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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, March 30, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "A Chinese Dinner." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available: "Soybean Utilization." (Farmers' Bulletin No. 1617-F).

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As Great-Uncle Charley used to say, "Life is so full of surprises and disillusions, it's well to be prepared for things that aren't what they seem."

Well, there's Santa Claus. Surprise No. 1. After learning about Santa Claus, one really is never again sure of anything in this world.

Then there is Chop Suey. Yes, Chop Suey. Little did I suppose, when I promised you a Chinese dinner menu for today, that I was in for another dis-illusion.

Of course, I thought of Chop Suey first thing for that dinner. So I went over and called a friend of mine who used to live in China. I wanted her to suggest some good dishes to go along with the Chop Suey.

"Claribel," I said, "if you were giving a real Chinese dinner, just like the finest dinners served in Pekin or Hong Kong or that gay town of Shanghai, what would you serve with the Chop Suey?"

"If I was giving a real Chinese meal, Aunt Sammy," answered Claribel, with a note of superiority in her voice, "I should not serve chop suey at all."

I gasped and asked why not.

"Because it isn't ever served in China, except in restaurants catering to Americans. That dish was invented right here in America, probably by some enterprising Chinese cook who wanted to make a new delicacy in the food line."

Well, did you ever? As I said, beginning with Santa Claus, disillusions may appear at any minute. If chop suey doesn't belong to China, how can I be sure that baked beans belong to Boston or codfish balls to Cape Cod?

I asked Claribel to tell me some dishes that she would guarantee as real, genuine, typical Chinese food. What do you think she suggested? Bird's nest soup, shark's fins, duck's tongues and thousand year eggs. These eggs,



she said, were pickled many years ago -- the Chinese say a thousand. She also mentioned Pekin roast duck, made with a thick candy-like syrup and served in hollow pancakes.

"A real Chinese dinner done in style has about 168 courses," said Claribel. "The guests start eating at noon and continue until night."

I was still gasping and wondering how I could possibly keep my promise about the menu today. Suppose I suggested shark's fins and bird's nest soup. How many housekeepers, even the brave and adventure-loving, would try them? And where could they find the ingredients anyway?

"Never mind," said Claribel. She began to realize how distressed I was. "Why not have chop suey anyway? It is the favorite dish at all Chinese restaurants in this country. Both Chinese and Americans like it. And every Chinese cook I've ever known says it is made according to the best principles of Chinese cookery."

All right. We'll have chop suey. I have such a delicious recipe for it. And we'll make the rest of the meal as authentic as possible, only, adapting where necessary to our American kitchen arrangements.

The menu? Chicken Chop Suey with Fried Noodles garnished with Egg Threads; Rice; Chinese Gravy; Preserved Ginger or Tart Conserve; and, for dessert, Chinese Tea Cakes and Tea. Claribel tells me that those small oranges known as tangerines are often eaten at the end of the meal.

When the Chinese plan their menus they probably don't spend much time considering vitamins or calories or balanced meals. Not they. They are guided instead by their ancestors, particularly the Emperor Pow Hay See, who is said to be the father of their cookery. He lived in the year 3000 B.C. Then there was Confucius, the philosopher, who had some ideas of his own about diet. He taught his followers to use a larger proportion of vegetables than meat in their diet. He also said that all food should be cut up and that there should be a little ginger served with the meal. So you see Chinese meals really are balanced even though the cooks in that country may never mention the term. The main dish contains meat or eggs with fresh vegetables. And some of the vegetables are added so late in the cooking process that they are still practically raw when the dish is served -- quite in keeping with our modern belief in the need for some raw vegetables. The rice and noodles in their meal correspond to our potatoes and bread. Their conserve or preserve provides the sweet. Fruit is often served at the end of the dinner. Old Confucius was a wise man, you see, even in matters of diet.

