

IT is curious to reflect that the spoon, as we know it to-day, was little used before the seventeenth century. Its earliest form was probably the Scots *spurtle* (or *spirtle*) for stirring porridge. This was a mere stick, cut from beech or sycamore, but later (in England and elsewhere) the utensil took the form of a spatula, a flat spade-shaped blade being added to the handle. Originally this spatula was used less in sipping or supping than for measuring out ingredients for food. By degrees the flat spatula blade began to be hollowed out; the spade form became round or oval, and in time we got the *spoon* with its curved handle and pear-shaped bowl. Even now, however, the idea of the "measure" lingers. The spoon has attained the dignity of having standard sizes, and when our doctor orders a tonic we take this in doses of "tea," "dessert," or "table" size. As, too, there is no regulation as to the exact size of a tea, a dessert, or a table spoon, the *standard* remains in the "minim" glasses supplied by chemists, a standard recognised by law as well as by custom.

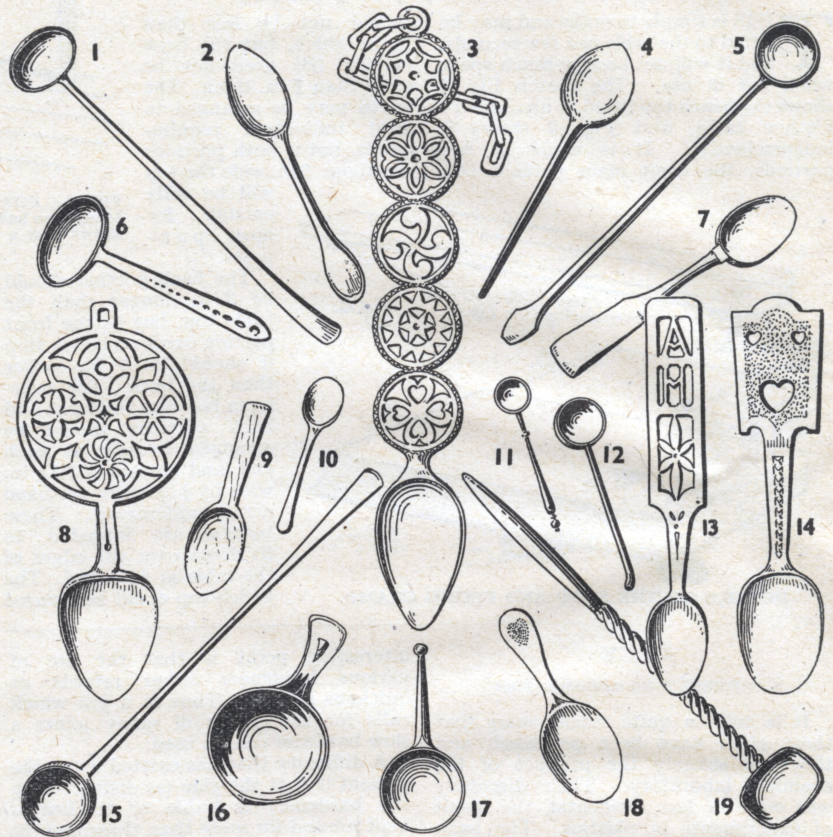
Early spoons were made from home-grown timber, chiefly lime, beech and sycamore. When available, however, maple and boxwood were used, these lending themselves to a finer finish for the bowls. Later, when black walnut and lignum vitae came to be imported, the value of these denser woods for domestic items was valued. Many, too, were cut from the timber of fruit trees. Pear was chosen for preference, but cherry, apple and also plum were favoured.

In museums we find numerous examples of highly ornamental and finely wrought wooden spoons, but in general we must regard spoon-making as a peasant craft. In Scandinavia the craft reached a high standard, but, on the whole, British spoons are valued more for their interest than their craftsmanship. Some of the finest are the eighteenth century punch and cordial ladles (see Nos. 1, 5, 11, 12, 16). The former sometimes reached a length of about 22 ins., the latter being delicate pieces from 6 ins. to 8 ins. All were cut from the solid, with the handles finely modelled to the under side of bowl. The bowls themselves were usually round (5, 11, 12, and 15), but sometimes took the oblong oval form (1) or the squared-oval (19). Mostly these were in sycamore, but small cordial ladles were frequently made in lignum vitae.

Welsh and North-west English "love spoons," being decorative rather than for daily use, were often made in lime. The origin of the term is a little obscure, but the fact that, in early days, the spoon was used as a gift at christenings may have prompted the association. Love spoons bear the stamp of peasant art, many of the examples being produced with the aid of the simplest tools. Spoons of the type of (3) we have seen over 2 ft. in length, having from six to nine or more fretted and carved circles. Some have folding

WOODEN SPOONS

Utensils used by our forefathers



OLD WOODEN SPOONS AND LADLES.

1. Long punch ladle, 18 ins. to 21 ins. long with oblong oval bowl. (Also smaller sizes from 12 ins. to 16 ins.).
2. Beech spoon, about 11 ins.
3. Love spoon, fretted and carved, with wood chain. Length 18 ins. Date probably about 1800.
4. Porridge-stirring spoon, beech or sycamore; length 10 ins. to 11 ins.
5. Long round-bowled punch ladle, about 20 ins.
6. 8-in. spoon with incised handle and oblong-oval bowl.
7. Lime or beech spoon, 9 ins. to 10 ins.; 18th century type.
8. Love spoon, about 8 ins., sycamore.
- 9, 10. Old porridge spoons, lime, 9 ins. and 8 ins.
- 11, 12. Small cordial ladles, 7 ins. and 7½ ins.
- 13, 14. Welsh love spoons; these, in various woods, are of many types and sizes.
15. Long punch ladle, with delicately worked handle, sycamore, 21 ins. long.
16. Peach-shaped ladle with short curved handle.
17. Early small spoon (maple) about 5 ins. long.
18. Boxwood spoon, about 6 ins.
19. Punch ladle, squared-oval bowl, turned handle, partly spiral-curved, length 20 ins.

Note.—These spoons and ladles have necessarily had to be drawn to varying scales.

spoons, whilst others have knives and forks attached by short chains or single links, all cut from the solid wood. Nos. 3 and 8 have the usual circle features, whilst Nos. 13 and 14 are examples of the smaller and simpler types.

A good deal of interest lies in the varying shapes of the bowls. The illustrations show the usual circular and oval forms, but in others the shape is more subtle. Compare, for example, the sharp-pointed bowl of No. 2 with the bowls of Nos. 13 and 14. Again, take the flat top of bowl at No. 8 and

compare it with No. 4 or No. 18. It will be noticed, too, that when there is an oblong oval (1 and 6) the form is elliptical, whereas the egg shape is usually adopted in the case of upright ovals (see 2, 13 and 18). No. 16 shows a peach-shaped ladle with a very short handle, whereas the spoon at No. 4 has a long tapered handle and a pointed oval bowl. Old spoons which may have been in daily use for two if not more generations are worn in bowl and handle and have lost much of their original beauty. However worn, preserve and protect them. (916)