

FRENCH HOUSE FURNISHING.

BY THEODORE CHILD.

THE DINING-ROOM.

II.

THE service of the dinner table is the affair of the maître d'hôtel rather than of the decorative artist; the rôle of the latter consists in making beautiful the utensils which the former employs. Like the art of cooking itself, a dinner table artistically laid is one of the great triumphs of civilization. Food and the art of eating it are in themselves disgusting phenomena. Lord Byron used to profess that the spectacle of a pretty woman eating filled him with horror, and after all a civilized man devouring with all possible good-breeding a slice of roast beef, is just as disagreeable a sight in itself as a crow rending and ripping a piece of carrion. But eating being a necessity, nature and civilization have taken care to surround the operation with everything that tends to distract the attention from the material side. Eating has become a social as well as a natural act; it has been sublimated by the idea of hospitality; the festive board has acquired a certain solemnity from its connection with the great fêtes of the family; and dinner has become the highest function of home life, a daily act to which no other can be compared in importance, character and result. It was on the vessels and objects for table use that the first manifestations of decorative art appeared, and the potters, goldsmiths and glass-



LOUIS XV. SOUP TUREEN.

makers have expended the best of their genius in devising beautiful objects in which to serve food and drink. The brilliancy of gold, silver, glass and porcelain, the fineness and purity of linen, the beauty of fruit and flowers, and the application of form, color and fancy to the preparation of food itself, all contribute to render the dinner-table charming to the eye, amusing, gay, interesting, beautiful even as a harmonious whole, and so refined in all its artistic details that the material and gross side of eating is quite lost sight of.

Before proceeding to say a few words about certain features of the French dinner-table, I must say something about the manner of serving the food. The ordinary service consists in France as elsewhere in placing the dishes on the table one after the other, beginning with soup and so on to hors d'œuvres, fish, flesh and dessert. The service of a ceremonious dinner or even of a small family dinner, where the *grande cuisine* is called into play, is a more delicate matter. Shall it be served *à la française* or *à la russe*? Shall each course be served on the table and afterwards removed in order to be cut up, or shall the dishes be cut up before they are served on the table? The former system, *à la française*, has the disadvantage of slowness; the Russian system has the disadvantage of destroying the art of decorating and mounting dishes and of suppressing altogether the exterior physiognomy of the French *grande cuisine*, that has always been so famous for its taste and splendor. The modern system is a compromise between the two. The table is simply adorned with the dessert and with the cold dishes, the important *relevés* and the *entrées*, that can be kept warm without deterioration by means of *réchauds* furnished with spirit lamps or hot water; or the reform is even carried further and nothing figures on the table except the fruit, the colored sweetmeats and the floral decorations, and the *entrées* and *relevés* are served on hand dishes. The important dishes, the roast and the *pièce de résistance*, are brought in, each by the maître d'hôtel,

presented to the mistress of the house, who makes a sign of acknowledgment, and then taken off by the maître d'hôtel to be cut up. The carved dish is then handed round by the waiters, and when all the guests are served it is placed, if the dish be important enough, in front of the host or hostess on a *réchaud*. I am speaking of course of dinners where the number of the guests is wisely limited; no other dinners can be well served, so that it matters little whether they be served *à la française* or *à la russe*. By the fusion of the two systems, as above indicated, and as I have seen it practiced in some first-class French houses, it is possible to give full and entire satisfaction to the cook, while at the same time the guests have their eyes satisfied by an agreeably arranged table and their palates respected by being enabled to taste the delicate masterpieces of the cook in the very best conditions.

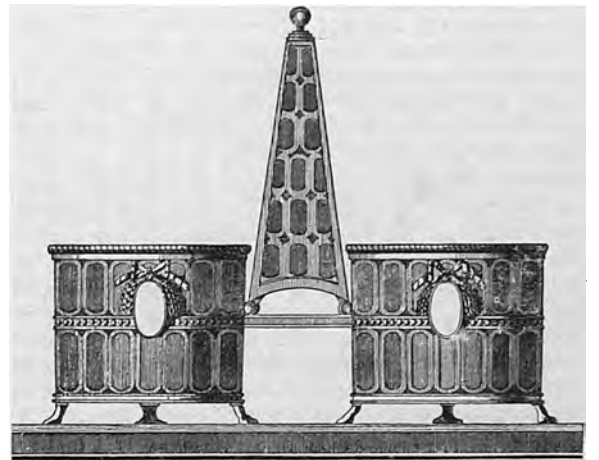
In comparing a French dining-room with the dining-room in a modern English or American house, I mean of course a house whose inmates have not remained uninfluenced by the artistic movement of the past fifteen years, I should call attention first of all to the want of color in the French room, and the predominance of color in the English room. To a certain extent this difference is accounted for by the fact that an English dining-room is always more or less a living room, but the real reason is that the English are in their interior decoration colorists to a supreme degree. The English delight in rose, lilac and sky-blue by way of protestation against the gray sky, the gray sea and the gray fogs of half the English year. The spectacle of an English breakfast or dinner

