



***ELIZABETH
ROBINS
PENNELL***

***THE FEASTS
OF AUTOLYCUS:
THE DIARY
OF A GREEDY
WOMAN***



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The Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman

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INTRODUCTION

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I have always wondered that woman could be so glib in claiming equality with man. In such trifling matters as politics and science and industry, I doubt if there be much to choose between the two sexes. But in the cultivation and practice of an art which concerns life more seriously, woman has hitherto proved an inferior creature.

For centuries the kitchen has been her appointed sphere of action. And yet, here, as in the studio and the study, she has allowed man to carry off the laurels. Vatel, Carême, Ude, Dumas, Gouffé, Etienne, these are some of the immortal cooks of history: the kitchen still waits its Sappho. Mrs Glasse, at first, might be thought a notable exception; but it is not so much the merit of her book as its extreme rarity in the first edition which has made it famous.

Woman, moreover, has eaten with as little distinction as she has cooked. It seems almost—much as I deplore the admission—as if she were of coarser clay than man, lacking the more artistic instincts, the subtler, daintier emotions.

I think, therefore, the great interest of the following papers lies in the fact that they are written by a woman—a greedy woman. The collection, evidently, does not pretend to be a "Cook's Manual," or a "Housewife's Companion": already the diligent, in numbers, have catalogued *recipes*, with more or less exactness. It is rather a guide to the Beauty, the Poetry, that exists in the perfect dish, even as in the masterpiece of a Titian or a Swinburne. Surely hope

need not be abandoned when there is found one woman who can eat, with understanding, the Feasts of Autolycus.

ELIZABETH ROBINS PENNELL.

THE VIRTUE OF GLUTTONY

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Gluttony is ranked with the deadly sins; it should be honoured among the cardinal virtues. It was in the Dark Ages of asceticism that contempt for it was fostered. Selfish anchorites, vowed to dried dates and lentils, or browsing Nebuchadnezzar-like upon grass, thought by their lamentable example to rob the world of its chief blessing. Cheerfully, and without a scruple, they would have sacrificed beauty and pleasure to their own superstition. If the vineyard yielded wine and the orchard fruit, if cattle were sent to pasture, and the forest abounded in game, they believed it was that men might forswear the delights thus offered. And so food came into ill repute and foolish fasting was glorified, until a healthy appetite passed for a snare of the devil, and its gratification meant eternal damnation. Poor deluded humans, ever so keen to make the least of the short span of life allotted to them!

With time, all superstitions fail; and asceticism went the way of many another ingenious folly. But as a tradition, as a convention, somehow, it lingered longer among women. And the old Christian duty became a new feminine grace. And where the fanatic had fasted that his soul might prove comelier in the sight of God, silly matrons and maidens starved, or pretended to starve, themselves that their

bodies might seem fairer in the eyes of man. And dire, indeed, has been their punishment. The legend was that swooning Angelina or tear-stained Amelia, who, in company, toyed tenderly with a chicken wing or unsubstantial wafer, later retired to the pantry to stuff herself with jam and pickles. And thus gradually, so it is asserted, the delicacy of women's palate was destroyed; food to her perverted stomach was but a mere necessity to stay the pangs of hunger, and the pleasure of eating she looked upon as a deep mystery, into which only man could be initiated.

In this there is much exaggeration, but still much truth. To-day women, as a rule, think all too little of the joys of eating. They hold lightly the treasures that should prove invaluable. They refuse to recognise that there is no less art in eating well than in painting well or writing well, and if their choice lay between swallowing a bun with a cup of tea in an aërated bread shop, and missing the latest picture show or doing without a new book, they would not hesitate; to the stodgy bun they would condemn themselves, though that way madness lies. Is it not true that the woman who would economise, first draws her purse-strings tight in the market and at the restaurant? With her milliner's bill she may find no fault, but in butcher's book, or grocer's, every halfpenny is to be disputed.

The loss is hers, but the generous-hearted can but regret it. Therefore let her be brought face to face with certain fundamental facts, and the scales will fall quickly from her eyes, and she will see the truth in all its splendour.

First, then, let her know that the love of good eating gives an object to life. She need not stray after false gods;

she will not burden herself with silly fads, once she realizes that upon food she may concentrate thought and energy, and her higher nature—which to her means so much—be developed thereby. Why clamour for the suffrage, why labour for the redemption of brutal man, why wear, with noisy advertisement, ribbons white or blue, when three times a day there is a work of art, easily within her reach, to be created? All his life a Velasquez devoted to his pictures, a Shakespeare to his plays, a Wagner to his operas: why should not the woman of genius spend hers in designing exquisite dinners, inventing original breakfasts, and be respected for the nobility of her self-appointed task? For in the planning of the perfect meal there is art; and, after all, is not art the one real, the one important thing in life?

