

THE CARMELITE NEWS

FEBRUARY—MARCH, 1967 Number
WHITEFRIARS, FAVERSHAM, KENT

Published by the St. Mary's College Building and Missionary Fund

I TALK about food because I remember the tastes of my youth. We loved mushrooms in season. Mushrooms are a speciality. The Irish never believed in soup so they never understood the taste of mushroom boiled in soup—they just didn't regard soup as food. The Italians are different, so are the Spaniards and so, indeed, are the French. Soup to them is a main dish—a mixterum gatherum of all the remnants of vegetables and meat fortified by spaghetti, cheese and in the end butter. Few people realise that a good soup dish can be a full meal. It can contain all the vegetables, all the residue of meat, with the added flavours of grated cheese and even dairy butter. A soup like that is a full meal and there is no need of meat, or fruity dessert.

In the mountains where I was born soup hardly existed, but we had all the ingredients of it almost at any time.

I started to talk about mushrooms. We used to go out in the fields and find the mushrooms growing abundantly; we picked them and brought them in and this is how we cooked them. We peeled them, we cut away the earthy stem and then peppered them and put a teaspoonful of dairy butter on them. The outer coals of the peat fire were raked out and after three or four minutes the mushrooms could be taken up by the stem and swallowed by mouthfuls. Mother always watched that the butter didn't drip too freely down our chins—but those were mushrooms cooked as they should be cooked, almost in the soil from which they came, the peat fires of the old open hearths of the old Irish farmstead. To-day the same thing can be done by a gas grill, if only people will remember that you

must never turn the mushrooms over; in the open charcoal fire of a modern restaurant with its grill to shield the mushrooms from total destruction. But we used to toast our mushrooms on the embers of old peat fires and after wiping any cinders that might remain on the underneath, ate them from our hand even if the butter did drip down our chins. These were mushrooms in excelsis.

The mushroom is a peculiar fungus. Mushrooms; innumerable little leaves on the inside of the crown, and to fry them and allow these little leaves to absorb the abundant fat that is available is a desecration of their very nature. Mushrooms should be grilled, sprinkled with a little pepper on the inside of the crown, then a little salted dairy butter around the stem and eaten on toast or from your hand. This is the way to eat mushrooms. My apologies to George Villiers of the B.B.C. when he suggests that mushrooms should be cooked in the fat of bacon and egg for the breakfast; goodness gracious, mushrooms in that guise are fatty, heavy and repetitive and to my taste entirely abominable.

Long ago I was the Superior of a small seminary on the outskirts of Dublin and we had a large greenhouse with concrete beds. The only things I ever saw come from it were tomatoes until the Autumn and then some chrysanthus for Christmas. I knew very little about rearing mushrooms but I thought that it could be done; so when the Christmas season was over I bought a large quantity of mushroom spawn and without more ado put it into the beds. I knew that darkness was required for mushrooms so we covered the beds over with straw and let nature take its course.

There was no urgency until perhaps the following Summer. Well, we got a few mushrooms; we turned the straw over occasionally and had a look but the crop was never more than a few. I decided that the experiment was not a success so I told old John Higgins, the gardener, to empty the soil from the concrete beds and spread it as top soil on a very large bed of an enclosed garden that we used to call the herbaceous border. Then we forgot all about it. To our astonishment in the following Autumn so many mushrooms came up that we couldn't gather them fast enough and we had to ring up a top line fruit man in a swanky part of Dublin to know if he would absorb our surplus requirements. In the end we made more money from that topsoil than from the greenhouse. Now that small seminary has passed over into the hands of a congregation of Nursing Sisters. I don't know if they are still bothered by the mushrooms that were once upon a time thrown out as top soil from our very large greenhouse.

I have been interested in mushrooms ever since. In Lapland, where the reindeer roam, mushrooms can be found with a spread of over sixteen

inches in the crown. Of course they are infested with earthworms of every description but the reindeer come along and eat them as normal forage. I cannot see why that type of prodigious mushroom should not be introduced into Scotland or even into Ireland. The reindeer eat them voraciously and indeed, so do cattle, sheep and goats. They provide a speciality from the soil that is self propagating. Of course in northern Lapland there is very little agriculture, the ground is never disrupted and so the harvest comes up year after year. Nevertheless the spores of these giant mushrooms could be introduced into Irish and Scotch hillside pastures where agriculture isn't possible and grazing is the only alternative. Will this suggestion ever strike a chord in some minor official of the Ministry of Agriculture in England or Scotland because a mushroom with a spread of sixteen inches is something that is of great interest to me. In other words, if the goat can eat it let the goat have it. By the way, there is an arsenical content in sheep dye and sheep lie in the fields and a little of it communicates itself to the soil so mushrooms should always be peeled before eating.

THE RABBIT and THE MAN

THERE was an old chap I knew who had led a varied and in some ways an interesting life. He had worked long at the money business, not that he could keep much for himself, but it went away like water that is thrown out of a bucket. A bit eccentric perhaps, but self-willed and impatient.

The day came when he retired from most of his work because he was going blind. There were many things he couldn't eat and landladies were very impatient of him. One Sunday night the landlady brought in a plate of something or other and she said "that's chicken casserole." (Boiled chicken and vegetables if you like to put it that way.) When the old man put his fork into what seemed to be a

piece of chicken he came up with the bones of the breast-cage of a rabbit. Now, the old man knew every bone in a rabbit from its neck to its knees because he had caught or shot thousands of them as a boy and he really did know what a rabbit should taste like even better than he knew what a rabbit should look like. He knew that the landlady was trying to fool him relying on the fact that he could hardly see what he was eating.