table is a source of wonderment to the Frenchman who, when he has thoroughly mastered the subject, very reasonably criticises the superabundance of objects that are considered to conduce to comfort or to utility, but which by their very multiplicity become, if not inconvenient, at least useless. The aspect of the English table is certainly elegant and recherché, but the utensils applicable to each dish, the special spoons and trowels and plates and dishes and receptacles for sauces and condiments are confusing. On a French table you find no condiments except salt, pepper and mustard, it being considered the business of the

cook to season the dishes to the ideal degree. Sauces and condiments are confusing. Compare a French furnishing or plate catalogue with that of an English or American house, and you cannot fail to be struck by the extreme simplicity of the French table apparatus. Toast-racks, butter coolers, biscuit boxes, cake baskets, sardine boxes, pickle forks, cruet stands, egg stands, sardine forks, claret jugs, and a multitude of other objects, in which the Anglo-Saxons display too often their execrable taste, are entirely wanting, and they are only to be found in shops that make a specialty of English goods and in the houses of persons who affect English habits. In a French house the average table service for twelve persons is composed as follows: 18 table spoons, 36 forks, 24 knives; 12 dessert spoons, knives and forks; 12 coffee spoons; a soup ladle, a large serving spoon and a sugar spoon; sugar tongs, a carving knife and fork; a salad spoon and fork; a *manche à gigot* (a handle to screw on to the bone of a leg of mutton); a fish trowel; a hors-d'œuvre service of six pieces; 4 bottle dishes; an oil and vinegar stand; 2 salt and pepper, with two salt spoons; a mustard pot and spoon; 1 cheese knife and a *réchaud* or hot water dish. To this may be added, as objects of luxury, oyster forks, asparagus servers, an ice pail, nut-crackers, grape scissors, crumb brush and tray, a salver or tray with tea service, and there will be an end of the silver, unless we add a surtout or centre piece. With these utensils and the necessary supply of plates, dishes, crockery, glass and linen, the most delicate and complicated French breakfast or dinner may be perfectly served.

First of all, as to laying the table. On the basis of a thick cotton blanket is placed the cloth, pure white, damask, or with a colored pattern woven or embroidered round the edge. In this respect the French service offers no difference from the English. Indeed the use of color in the pattern of table linen is by no means novel. In the miniatures of the fourteenth and fifteenth century the long white dresser cloths are constantly represented

with rose or blue stripes and border. The napkins of course will match the cloth, and if they are embroidered or ornamented in any way you may be sure that there will be no mottoes "charmingly worked in all kinds of odd places, in



SALT CELLAR, LOUIS XVI.

one corner, or across the middle, or along one or all the sides," as Mrs. Loftie suggests in her volume on the dining room. "Not only are such devices pretty and appropriate," continues Mrs. Loftie, "but they may sometimes afford a subject for dinner conversation when the weather has been exhaustively discussed!" Happily the conversational powers of the French have not sunk so low as that. But of whatever quality or design the French table linen may be, you may be sure to find it clean, without the white shining glare and stiffness frequent in English linen, and the napkins above all will be soft and ample. In the matter of napkins, as in all other details of French table service, appropriateness to the end served is the chief consideration. Napkins are used to wipe the mouth, to cover the lap, to protect the shirt front even, and so the French napkin is a fair piece of linen, at least 34 by 25 inches in dimension. And one great blessing of French life is that you have a napkin at every meal and even in the humblest eating houses. The Frenchman who dines in a wine-shop or in a *gargote* at twenty-one cents, eats like a white man, at least as far as napkins are concerned. The napkins served at dessert are of course small and always embroidered or wholly colored. They are presented with and on the plate, and with the knife, fork and spoon on the top. Each guest arranges his utensils himself.

The French knife and fork is smaller than the corresponding Anglo-Saxon implements. The knife never exceeds 9½ inches in length; the small knives 7½ inches and the large forks 8½ inches. These implements are quite strong enough for all food that figures on a civilized table. The French glass ware, though excellent in quality, is not so varied as the English. Generally you will see crystal used, depending for its charm simply on the purity of the glass and the beauty of the forms. Engraved glass, cut glass and colored glass is used very sparingly by people of taste. French wine, whether Bordeaux, Burgundy or Champagne, is to be drunk out of nothing but the purest crystal glass, that will conceal none of its qualities of color or scintil-



A SIDE TABLE.

lation. German wine is rarely drunk, so that in point of fact colored glass is very rarely seen on a French table, unless it be in the liqueur sets, where greater play may be given to fancy both in

color and shape. Then, again, as it is happily not the custom to decant wines in France, the table is not encumbered with claret jugs, carafes and glass decanters. French wines demand respect both for themselves and for the humble bottles in which they have sojourned while their qualities were ripening.

