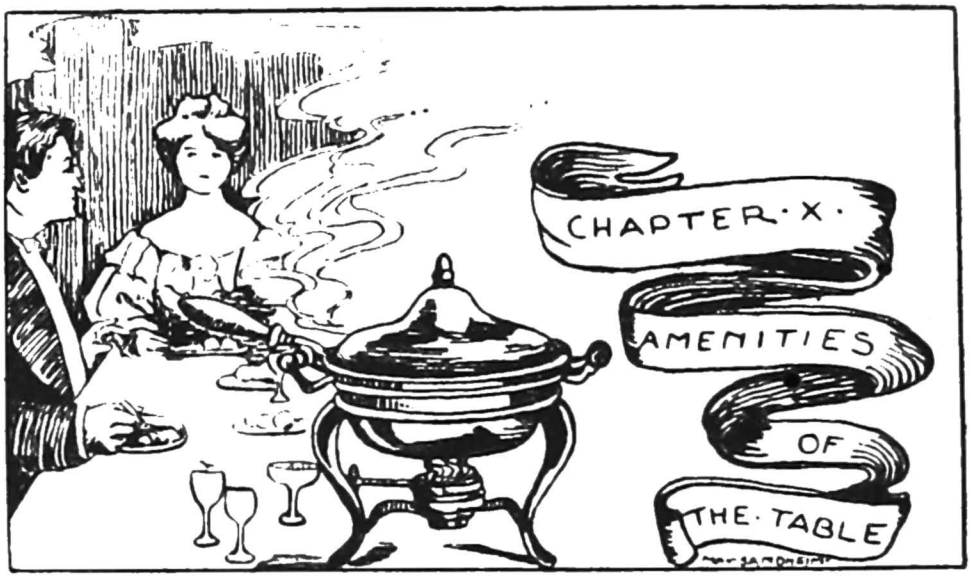

"I had some hopes of the cook at first, but when I talked to her tightly and closely, I could make nothing of her: she was all wiggle-waggle, and I could never persuade her to be categorical."

DR. JOHNSON ("D'Arblay's Memoirs").

SOME of us have been to school. It was usually a long time ago. Still, here and there a man with a memory may recollect that when Achilles, in the "Iliad," has granted the request of the unhappy Priam in reference to the dead body of his son, his next remark to the old man is an eminently practical and sensible one: "Let us now go to dinner!" It has struck me that this classical allusion may have been one of the reasons for the erection of the Achilles statue at Hyde Park Corner; just to remind late dawdlers in

the Park that dinner-time and dressing-tide wait for no man or woman.

I have already had the presumption to suggest that we eat too often and too much and too late and too elaborately; this has emboldened me to further frankness. A French friend who "knew himself" in dining matters said to me once: "En Angleterre on se nourrit bien, mais on ne dine pas." He was both right and wrong. Right as regards the very pseudo-French cookery of the affluent middle-class, wrong as regards the best restaurants and hotels.

Buckle, in his "History of Civilisation," following Cabanis, considers food as one of the four physical agents most powerfully influencing the human race. Men's manners and morality, their customs and condition, depend mainly on what they eat. The boldness of the Norseman and the timidity of the Bengalee are justly due to their respective preference for meat or vegetables, for carbonaceous or nitrogenous diet. Slavery in India is the direct result of rice, in Egypt of dates, of maize in Mexico and Peru.

We must, therefore, adapt ourselves to

circumstances in so far as the circumstances adapt themselves to us. It is no longer fashionable to get drunk, and in a generation or two it will be the worst kind of form to eat more than three courses at dinner.

"Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are," said Brillat-Savarin, Judge of the French Court of Cassation in 1826, and *not* a professed cook, as so many folk seem to imagine. He goes on to say: "The gourmets by predestination can be easily told. They have broad faces, bright eyes, small foreheads, short noses, full lips, and rounded chins. The females are plump and pretty rather than handsome, with a tendency to *embonpoint*."

This is not complimentary, and does not seem to be borne out by experience. Women gourmets are fewer than men, but they make up in knowledge what they lack in number. Both Goethe and Byron have left it on record that they objected to seeing women eat, but nowadays, with better table manners, it is not a disagreeable sight, except perhaps at a Swiss *table d'hôte*.

