**Unit 4**

**Parts of Meals: Courses**

**Additional reading**

**The Soups**

Soups occupy the second place on a menu, but they are of much older origin than the starters, which occupy the first place.

For thousands of years soups have been the main meal, especially for the poor and peasant classes. They are one of the oldest dishes in cookery and in the history of eating. It is interesting that soups were equally important as basic food, and they were made in a similar way all over the world and in European countries in particular. To all they represented the main meal of the day. Soups were always popular and they were easily made from what was available and cheapest in the garden or in the fields. Mostly vegetables, potatoes, barley and rice were used, as well as pulses. If times were good, a piece of meat, poultry, bacon or sausage was added to give the soups substance and flavour. In order to make this simple everyday meal more palatable and variable people used seasonings, herbs, spices.

The soups were made in the manner ’pot on the fire’. A piece of meat or poultry would be put in an iron or earthenware pot together with various vegeta-bles in season, some barley, rice, or pulses. Then it would be covered with water. All that was brought to the boil and seasoned with herbs and spices. Then the pot would be placed on the side of the stove, or in the hot ashes of the fire, to simmer gently for hours.

In the evening when the peasants returned from their hard work in the fields, the soup was ready to be served. First, the thin broth was ladled into the bowl or plate to be eaten as soup. Then the thicker part, vegetables, potatoes, rice, pulses and meat, if any, followed as the main course. Fresh fruit, or cooked dry fruit, or home-made cheese concluded this simple meal.

In this we can see the beginning of the structure of our three-course meal. Today soup is just one of the courses in a meal. The stocks are now strained and called consommé. The vegetables may be sieved for puree soups.

A great many soups are used in international gastronomy. They are: clear soup (or broth), thick soup, puree soup (usually a vegetable soup thickened with the starch contained in the pureed vegetables), cream soup (thickened with béchamel sauce), etc.

**The Fish Course**

In most parts of the world, fish has always been a valuable source of protein.

Indeed, in some parts it has been the only source.

Fish is very important for the catering industry. It provides an excellent change from the normal meat diet. It is of great value for special diets and meals. Fish dishes also appear on menus for religious reasons and customs, especially on Fridays and throughout Lent. Besides that, until recently most fishes have been cheaper than meat. However, pollution of rivers and the sea, and concern for over-fishing led to the imposition of fishing limits. These made fish now as expensive as most types of meat, in some cases even more expensive.

All good cookery books give much space to the preparation and presentation of fish dishes. The recipes are numerous and varied. It is true that most of them are limited to the most popular types of fish. On the British Isles these are cod, haddock, herring, turbot, halibut, plaice and sole, as well as salmon and trout. As to shellfish, crab, lobster, oysters, and mussels are usually used. Squid and cuttlefish are also very popular.

Various cooking methods are used in the preparation of fish dishes, such as boiling, poaching, steaming, stewing, braising, roasting, baking, grilling, deep-frying, shallow-frying, etc. Many garnishes and sauces are used with the fish as a main course, or in the framework of a classical menu, as the fifth course on the menu.

**Salads**

Salad is a dish of raw or cold cooked foods, usually dressed and seasoned, served as an hors d’oeuvre or as an accompaniment to grills and roasts. Salads are not really a course. However, on the classical banqueting menu a piquant crisp salad may break the order of the courses and thus make a pleasant and refreshing change.

There is no doubt that in the last ten years salads have become very impor-tant. Eating habits are changing. Nowadays people are concerned about health and weight, about a more balanced diet. This makes the service of various salads at all meal times very popular. A salad may be served as an appetizer, side dish or main course.

A salad would not be a salad without a dressing. Indeed, various dressings allow the same salad combination to taste different. Each kind of salad requires a different dressing. The most popular cold dressings are mayonnaise and vinaigrette. Vinaigrette (also called French sauce) is a cold sauce or dressing made from a mixture of vinegar (or lemon juice), oil (or sour cream), pepper and salt, to which various flavourings may be added: shallots, onion, herbs, garlic, anchovies, gherkins, capers, mustard, hard-boiled eggs, etc.

The classical menu may include the following types of salads.

