

WHAT CHINESE EAT.

CHINESE COOKERY USUALLY
GOOD, THOUGH STRANGE—
BUTTER, CHEESE AND MILK
DESPISED—SOME POINTS IN
WHICH CHINESE EXCEL.

A VAST
VARIETY OF
FOOD
ENJOYED BY
JOHN.

Special Correspondence.

San Francisco, Sept. 8.—If it be true, as the German philosopher Fichte said, that "man is what he eats," some explanation of the peculiar ways of John Chinamen may be found in his diet. His is so complex and many-sided a personality that the natural expectation is that his food will reveal the same characteristics, and this expectation is not disappointed upon investigation. Although the Chinese do not eat rats and mice, as they are commonly supposed to do, except under the stress of dire necessity, they do eat other things in comparison with which a juicy broiled rat would not suffer. Roast dog and eggs of very ancient vintage are highly esteemed delicacies among the richer classes of Chinese, while live young crabs, dipped in vinegar, formed the piece de resistance at a recent Chinatown dinner.

To this list of curious foods may be added the celebrated birds' nest soup, sharks' fins, sea lungs, raw pigs' kidneys and crabs tails. These are, however, very high in price and never reach the tables of the mass of the Chinese people. They seem fantastic and repulsive to American taste, and yet the gusto with which the wealthy Chinaman enjoys them is very amusing. Corresponding to their hearty enjoyment is the very evident delight with which a Chinaman of the poorer class will pick up a small fish, somewhat like our sardine, and swallow it raw.

The Chinese, for the most part, are good trenchermen and enjoy their meals and they take no pains to conceal their pleasure. At a recent large dinner in Washington one of the guests was a Chinese attaché, who had just arrived from his native country. After the last course, in accordance with the polite Chinese custom of showing his appreciation of the good things enjoyed, he leaned back on his chair, crossed his hands over his stomach and emitted a resounding grunt. The other diners, among whom were the president and his wife, were naturally taken by surprise. But the hostess saved the day and possibly the feelings of the other Chinamen present by immediately imitating him. Her example was followed by the rest of the dinner party. Never before had a Washington dining room sounded so much like a pigsty.

The cultured Chinese minister later explained the action of his assistant as a common Chinese way of expressing approval of a good dinner.

Contrary to general belief, the food grain most generally used throughout China is not rice, but wheat. This statement, however, must be made qualifiedly and the vastness of China and its variety of climate must be taken into consideration. In the south, rice is, of course, most generally used. Next to wheat, millet is a most important food grain in the north. Baked or prepared in other ways, one of these grains forms the principal dish of the Chinese bill of fare, with rich and poor alike. The difference lies in the side dishes or relishes, and herein there is great variety. With the laboring classes a vegetable or two give the necessary variation, with sometimes a bit of pork, while on feast days or on the occasion of the birth of

a son or at other uncommon times fish and meat are added.

The principal meat of China is pork. The pig is seen everywhere, hobnobbing with the family in the living rooms and in all other places. Chinese butchers know nothing of our system of division of meat by joints, and they cut off chunks of varying size and weight with no regard to articular divisions. Pork is not the principal dish of the meal, where it is used, it is used rather to give a flavor to the boiled rice or other grain. The food is all boiled together in a mass, and when the family is assembled around the paternal board, each dish has a bowl, with the mixture from the center bowl, every one putting his chopsticks into it.

Fish is highly esteemed all over the empire, and every part of the fish is devoured. No fish is considered small enough to be cast aside, and none is too large to be divided. The Chinese are expert fishermen, and everything literally is fish that comes to their net. As in everything else, the innumerable economy of the Chinaman crops out in his food arrangements. The sea yields to him not only the kinds of fish enjoyed by civilized peoples, but also some things that cause disgust to foreigners. Imagine eating cuttlefish or sharks or sea anemones or seaweed! Chinese dried oysters, however, are an exceedingly interesting and toothsome proposition, proving that in some things John is not so far behind us. In passing it may be noted that in drying, preserving or pickling the Chinese need acknowledge no masters in the world. The dried oysters are prepared by spreading them in the sun for several weeks. How they are preserved from decomposition is a trade secret well guarded by the inscrutable manner of the Chinese. The result, however, is delicious. When prepared by the Chinese in the proper manner, large quantities of these dried oysters and other preserved sea food are sold in the Chinatowns of New York and San Francisco. When one buys fish in the foreign markets or, in fact, anything else, it is well to be on one's guard against deception. "Things are not what they seem" is nowhere more true than in China. For instance, while red and fresh looking sills are a sign of freshness in fish, too often has the redness been put on by hand by ingenious John.

Theoretically, the Chinese have only two mealtimes, one in the middle of the forenoon, and the other between 3 and 6 in the evening. Practically they do not hesitate to eat whenever they have an opportunity. The constant aim and chief pleasure of John Chinaman's existence are to obtain a feast at the expense of some one else. He will go to any pains to amuse himself in a wedding or other festivity where good things to eat are to be had, and his endeavors to prove relationship with the celebrating parties are often extremely amusing. To be eaten out of house and home is only a phrase with us; with the Chinese it is often a stern reality. As with Hinduism and Judaism, Confucianism enjoins on its followers certain dietary regulations, but these have long since fallen into disuse and are universally forgotten or disregarded.

