

**LONDON'S DINING PALACES.**

"Do you still take your pleasures sadly, your prime steaks off grimy plates, your fine beer out of clammy pewter, and your food and drink generally from waiters with dirty hands and faces?" queried a Paris boulevardier, who had not been to London for nearly ten years. His friend from Piccadilly only replied, "Wait and see," and brought him over by the next train. Now the Parisian is in London, and does not talk of going back. He says that we have revolutionised our way of living, and that we do not seem to realise it. He positively does not know us, we enjoy ourselves so. He goes to our smart hotels and our new restaurants, and wherever modern London amuses itself, and everywhere he says that he feels as if he were in Vienna or even in Paris. Being a true Parisian, he could not pay us a better compliment than that. His opinion of us now is summed up in the observation that if a French novelist first theorised about the joy of living he really thinks the Londoner of to-day takes the palm for practice. "Of course, it was we who educated this age up to the pleasures of existence; but I believe you are beating us in the cultivation of modern luxury."

"Tell me how a man dines, and I will know now he enjoys existence," says the Parisian sage. He does not think the revolution in London life is anywhere more strikingly exemplified than in what he calls our modern dining-palaces. On reflection, the Londoner will agree with him. These dining-palaces of ours, which are necessities of our enjoyment of existence to-day, are but things of yesterday. It is only six years ago that the famous resort known as "the restaurant of the world" was built. Yet modern dining palaces have by now nearly killed the old-fashioned eating-houses. A few places of the latter type will survive by strengthening their ancient reputation with vigorous and careful progressiveness. The others are moribund. The wooden box, with narrow benches devised for discomfort, to make customers "sit up," the cloth clean at noon, but doubtful at one, and dirty at three, the cracked earthenware plates, sometimes decorated with a thumb impress, otherwise unadorned, are quickly becoming things of the past. There are already a few left of those small, low-ceilinged rooms, whence ladies are excluded, and where smoking is only permitted after three, for the obvious reason that by then it no longer matters whether the place be totally obscured and the atmosphere unbreathable.

They certainly give you a fairly good chop or steak and greens in these eating-houses—few other dishes have ever been heard of by the cook. But did the waiter wear doubtful blue cotton and an undoubtedly dirty apron for the sole purpose of taking your appetite away? In the modern restaurant everything is devised to give you one. Picture the Londoner of the good old days when he managed to wield a vigorous knife and fork in spite of the surroundings, suddenly set down without warning before the dainty table laid with spotless linen and silver dishes bright enough to mirror the choice fresh flowers in delicate glass vases, within hearing of a good band, among noiseless waiters, well groomed and in spick and span uniforms and white ties, in the immense grill-room of a modern palace of dining? The old Londoner would eat three meals straight off on the strength of it.

We have learnt the art of dining on the Continent, but we are teaching our masters. Modern luxury in this respect has reached a pitch of perfection of finish in London which neither Berlin nor even Paris, all things considered, can equal. Possibly Paris still retains the palm for the cook's rarest masterpieces, for dinners each dish of which is unique and the composition of which is a long-thought-out-harmony, and which cost a small fortune. As for Berlin, it is the paradise of snack financiers, and nowhere can the delectable sausage, savoury ham, or toothsome pastry be obtained in such variety, at such diverse hours, or so instantaneously as in the beer palaces "Under the Linden" and in the Friedrichstrasse. But the tourist will look in vain there or on the Paris boulevards for the equivalent of the really modern London grill-room. The idea of the latter has been borrowed from the huge German beer hall or the neat, clean, and airy French cafe, but

the originals have been improved upon by our caterers. There spread in Paris lately a sinister rumour that French cooking was dying out. Questioned on the painful topic, great Parisian chefs, while crying that, whatever happened, they would expire at their saucers rather than sacrifice to new-fangled fashions, confessed that the latter were conquering. "Your London grill-room, where you feed, may eventually kill our restaurant where we dine, or used to dine." As a matter of fact, once famous restaurants in Paris are dying daily from inability to assimilate progress, and two more celebrated houses on the boulevards lately met with a sad doom. One is now closed; the other has had to bring down its prices—a fate which is considered to be almost worse than extinction by conservative Parisian chefs. And it is precisely in this distorted view of theirs that lies the essential error of their policy.