Mouth bowls have never, I believe, become acclimatized in Anglo-Saxon countries; on a well-served French table they invariably appear at the end of dessert. They are small bowls about 3 inches deep and $4\frac{1}{2}$ diameter, either round or square, of dark blue or opal glass generally, and in each bowl is served a little goblet containing tepid water, perfumed just sufficient to take away the disagreeable taste of warm water. Each guest pours a portion of the water into the bowl, washes the tips of his fingers, and with the rest of the water left in the goblet rinses his mouth. Then he replaces the empty goblet in the bowl, and the waiter removes the object. The operation, though far from pleasing to contemplate, is very convenient, and, being very generally practiced, nobody thinks anything about it. Formerly, however, this operation was not, it appears, performed at table. Mme. de Genlis in her *Dictionnaire des etiquettes de la cour, des usages du monde*, etc. (Paris, 1818), says on the subject: "Formerly the ladies, after dinner or supper, rose and left the table to rinse out their mouths; the men, and even the princes of blood, out of respect for the ladies, did not permit themselves either to remain in the dining-room in order to perform the operation in question; they passed into the ante-room. Now-a-days this sort of toilet is performed at table in many houses. There one sees Frenchmen, seated by the side of ladies, wash their hands and spit in a bowl. It is a very astonishing spectacle for their grandfathers and grandmothers." Mme. de Genlis intimates that the use of the mouth-bowl was introduced into France from England together with race-horses and jockeys.

One of the greatest ornaments of the table is plate. Balzac in his novels always cites fine silver, fine linen and fine porcelain as evidences of high luxury: kings, princes and wealthy citizens have at all times taken pride in amassing beautiful objects in the precious metals, and in the great houses of the 16th and 17th centuries, the finest room in the house was the dining-room, at one end of which stood the dresser laden with basins and vases enriched with precious stones. Amongst the ornaments of this dresser was a coffer called a *nef*, because it was often in the shape of a vessel. The use of this coffer was to hold the knives, spoons, toothpicks, etc. Now-a-days the lucky possessors of old silver willingly make a show of it on dressers and buffets and on their tables. Many who have been smitten with the craze for *bibelots*, load their buffets with hanaps and falence and Palissy ware of more or less authentic origin; but very often, as I intimated in a previous article, the buffet or dresser is altogether suppressed in the modern dining-room, and the table and its service reduced to the simplest and most practical proportions.

The history of French work in gold and silver is still to be written. M. Phillippe Burty has recently contributed an important chapter in his work *Froment Meurice, Argentier de la ville de Paris*, and from some notes drawn up by Froment Meurice at the time of the Exhibition of 1852, and now published by M. Burty, we shall be able to glean some curious observations made by one who knew what he was talking about. The gold and silversmith's art, so brilliant in the time of Louis XV., began to degenerate already under Louis XVI. In the productions of the latter epoch we find no longer, either in the forms or in the arrangements, those pleasing and charming, though unclassical motifs that so admirably furnished a table. The dishes and plates are no longer twisted and cut into lacework at the edges; the soup tureens no longer bulge out with puffs and ruffles and gad-rooms; we no longer find those sculptures in relief, that foliage that was intertwined and interlaced in defiance of all style and measure, and yet with such elegance and grace, in spite of excess. The decadence of the Louis XV. style, which was the *rocaille*, led the way to the reaction, to the Louis XVI. style, the triumph of pure line, the adaptation of the most rigid forms of architecture to both jewelry and table silver. After the Revolution we find admirably executed work in the Greek or Roman style, with dry and correct ornaments, inspired under the influence of the school of David. This pure, classic and correctly dry Greek style of gold and silver work was continued by Odier and Biennais, the two great artists of the time until after Waterloo. Then about 1817 the presence of foreigners at Paris, and especially of the English, who brought with them their plate, and perhaps, too, not a little the desire for change, contributed to overthrow the pure and classical plate, and to enthrone in its place English rococo plate, a kind

of degenerate Louis XV. style. Theophile Gautier, even, in 1867 terminated one of his feuilletons with these words: "But the amateurs lay more store by the name of the painter than by the value of the picture, amateurs for whom in general art is a mere luxury, like thorough-bred horse and *English silver ware*." And now, once more, in obedience to the dictates of *le chic Anglais*, the products of the London and Birmingham plate makers are to be found on many a fashionable French table. But to return back from this digression: at the time of the Restoration all the eminent Parisian houses were making in the English style. M. Fauconnier alone resisted, and, under the patronage of the Duchesse de Berry and with the collaboration of Barye, who was destined to become so famous as a sculptor, made the first attempts to resuscitate the Renaissance and Gothic styles, and began that movement of which Froment Meurice became the glorious leader, the romantic movement in *orfèvrerie*. Froment Meurice, in his influence on French work in the precious metals, may be cited side by side with the names of Delacroix in painting, of Perault in sculpture, of Berlioz in music, of Celestin Nanteuil in etching, of Gautier in criticism, of Victor Hugo in poetry and the drama. He was a great innovator and a great resuscitator,