The staples of Chinese food do not

vary greatly from our own, save that the poorer Chinese have not nearly so large a variety of foods to choose from as we have. Save in the north, where the Mongols and Manchus, butter, milk and cheese are despised—justly in the case of the butter, which is a villainously rancid mixture of uncertain composition. In the neighborhood of Amoy and Canton, snails, crabs, and other reptiles and insects are eaten by the poorer classes. Other curious things are seen and heard of, especially in the low class restaurants. The following are a few of the items from the bill of fare of one of these: Cat's flesh, black cats' flesh, black dogs' grease, black cats' eyes, black cats' and dogs are more highly esteemed than those of other colors, being supposed to give more strength to the eater. To an American, a stomach strong enough to enjoy Chinese fare hardly seems to need strengthening. The standard Chinese drink is tea, or white wine, made from rice. In some parts of China they drink great quantities of hot water. The Chinese, rich and poor, are exceedingly fond of sweets, and no Chinese meal, among the richer folk is complete without sweetmeats of some sort. Celestial cookery is often very well done. It is not confined to women, for male cooks are common and quite as proficient as cooks of the other sex. The dishes, although sometimes grateful to the American palate, for the most part are too highly seasoned or too greasy to find ready acceptance. The Chinese have a vastly greater variety of spices than we have, some of them, in fact, being quite unknown to Americans. Among the richer Chinese masters of the culinary art are held in high esteem and command very high salaries. The other side to the picture, cooking among the poorer Chinese, is not so pleasant. They boil everything they eat in the same vessel and seem to have absolutely no regard for cleanliness. It is not well to watch Chinese cooking going on if one is to partake of the resulting meal.

In the matter of fruits and vegetables China has few if any equals. No where else is a greater variety or better quality to be found, for they have all of our fruits and some of which we know nothing. Nuts of all kinds abound and are prepared in numerous ways, while Chinese preserved ginger has become justly famous. Poultry is also one of the strong points of Chinese farming and cooking. The Peking ducks are celebrated throughout the empire for their size and delicacy, and the preparation of their flesh is one of the finest evidences of Chinese skill in cookery. If one of my American readers cares to try a duck à la Chinese, here is the recipe:

Take a fat duck. Open and clean. Take two mace of salt and rub over it both outside and in. Put into an earthen dish and take of fan spirits one cup and put the cup with the spirits inside the duck. Do not let the spirits fall on to the duck only the vapor of the spirits is wanted. Steam over water till quite tender. Lift out the wine cup into the bowl. Done in this way there is no need of minor vegetables. Among the poorer Chinese the meals consist generally of only one course, while the banquets of the rich sometimes have as many as forty.

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A CONGRESS OF DANCERS.

Special Correspondence.

Paris, France, Sept. 17.—The word "Congress" gives many people the impression of a dreary hall, filled with dull men looking at a green covered table at which are seated other dull men, with the gift of talking interminably. The Exposition, however, has marked an epoch in congresses; the other day there was one where they danced. It may have been the gossamer neighborhood of the Palace of Dance; the frivolous association of the Palace of Costume, or, in short, of Paris itself, at any rate, they danced.

There is at present in session a congress of physical education, which is much interested in gymnastics; and Mrs. Bergman Osterberg, the apostle

of Swedish gymnastics, wished to show her colleagues the results obtained by the latter. It must not be concluded that Swedish gymnastics are meant to prepare one for the Terpsichorean art. Certain dances, it is held, are a necessary complement of the method.

The participants were the scholars of Mrs. Bergman Osterberg, a dozen young girls. They wore gymnastic costumes of black knitted wool, covered with a tunic descending to the knee. The garments allow all possible play to the muscles, at the same time swathing the form so closely as not to be in the way. They execute various movements in concert, with a rigid respect for rhythm and alignment. The method consists essentially in a series of gestures and attitudes. The gestures are rather slow—with the exception of a few, which are extremely rapid—and the attitudes are held a certain length of time. One is struck at once by the absence of all apparatus

or accessories, and also by the number of athletic exercises which can be practiced without the employment of the latter. The gestures appear, at first glance, to have no special meaning; but on investigation it is found that all are founded on some physiological reason. Each has a definite object, to work or to contract a muscle or group of muscles; and as there are many and various muscles, the gestures are likewise many and various; in fact, all the body is exercised. All is regulated with scientific precision and with the exact knowledge of the organs that each gesture or attitude puts into action, and each muscle is intended to be exercised in the most effective manner and under conditions most favorable, in view of the force expended. The combinations are ingenious; in the exercises intended to increase respiratory energy, for instance, follow those that occasion breathlessness; and during each movement, the prescribed attitude causes the inactive parts of the body to furnish the heat and more secure support for the parts in action. All is graduated and combined.

It is also aesthetic. There is nothing in common between the movements of the Swedish gymnasts and those of the traditional school. The general effect is one of harmony and grace; there is nothing stiff or constrained; all the attitudes seem easy and natural. And in fact, this is not surprising after one has studied the exercises. They tend to make the body supple and contribute especially to the development of the muscles of the back and neck, of the shoulders and sides. Of course, the aesthetic effect is not the result of the exercises alone. It is due to the manner in which they are co-ordinated and prescribed. Grace is often natural; but it may be acquired by a judicious education of the muscles.

After giving an exercise of Swedish gymnastics, the director announced an exercise of dancing. This consisted of steps, mingled with attitudes, all meant, also, to produce certain gymnastic effect. The dancing is slow and varied; sometimes it resembles the minuet, with a more general participation of the body. Again, after a few grave steps, such as might have been made by the religious dancers of ancient Greece, there is a pose which reminds the observer of antique statues. The whole is so well co-ordinated that the gymnasts, who are not particularly pretty or well shaped, produce an effect that has much charm, and sometimes attains to real beauty. With twenty pretty women, well trained in the system, one could establish an attraction that would be as successful as the exhibitions of dances du ventre. But the director has no such object. She wishes merely to show the ease and suppleness given by the method, and to demonstrate its scientific character. She desires also to spread the cultivation of grace and strength. Strength gives health; and on the other hand, exterior grace is reflected on the humor; the attitude reacts on the feeling, the gesture on the brain.

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