Whatever some great French chefs say, we do not feed, we artistically and harmoniously dine, in London, Now and then the epicure may run over to a famous Paris restaurant of the old school to spend a small fortune on some special dish. But the most fastidious gourmet will take his daily meals—asking for nothing better—in a London palace. Of course, the crowning originality of the latter is that with moderate prices, almost, in some cases quite, as low as those of eating-houses which were nasty as well as cheap, it combines the general excellence of cookery of a first-rate French restaurant, and adds thereto undoubted superiority in handsomeness of surroundings and that perfection of setting without which the finest food in the world would be unpalatable to the Londoner of to-day. We never got, and we get nowhere, so much for our money as in our dining palaces. How do our caterers contrive to give it us? Sipping his coffee and crowning the satisfaction of the inner man with the gentle influence of a good cigar, the diner may sometimes have dreamily asked himself the question. When it was put to the manager of "restaurant of the world," he answered in one word, "Organisation." There is no secret in the system and no Royal road to success. But every detail from the paring of a potato to the decorations of the huge ball-room has to be looked after by one practical master mind. To inspect the inner workings of the establishment in question is to learn a lesson in organisation. From the basement, where vans bring in fish, flesh, fowl, fruit, and vegetables directly from the central markets in quantities sufficient to feed armies, to the top floor, with its fruit and flower room, cooled by refrigerators, its vegetable-paring, fish and poultry dressing, plate-washing, dish-cover cleaning, silver-polishing departments, its immense kitchen, where fifty French cooks (who have never heard of the decay of French cookery), in spotless white suits and caps, deftly compose dishes, under the direction of a chef, and a sous-chef, its ingenious check system, by which each dish, either for table d'hote or a la carte, is noted down, with the exact minute at which it was ordered, so that any complaint from a customer can be immediately gone into, as a complete and accurate record, unbeknown to him, is preserved of each course that he has consumed—it is all one great, complex, smoothly-working machine for satisfying the exacting wants of the modern inner man. Different, but essential, parts of the organism are the thousand and one arrangements for providing the surroundings and the setting of the dinner—the table decoration, the music, the service, entirely by

Germans, in this particular restaurant, the manager of which said that the best waiters in the world hail from the Fatherland, French coming second, Italian a bad third, and English last. Before such an undertaking can be started an enormous outlay is required. This, and a huge subsequent current expenditure, can only be covered with a profit by doing a correspondingly large business. London dining palaces have killed small restaurants because of the colossal scale on which they are worked, and they can only flourish when conducted on such a scale. Those who may feel inclined to open an establishment of the kind will be interested to learn that they will have to put down about £150,000 for building and decorating premises to suit the requirements of modern luxury. Some £50,000 more will be wanted to fit the place up. Then the proprietor can begin business—if he has previously learnt every element of his trade, not only the subtlest arts of cookery, but the science of judicious marketing and the professions of butler, waiter, and even scullion. If he is not himself able to wash a plate perfectly, serve a prince at table, as well as cook a dish to set before the King, it is useless (says the most competent authority on the question) for him to think of starting a modern London restaurant.—"Daily Telegraph"

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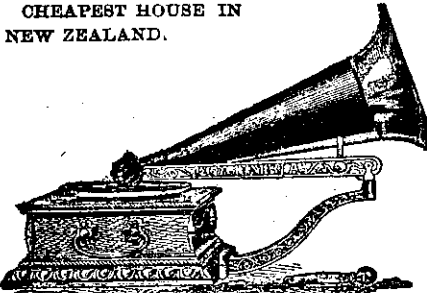
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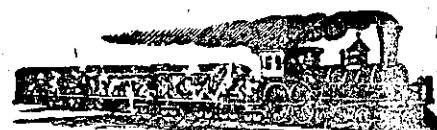
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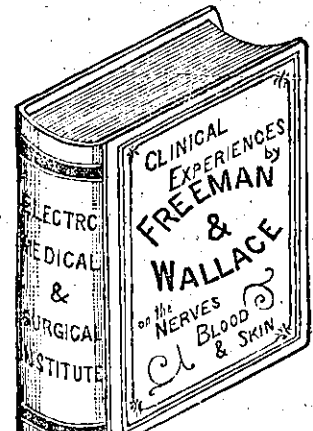
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