Chop suey is a stew made with meat and vegetables. As in most Chinese dishes, all the ingredients are cut up or shredded. Not diced or chopped, as we American cooks would do, but cut in short thin strips, and occasionally sliced. Both vegetables and meat are cut the same size and shape. Chop suey



can be made with chicken, lamb, pork, beef or even fish. Chicken is delicious in this combination, so in just a minute I'm going to give you a recipe for chicken chop suey. For vegetables the Chinese use bamboo sprouts, bean sprouts, mushrooms, onions and celery. To give variety in texture they also add some crisp, firm ingredient such as water chestnuts. Brazil nuts, or Jerusalem artichokes will give the same effect and are easier to obtain in this country. Pieces of tart, firm apple may also be used. Add them during the last few minutes of cooking so they will still be crisp and not cooked soft.

Bamboo sprouts are the white underground shoots of the bamboo. Their flavor is something like an artichoke and their white, firm flesh makes them very attractive. In China they are served in many ways, sometimes boiled and served like asparagus, sometimes fried in hot peanut oil, sometimes salted or pickled or candied. They are most popular, however, in soups or stews. They can be purchased canned, but for our chop suey bean sprouts will do just as well. Bean sprouts, by the way, are rich sources of vitamins as well as other food materials and are especially valuable if the supply of fresh vegetables is limited. You can prepare them yourself. If you want the real Chinese variety, use mung or small soybeans. Sprout a small amount at a time, for though dry beans will keep indefinitely, those that are sprouted are as perishable as any green vegetable. Soak the beans overnight. The next morning place them in a sink strainer or a granite or aluminum colander. Keep them covered and in a warm place and flood with water four or five times a day. Mung beans sprout in three or four days. When the sprouts are full grown, the outer green covering will be loose and can be removed by washing.

Soybeans are also used in making the soy sauce so often used in chop suey and gravy. In this country it can be purchased in bottles.

The chop suey is garnished with egg threads. The Chinese gravy goes with the rice and the ginger or conserve adds spice or extra flavor as well as the taste of sweet needed.

Now for our recipe for chicken chop suey. Eleven ingredients:

4-pound fowl	2 cups chicken broth
1 teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon cornstarch
1 green pepper, shredded	1 tablespoon cold water
2 cups shredded onions	2 cups sliced Brazil nuts or
2 tablespoons fat	Jerusalem artichokes, and
2 cups shredded celery	4 tablespoons soy sauce.

I'll repeat those eleven ingredients (REPEAT):

Put the fowl on a rack in a kettle. Half fill the kettle with boiling water. Add the salt. Partly cover the kettle. Simmer until nearly tender. Let the fowl and broth cool and drain. Then cut the meat into small pieces, discarding the skin. Cook the green pepper and onion in the fat in a heavy skillet for a few minutes. Stir frequently. Add the celery, chicken and broth. Mix the cornstarch and water and add this. Cover the skillet and simmer for





5 minutes. Then add the nuts or artichokes, the soy sauce, and more salt if necessary. Serve with hot flaky rice and fried noodles.

The noodles next. I'll read the directions slowly.

Cook narrow, dried noodles in a large quantity of boiling salted water for 15 minutes, drain, and place on absorbent paper to dry for about 20 minutes. Have a heavy deep kettle about half full of well-flavored fat heated to 375 degrees to 400 degrees Fahrenheit, or until a cube of bread browns in 60 seconds. Cook a small quantity of the noodles at one time, for the water in the noodles causes the fat to sputter and bubble and care must be taken that it does not boil over. When the noodles are light brown, remove at once from the fat, and drain on absorbent paper.

One minute more for a recipe for egg threads made from two eggs and  $1/4$  teaspoon of salt.

Beat the eggs until light. Oil a frying pan slightly. Pour just enough egg into the pan to make a very thin layer, tilting the pan so it will run over the surface. Heat over a low flame until cooked. Place the egg sheet on a bread board. Slice it in uniform threads which will be as long as possible. Serve these egg threads piled lightly over the meat mixture.

Chinese Gravy? Five ingredients:

2 cups broth, either pork or chicken or both  
2 teaspoons cornstarch  
 $1/2$  teaspoon salt  
 $1/2$  teaspoon sugar, and  
1 teaspoon soy sauce.

I'll repeat those. (REPEAT):

Mix the cornstarch with a little cold water. Add to the boiling broth, and let boil until it thickens. Add the soy sauce, salt, and sugar.

Tomorrow: "Preventing Fires in the Home."

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