An English dinner-party, in the present

year of grace, is not at all ugly. It may be —and sometimes is—almost a thing of beauty. The modern dinner-table approaches as nearly to the old Greek type as is compatible with the widely divergent character of the two civilisations. It certainly follows the classic pattern in two valuable particulars —beauty and repose. True, we do not wreathe our heads in roses, nor carry doves nestling in the folds of our robes, nor pour libations of wine over one another (such a messy habit!), but we have done away, for good and all, let us hope, with the dreadful mid-Victorian table decorations. Instead of hideous dish-covers, branching candelabra, hideous *épergnes*, and appalling "set pieces," we have Hawthorn bowls of roses, delicate Venetian glass, beaten copper finger-bowls, perfectly plain silver, and the simplest of white china. Everything perfect of its kind, and its kind the non-ostentatious.

We have also become franker in the honest avowal of our appetites. Even in our grandmothers' time it was considered somewhat immodest to take a second helping without being pressed. Pressure was expected

as a politeness from the host. An old manual of table etiquette says: "Offer every dish at least thrice to each guest. Timid appetites must be tempted, for they exist still, especially among literary folk!"

Altogether we are much politer, outwardly at any rate, than we used to be. Even a Royal Duke has manners. So he had formerly—but they were mostly bad. It is told of one of the Royal Family, of a couple of generations ago, that he was dining at Belvoir, and his host, noticing His Royal Highness studying the menu at dinner, asked him if he would like anything that did not appear on the bill of fare. "Yes; roast pig and apple dumpling," was the gracious reply.

The daring simplicity of the royal appetite is splendid, but the pity is that it was not more pleasantly put.

Another reform in our dining arrangements is the greater love which folks now bear to fresh air. Formerly dining-rooms were heated up as though the guests were early cucumbers, and wanted forcing. This, I am sure, contributed greatly to the dulness of the average dinner-party. As the result

of careful observation, I have found, by experimenting with a thermometer, that at a temperature of 62° Fahrenheit conversation flows easily and every one's wits are at their best and sharpest. At 75° or higher the most elastic spirits become subdued. If any one says to me: "So-and-so was not himself last night at dinner," I am always tempted to ask: "What was the temperature?"

Why will people, when they dine out in public places, insist on having music? It seems to me a confusion of the arts, and with little ear for music I cannot bring myself to take my soup in polka time, or masticate my whitebait to the *Intermezzo* from "Cavalleria Rusticana." It is quite a modern fad, for in 1874 G. A. Sala discusses music at dinner in a magazine, and only refers to it in royal palaces. With all deference to those who know better, it seems to me to be rather rude to good music, and to a good dinner.

All the foregoing is in direct relation to the art of the Chafing Dish, because the refinement of modern cookery is nowhere more evident than in dealing with Chaffinda. I have been to a dinner-party where two

Chafing Dishes were brought on to the table after the sweets, one being placed before the host and the other before the hostess. Deft servants handed the necessary ingredients, and in five minutes, the guests (we were eight, I think) were enjoying a little egg savoury, piping hot, and cooked before their eyes. This sort of thing may become quite common. Who knows?

The table for an ordinary Chafing-Dish meal, whether luncheon, dinner or supper, such as might be cooked after a diligent study of the foregoing chapters, should be arranged as simply as possible. One end bears the Chafing Dish on its own little tray and cloth. The remaining three-quarters of the table may be laid for a smallish party, and, by all the canons of good taste, avoid decorating it with tulle or nun's veiling, or chiffon, or whatever the silly, flimsy, puffy stuff is called. You might as well put ostrich feathers and bombazine in the middle of the table. Good simple glass and china, the older the better, as a rule, because the forms are more beautiful; and I see no need for uniformity in either service, so long as

each individual piece is beautiful in itself. Pewter plates retain the heat splendidly, and some of the old ones are excellent in design. Wooden platters are affected by some people for meats, and I confess that the red juice of the meat on the well-scrubbed surface is very pleasing. Keep the centre ornament very low, so that one can see and talk across it. A big dish of almost any old blue and white ware, with a very few flowers, but each bloom perfect in itself, is my own ideal. Nothing is more trying than to talk to your opposite neighbour across a small table, through a mass of tightly packed towering flowers, or a jungle of dense fern. It is not beautiful, but just annoying.

Chafing-Dish cookery, I am delighted to be able to add, seems to engender the love of beautiful things. It is so easy to pick up and use, in parlour cookery, all sorts of quaint and delightful pieces of china of curious and old-fashioned design. They may not all be genuine; in fact, most of them are pretty certain not to be. But if the shape is good, the colouring pleasing, and the form well adapted for holding sauce,

sweetmeats, condiments, or anything else, then, so far as Chaffinda is concerned, their genuineness and intrinsic value is a secondary matter.