MODERN FRENCH CANDLESTICK.

seeking his inspiration chiefly in the fine work of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, and in his jewelry, seeking willingly the line and forms preferred by the artists of the times of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. At the present day the silversmith's art, like most of the decorative arts, seeks its inspiration chiefly in the masterpieces of the past; the most original products of our century are probably the vases and groups of figures for race cups or surtouts de table, which latter are not admissible except on immense tables, where the ex-

cellence of the dinner is subordinated to the splendor of the service. For that matter, silver and crockery are both subjects deserving special treatment; I shall not therefore attempt to do justice to them in the present general considerations.

As for the lighting of the dinner table the ideal illumination remains candles on the table itself and on the walls in sconces and *bras appliques*. Generally, however, some system of suspended lamp, burning either gas or oil, is adopted. In all the metal work concerned with lighting apparatus, the French display great art, and some of the finest designs of Gouthière and Delafosse are designs for sconces and flambeaux.

In general I have remarked that the French table service is distinguished by simplicity, good taste and extreme practicality. It is really a service and not a servitude; the guest is really served, and he is not the slave of the ornaments of the feast. Another point to be noticed in a good French house is that the floral decoration of the table is chosen so as to be as much as possible *without perfume*—a very important detail—for nothing is more intolerable to some sensitive organizations than an atmosphere impregnated with violets or roses or mimosa, particularly during meals. Still another good feature of this floral decoration is that it is kept low, no flowers or foliage being allowed to rise to such a height above the table as to intercept the free view of each guest over the whole table from end to end and from side to side.

ARTIST FUND SOCIETY.

WHAT will probably be the last exhibition of the Artist Fund Society was held in the south room of the Academy of Design, on the closing of the Bartholdi Loan Association Exhibition. The sales of the Artist Fund Society have been so disappointing for the last few seasons, that the annual contributions of the members have become a burden, and the subject of discontinuing them is to be seriously discussed. This, according to the constitution, cannot be effected under a year, and requires a unanimous vote. Several projects are under discussion. Inasmuch as after twenty-five years of membership contribution is not obligatory, and several members will have soon completed that term, it is somewhat difficult to adjust their claims with those who have been members but a comparatively short time. It is suggested that the association be disbanded, and a division of the fund be made pro rata, that the exhibitions be given up, the fund left at interest, and the money be given according to the first intention of the society, to the members' families at their death, and thus gradually dissolve the organization. A few members prefer that the exhibitions be continued as usual. As any decision must be ratified by an unanimous vote, the matter is by no means settled.

It is undeniable that there has been a decreasing lack of interest in the exhibitions, on the part of the members as of the public. Many prominent contributors, notably Eastman Johnson, are absent this year; on the other hand, Mr. Daniel Huntington sends a Venetian view of importance. For the most part the works repeat in great measure the annual aspect of the rooms. Mr. Homer Martin, whose work is now so seldom seen, sends from Normandy two small but delightful works. One, "In the Paddock, Ariqueboeuf," is in composition not unlike similar works exhibited by Mr. Martin, and for which he has strong feeling; the chief motive is a grove, with reflections, in which mingle the delicate tints of the sky and the foliage, now slightly turning. This suggestion of the color of this picture will also recall other colors of the kind by Mr. Martin, but nothing at once so well balanced, poetical and delicate. Mr. Martin's perception of color, compared to that of most people, even of most artists, to use a homely comparison, is like the scent of a dog or of the hearing of an Indian, who is conscious of the myriad sounds of the forest, which are silent to duller ears. It is, in fact, almost another sense. The second picture, a Normandy Road, is an illustration of this. There is a strip of woods, a house and stone wall; a woman is on a horse, and a man in a blouse turns to look at her. The types, apparently so lightly sketched in, are true to the life. The local color of road, wood and wall are set down like facts when scrutinized. But this painting glows with beautiful color, which is as impossible to fix as the gleam of the opal. This is the alchemy of the painter, and if it is not given to us all to discern this joyousness of color, which Mr. Martin finds in nature, as Turner suggested to his critic, we may well wish we could.