He told me a few things about rabbits which I had somehow forgotten. He said you will notice the difference between a rabbit that is hung by the legs and one that is hung by the neck (after being killed, of course.) If a rabbit is hung by the hind legs with its head down the gall and bladder

will drain themselves back into the carcass thereby causing very unlikeable and most indistinguished flavour; therefore, always hang a dead rabbit up by its neck, otherwise it certainly will never pass for a chicken.

During the war chefs in London and elsewhere often passed off rabbit as chicken; the fore legs and hind legs are not dissimilar and it was not a difficult task to disguise the flesh. This is still done by many good cooks, but not for purposes of disguising it. Rabbit that is cooked in half a pint of light dry cider can be delightful; failing that a few spoonfuls of white wine or two tablespoonfuls of vinegar. This method of cooking rabbit will enhance its flavour. Possibly the most favourite method of serving rabbit is in a rabbit pie. It was usual to boil some pearl barley in the water and then add some fingers of salted streaky pork, a few mushrooms and then a very light pastry. This, when allowed to set, was a favourite dish of earlier times when meat wasn't so plentiful.

Rabbits are still plentiful in some places and a new strain has appeared which is immune from myxamatosis—the survival of the fittest.

When I was a boy our favourite recreation on a Sunday afternoon was bush-whacking. Five or six of us used to gather to comb a hill for rabbits and hares. We had no guns because guns and cartridges were expensive, but we all had a stout stick with a

knob on it and, of course, a collection of dogs that ranged from collie through the terrier up to the greyhound. We called ourselves the Ancient Order of Bush-Whackers. We would separate and work up a hill and when we came to a clump of firs we would give the bushes a whack and then perhaps out would jump a rabbit or a hare. How far he got depended upon the type of hound that was after him. Then, always, they were hung head up, on some convenient branch until we gathered them up on our way home. It was always useful to station one lad with a couple of dogs way up the hill so that the rabbits running for the boundary would meet some opposition. Monday morning they would be paunched and sent in hampers to Dublin where, I think, they fetched in those days about sevenpence each. It was just about the lowest paid profession in the country.

There was not much we didn't know about rabbits or hares either. Maybe, some time I will tell you about the domestic goats who were turned out on the hills and went wild, but that is another story.

My talk with my old friend about having met the breast cage of a rabbit in his boiled chicken brought these memories back to mind. It often makes me wonder how many landladies think that old men are just plain silly. I know that old men forget, but there are some things they cannot forget because these things are part of themselves.

A MAN was arrested for murder in a rural area and his trial was impending. One of his friends went to the man who was traditionally foreman of the jury and said to him—now if the charge could be reduced to one of manslaughter, which it really was, it would be worth £500 to you, but don't tell anyone I said so.

The trial came off. The jury retired to come back with a verdict of 'not

guilty' of murder but 'guilty' of manslaughter. The prisoner was released pending trial. Subsequently he came up with the jury foreman and quietly handed him £500, then pausing for a minute he said 'did you have a hard time with them?' 'I had an awful time with them,' said the jury foreman 'they nearly drove me up the wall. They couldn't see any sense in it, they all wanted to acquit you.'

After a long illness an elderly Irish lady was allowed recently to leave the rest home with another old friend and attend a nearby church for an early Mass. They sat in wonder—and almost in shock—as they saw the priest saying Mass facing them, and all the congregation speaking out in English “as though they’d been ordained.” Finally, one of them said to the other: “Do you think, Mrs. Malley, we’re really in a Roman Catholic Church?”

Mrs. O’Malley looked around carefully and then finally nodded and whispered loudly: “Sure. Everythin’ seems turned around. But himself up there still hasn’t turned around his collar. So just keep on prayin’.”

o o o

There was to be a christening party in the home of a farmer. “Sir,” said the priest, taking his host aside before the ceremony, “are you prepared for this solemn event?”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” said the farmer. “I’ve got two hams, pickles, cakes—”

“No, no! I mean spiritually prepared.”

“Well, I think so; two gallons of whisky a case of gin and three cases of beer.”

o o o

The Scottish patient was fumbling in his pocket. “You needn’t pay me in advance,” the dentist said.

“I am not going to,” was the reply. “I am only counting my money before you give me gas.”

o o o

Pat swaggered joyfully into the bar at the “Lion and Mouse.”

“Hallo,” asked Casey, “where have you been?”

“I’ve been along to the station to see my ma-in-law off,” replied Pat.

“What’s that on your hands?” asked Casey. “They’re black.”

“Oh, yes,” said the other merrily, “that is from the engine. I patted it when it took her off.”

Sergeant: “When I say ‘Fire!’ I want all you men to fire at will.”

One recruit dropped his rifle and took off over the hill.

Sergeant: “Who was that?”

Another recruit: “That was Will.”

THE SWALLOWS

Beautiful little creatures of the air!
with wonder I could watch them
all day long,

as they chant upon their way; e’en
tend their young.

with lightning love and joy beyond
compare.

Whence do they come? What lan-
guage understand?

what time-old signal calls them to
unite

in little legions for the distant flight
of young and old far over seas and
land?

From the beginning to the utmost
end,

through pathless space they wing
their destined way,

like the obedient stars that never
stray;

the tides, remembering that old
command.

Unwitting little envoys of the Word,
helping the soul amid man’s chaos
to see

beyond poor human pride the immen-
sity,

infinity, the omniscience of the
Lord.

Grace McCormack

OUR COMING NOVENAS

OUR LADY OF LOURDES

February 2nd — February 10th

ST. JOSEPH AND ST. PATRICK

March 10th — March 19th

ST. JUDE

April 13th — April 21st

Our Lady Keep You!

Yours in Carmel,

M. E. Lynch O.C.