One is occasionally tempted by the offer of a real old silver Chafing Dish with or without an ivory handle. Cooking in such an implement would be an ultra refinement of the art. But the temptation must be resisted, such things are not for daily use, although at one time and in some houses a silver dish no doubt was always put before the master, wherein to make his Welsh Rabbit.

There is a sort of huge silver Chafing Dish in the Cluny Museum, which rather suggests a cauldron, so vast are its dimensions. It is evidently fairly old and has seen much use, though it is not quite evident what could have been cooked in it, unless it were the original *marmite* of Monsieur Deharme, which never left off cooking.

Grimod de la Reynière places on record, as an example to all good cooks, this extraordinary *marmite* — or stockpot — of Monsieur Deharme, a restaurateur in the Rue

des Grands-Augustins. He calls it "the everlasting *marmite*," as, at the date of writing (1803), it had not been off the fire for eighty-five years! During that time it had cooked at least three hundred thousand capons, for Monsieur Deharme's specialty was the purveying of well-cooked hot capons at any hour of the day and night. His establishment was always open, and the procession of succulent birds to the *marmite* was unending; in fact, the Deharme fowl was regenerated perpetually in one long procession of—apparently—the same bird, born anew for each successive customer. The author adds that this *marmite* was celebrated throughout Europe — and no wonder.

In preparing some of the recipes in preceding chapters, Chafers may find some difficulty, if it be summer-time, in keeping one portion of the dish hot whilst the other portion is cooking. When I have no fire in the room, I use a copper tray with two spirit lamps underneath. This is a splendid invention and no Chafer should be without one. Then there is another useful thing to

remember. The lower hot-water dish, if filled with water and put over the lamp, only half turned up, will keep food warm in the Chafing Dish for ever so long. This is often useful to know, as it is so pleasant to find something unexpectedly prepared and ready when one had feared that all the cooking had to be done by oneself. After a late night's work such a surprise is very comforting.

In preparing a Chafing-Dish meal it is important to remember the sequence of cooking, so that the waits between the courses shall not be too long. I use two Chafing Dishes, so that there need be no delay; one can be cleaned whilst the other is in use. If you are making soup, have the fish ready so that it only wants hotting up. If your second course takes a little time, fill up the interval with something cold, or a salad. Work out your plan carefully beforehand so that there can be no possibility of accident, and if the occasion be special, and you wish to shine to your very best advantage, I earnestly recommend you to have a full-dress rehearsal the day before,

and time yourself accurately for each dish; then there can be little chance of failure.

The setting forth of menus seems to me to be an entirely futile method of filling up a cook-book. No one ever follows them, because things never happen just so as to make all the materials simultaneously available. It is much better to dip here and there in a book—to choose a soup, a meat, and a salad; or a fish, a bird, and a savoury; or a soup, a fish, and a sweet (an it be Friday)—to suit your convenience, pocket, and taste of the moment.

Further, as I have already explained, I do not pretend to have done more than touch on the fringe of the possibilities of the Chafing Dish. I have only described what I have done, and hinted at what others may do. But what I particularly want to draw attention to is the scope for original research in the cult of Chaffinda. A long winter's evening is much more profitably spent experimenting with the Chafing Dish than—well, playing Patience, for instance.

I do not desire to make every unmarried man and woman a cook. Far from it.

But it would do us no harm to think a little more of the quality of the food we eat, and less of the quantity. Few of us, however, are so stomach-ridden as Mynheer Welters, Burgomaster of Dilburg, in a delightful novel published thirty years ago, called "The Burgomaster's Family," by Christine Muller, and translated from the Dutch by Sir John Shaw-Lefevre. Burgomaster Welters worshipped his stomach. What a good dinner was to him no words can express. It was the realisation of all his dreams and wishes. The content of soul and the feeling of philanthropy which his eyes expressed after such a dinner must have been seen to be described. He was accused of marrying Widow de Graaff because she knew the recipe of a certain pie which she would not divulge at a less price than marriage. If any one spoke of glorious summer, he only thought of early vegetables; France reminded him of Veuve Cliquot, and Germany of Bavarian beer.

An American Chafing-Dish book in my possession contains the following quaint apothegm: "The Chafing Dish not only

makes possible the sincerest expression of the most perfect hospitality, but it seems the true symbol of good fellowship." The sentiment herein expressed is unimpeachable, and I should like to be able to use such pretty talk myself. It is exactly what I wanted to explain, but being clumsy in the expression of intimate feeling, I cannot get beyond something to this effect: "The Chafing Dish is a handy thing to have about the house, and turns up usefully at the most unexpected moments. It is a ripping good idea!"