PRACTICAL PROFESSIONAL GASTRONOMY

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Preface

The subject of gastronomy as a body of knowledge is one that gives rise to much controversy, the main difficulty being to confine its scope within clearly defined parameters of conventional disciplines as associated with culinary practices.

This book is written to give guidance to those engaged in the provision of food and drink so that they may improve their knowledge, extend the frontiers of the art and science of gastronomy, and achieve yet higher standards.

The approach is interdisciplinary and an attempt is made to transcend the conventional boundaries of present practice. The axis is the interconnection between man, his food and drink, the environment and the development of cookery practices. All these factors have to be considered in the light of the prevailing cultures of mankind and be based on the accumulation of nutritional knowledge that shapes our eating habits.

It is hoped that the contents of this book will stimulate a desire to learn more about the eating habits of nations and why means of nourishment are often imposed by geographical chance. Such studies can be a means of gaining a closer understanding of our fellow men and strengthen the brotherhood of man. A knowledge of man's physiological needs and of his psychological characteristics is considered necessary in order to understand the way in which present-day eating practices including table manners and other forms of etiquette, have come about by a prolonged process of progression of all the many strands that go to form the subject of oenogastronomy.

On a more practical plane, it is suggested that a basic knowledge of the principles of menu composition is essential because it is fundamental to every gourmet occasion. It is essential that the menu and wine list is absolutely right before any of the other aspects of gastronomy are planned.

The authors believe that the pleasures that can be obtained from a knowledge and love of good food and drink are not the sole prerogative of the wealthy. The knowledge of good food and drink can be applied right across the wide expanse of catering activities and at all levels as a means of making man's journey through life more pleasurable.

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G. N.

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Introduction

I first met Mr Harry Cracknell, one of the joint authors of this book, in 1972. The occasion was an interesting one, for with a colleague he had organised a gastronomic dinner in the Department of Catering Management at the Oxford Polytechnic. Thus was founded a Society 'devoted to furthering the Appreciation of Good Food and Wine', which at its second meeting adopted the name of Brillat-Savarin. The preparation of the carefully selected menus gave a rare opportunity to the students to produce dishes of the highest expertise; furthermore, each feast was followed by an opportunity for the diners to express their opinions on what they had been eating.

In this volume the authors have a comparable dual approach. The consumption of food and wine is very properly seen as an art, but it is viewed from the point of view of the cook and the restaurateur as well as from that of the diner. Certain primitive tribes, we are assured by anthropologists, regard the act of eating as indecent and only to be performed in private while other functions may freely be exercised in public view. I do not share their views, nor do the authors of this highly informative book. On the contrary they share the view of Anthelme de Brillat-Savarin, which adorned the menu of which I wrote above:

The pleasures of the table belong to all times and all ages, to every country and every day; they go hand in hand with all our other pleasures, outlast them, and remain to console us for their loss.

I count myself fortunate to have been brought up in a family where both food and wine were taken seriously, and then to have lived much of my life in Oxford where the same conditions have prevailed. As one looks back over the years of consumption, it is simple to see how personal tastes are conditioned by events outside one's control. Even today I am not over-fond of brains, and I think this goes back to the end of the First World War when they were (I believe) not rationed and thought to be wholesome for children. On the other hand, I like my game well-hung: this may go back to my mother's father, whose prescription was simple, if perchance extravagant: 'Hang two pheasants up by the beak: when one falls off, eat the other.' Two very large changes have occurred in the provision of food within my memory. One is the revolution of transport, which has brought *exotica* from every land to our tables; the other is the considerable replacement of small suppliers by multiple concerns with a consequent elimina-

tion of the unusual or the specialised. My mother, herself an excellent cook, would feel aggrieved if she could not get that admirable fish, John Dory – the *Poisson St Pierre* of legend – from our local fishmonger in South Kensington. When on festive occasions she bought from him what nowadays are ubiquitously styled ‘scampi’ they went under the more appropriate name of Dublin Bay Prawns. And in truth the large prawn of home waters is not the same as its cousin of the Venetian lagoons. Viewing a modern retailer of fish one sometimes feels that one would welcome more products from home waters and fewer ‘Pacific prawns’. How gladly would I trade many imported cheeses for a regular supply of Blue Vinney.

The authors of this book have cast their net wide. Food from every area of the world comes under their scrutiny, as does also its preparation from the age of Greece and Rome. But the scientific aspects are by no means neglected. It would seem that we all need a regular intake of five chemical substances in recognisable proportions. I think I was vaguely aware that I required a daily intake of two and a half litres of water, though I am always prepared to compromise by ingesting some of it in the form of wine. After all it is not necessary to drink wine of the highest class all the time. There is a little to be said for the attitude of Mr Mountchesney in Disraeli’s *Sybil*: ‘Rather like bad wine, one gets so bored with good wine.’ However, I had no conception that I needed a daily intake of ten to fourteen megajoules of energy every day. Strict vegetarians should perhaps add to their diet vitamin B12, which is only present in animal sources of food.

It is to the credit of the authors that they do not shirk the practical side of constructing a menu. In a fixed-price menu, the main dish should take some 62 to 72 per cent of the total cost. It is an interesting reflection that restaurants as we understand them, that is true eating places as opposed to inns and taverns, only came into existence in the eighteenth century. Even then certain practices which we would expect were slow to become common. According to family tradition, it was only in the 1870s that an English diplomat, Sir William Barrington, persuaded the great establishments of Paris that hot plates contributed to the better enjoyment of great food.

Some of the historic meals which the two authors have discovered make fascinating reading; they range from a dinner at York contrived by the great Alexis Soyer using 180 fowls but only cooking the tiny portion known as the ‘*sot l’y laisse*’ (often in English usage ‘the oyster’) to a French meal organised by President Loubet which entailed the consumption of 50000 bottles of wine and the washing up of a quarter of a million plates!

Mercifully, fashions change from age to age and vary from continent to continent. In the Middle Ages whale was esteemed a delicacy, but it could not recover that qualification in the last war. In New Zealand (I was delighted to discover) the flesh of the sheep is described by its age – hogget, shearing, and so on.

Less attention is paid nowadays to the gastronomic requirements of abstinence on fast days or in Lent. My grandmother, a sister of the diplomat mentioned above, preserved a menu from Paris for Good Friday 1877.

A highly decorative, symmetrical border made of intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, framing the central text. It features large, stylized flowers and scrolling vines.

LE MENU

Potage de Purée de Pois Faubonne

Cassolettes de Laitances de Carpe à la Flamande

Turbot sauces Crevettes et Hollandaise

Quenelles de Merlans à la Béarnaise

Timbales d'Oeufs Princesse

Mayonnaise de Filets de Sole à la Bagration

Pommes de Terre Farcies Soufflées

Salade de Romaine

Eperlans frits à la Colbert

Pâté de Saumon aux Truffes

Asperges en Branches sauce Hollandaise

Haricots Verts sautés au Beurre

Gâteaux Montmorency Chauds

Soufflés Vanille frappés

Glace Danicheff

It will be observed that this simple little repast is indeed '*maigre*' throughout by the strictest rules.

It is tempting to quote further from the extensive variety of sources employed in this fascinating and truly 'free-range' volume, but the reader must do his own research. For myself I wish the book every success. It balances splendidly the interests of those who consume and those who prepare.

MICHAEL MACLAGAN