* Green salads: one of various types of lettuce, endive, watercress, spinach, sorrel, chicory, dandelion leaves, rocket, lamb’s lettuce, etc. These salads are served as appetizers or as an accompaniment to dishes such as grills, omelettes, poultry, game or fish. They are usually dressed with vinaigrette, which can be flavoured and mixed with croutons, strips of bacon, cheese, shallots and garlic.
* Mixed green salads: a combination of several of the green salads.
* Single (plain) salads: consist of a basic ingredient, either raw or cooked, served cold with a cold dressing (mayonnaise, vinaigrette, mustard, soft cheese dressing, etc). The basic ingredient can be meat, shellfish or a vegetable, such as beetroot, celeriac, tomato, cucumber, cabbage, French beans, potato, radish, red pepper, etc.
* Compound salads: Various combinations of fruit and vegetables, with rice, pasta, flsh, meat, poultry, bound with mayonnaise or dressings. They may include exotic ingredients, such as lobster medallions. They should always be nicely decorated.

**Vegetables**

Vegetables play an important part in the preparation and presentation of every course on the menu. They are the basis of many hors d’oeuvres. Vegetables are usually served as a garnish with meat or fish, but they can be a complete dish by themselves. Seasoning and sauces can transform bland vegetables, such as courgettes, cooked lettuce, etc.

Vegetables are very important from the nutritional point of view. They are rich in vitamins, they provide minerals and cellulose. Taking this into account, vegetables are freely used in cookery. Every care is taken to cook them properly. Vegetables should not be exposed to prolonged heat after cooking, otherwise vi-tamins may be destroyed. The best method is to steam them unpeeled. Cooks should also take care to retain the natural colour of vegetables. Vegetables should be presented in an attractive way. If they are poorly presented, the guest will refuse to taste them.

As to cooking methods, vegetables are boiled, steamed, baked, stewed, or braised in stock, sauce or cream, roasted, pan-fried, or deep-fried in oil or fat. In some countries vegetables are flavoured with pork or bacon fat, in others with olive oil or butter.

**Dessert**

Dessert is the last course of the meal. Nowadays in France dessert comprises cheese, sweet dishes, and fresh fruit. In an ordinary menu cheese alone is served at the end of a meal, especially at lunchtime.

In ancient times, meals generally ended with fresh or dried fruit, milk or cheese dishes, or honey. In the 17th century desserts became more elaborate. They included marzipan, nougat, biscuits, creams, sugar sweets, sweet almonds, chestnuts (poached in syrup and then dried and glazed). At the end of the century ice cream appeared and pastry-making developed rapidly. Different basic mixtures appeared, such as puff pastry, sponge, choux pastry, and meringue.

The choice of a suitable dessert depends on the nature and quantities of food served in the previous courses. An appropriate dessert complements the main course. Nowadays many restaurants offer a sweet trolley. Various desserts are displayed on it, from which the diner may choose whatever appeals to them.

The choice of sweet dishes that may be served as a dessert is wide. These are:

* pies, tarts, flans, puddings, gateaux
* cream, mousse,
* fritters, pancakes, croquettes
* ice-cream, parfait, sorbet
* preserves, stewed fruit and compote
* fresh fruit and fruit salad

The opinions of writers on the subject of desserts are divided. Some think that the best dessert is ripe cheese, or preserves, or wines that are dry, old, and warm. Others believe that there is no good formal dinner without a dessert of patisserie. Tastes differ.

**Savouries**

Savouries are an English addition to the menu. They are not a course on the classical French menu.

Still, they are a popular alternative on many menus to the cheese course, especially when the function consists of men only. Sometimes, when alcoholic drinks are served at the end of the meal at such functions, they are a more suitable conclusion to a meal than the usual sweet course.

Savouries consist of delicate morsels (small pieces) of foodstuffs, very highly seasoned, placed on a well-buttered, slice of fresh toast. They are served very hot, on a china or glass dish, or on a silver platter on a doily. They should always be prepared as individual portions (one per person). They should be attractive and appetizing, and tastefully decorated with sprig parsley.

A selection of popular British savouries

Welsh rarebit

Cheese with beer and mustard on toast, browned under grill.

Mushrooms on toast

Grilled field mushrooms.

Sardines on toast

Boned skinned sardines heated under grill.

Anchovies on toast

Filleted fresh anchovies heated under grill.

Soft roes on toast

Floured soft roes brushed with melted butter, grilled, dusted with paprika.

Angels on horseback

Oysters wrapped in flattened bacon rashers, skewered, grilled on buttered toast.