And the object she thus accepts will be her pleasure as well. For the *gourmande*, or glutton, duty and amusement go hand in hand. Her dainty devices and harmonies appeal to her imagination and fancy; they play gently with her emotions; they develop to the utmost her pretty sensuousness. Mind and body alike are satisfied. And so long as this pleasure endures it will never seem time to die. The ancient philosopher thought that time had come when life afforded more evil than good. The good of a pleasantly planned dinner outbalances the evil of daily trials and tribulations.

Here is another more intimate, personal reason which the woman of sense may not set aside with flippancy or indifference. By artistic gluttony, beauty is increased, if not actually created. Listen to the words of Brillat-Savarin, that suave and sympathetic *gourmet*: "It has been proved by a

series of rigorously exact observations that by a succulent, delicate, and choice regimen, the external appearances of age are kept away for a long time. It gives more brilliancy to the eye, more freshness to the skin, more support to the muscles; and as it is certain in physiology that wrinkles, those formidable enemies of beauty, are caused by the depression of muscle, it is equally true that, other things being equal, those who understand eating are comparatively four years younger than those ignorant of that science." Surely he should have called it art, not science. But let that pass. Rejoice in the knowledge that gluttony is the best cosmetic.

And more than this: a woman not only grows beautiful when she eats well, but she is bewitchingly lovely in the very act of eating. Listen again, for certain texts cannot be heard too often: "There is no more pretty sight than a pretty *gourmande* under arms. Her napkin is nicely adjusted; one of her hands rests on the table, the other carries to her mouth little morsels artistically carved, or the wing of a partridge, which must be picked. Her eyes sparkle, her lips are glossy, her talk cheerful, all her movements graceful; nor is there lacking some spice of the coquetry which accompanies all that women do. With so many advantages she is irresistible, and Cato, the censor himself, could not help yielding to the influence." And who shall say that woman, declaiming on the public platform, or "spanking" progressive principles into the child-man, makes a prettier picture?

Another plea, and one not to be scorned, is the new bond of union love of eating weaves between man and wife. "A

wedded pair with this taste in common have once a day at least a pleasant opportunity of meeting." Sport has been pronounced a closer tie than religion, but what of food? What, indeed? Let men and women look to it that at table delicious sympathy makes them one, and marriage will cease to be a failure. If they agree upon their sauces and salads, what matter if they disagree upon mere questions of conduct and finance? Accept the gospel of good living and the sexual problem will be solved. She who first dares to write the great Food Novel will be a true champion of her sex. And yet women meet and dine together, and none has the courage to whisper the true secret of emancipation. Mostly fools! Alas! that it should have to be written!

And think—that is, if you know how to think—of the new joy added to friendship, the new charm to casual acquaintanceship, when food is given its due, and is recognised as something to be talked of. The old platitudes will fade and die. The maiden will cease to ask "What do you think of the Academy?" The earnest one will no longer look to Ibsen for heavy small talk. Pretence will be wiped away, conversational shams abolished, and the social millennium will have come. Eat with understanding, and interest in the dishes set before you must prove genuine and engrossing, as enthusiasm over the last new thing in art or ethics has never been—never can be. The sensation of the day will prove the latest arrangement in oysters, the newest device in vegetables. The ambitious will trust to her kitchen to win her reputation; the poet will offer lyrics and pastorals with every course; the painter will present in every dish a lovely scheme of colour.

Gross are they who see in eating and drinking nought but grossness. The woman who cannot live without a mission should now find the path clear before her. Let her learn first for herself the rapture that lies dormant in food; let her next spread abroad the joyful tidings. Gluttony is a vice only when it leads to stupid, inartistic excess.

A PERFECT BREAKFAST

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Breakfast means many things to many men. Ask the American, and he will give as definition: "Shad, beefsteak, hash, fried potatoes, omelet, coffee, buckwheat cakes, waffles, corn bread, and (if he be a Virginian) batter pudding, at 8 o'clock A.M. sharp." Ask the Englishman, and he will affirm stoutly: "Tea, a rasher of bacon, dry toast, and marmalade as the clock strikes nine, or the half after." And both, differing in detail as they may and do, are alike barbarians, understanding nothing of the first principles of gastronomy.

Seek out rather the Frenchman and his kinsmen of the Latin race. They know: and to their guidance the timid novice may trust herself without a fear. The blundering Teuton, however, would lead to perdition; for he, insensible to the charms of breakfast, does away with it altogether, and, as if still swayed by nursery rule, eats his dinner at noon—and may he long be left to enjoy it by himself! Therefore, in this, as in many other matters that cater to the higher pleasures, look to France for light and inspiration.

Upon rising—and why not let the hour vary according to mood and inclination?—forswear all but the *petit déjeuner*: the little breakfast of coffee and rolls and butter. But the coffee must be of the best, no chicory as you hope for salvation; the rolls must be crisp and light and fresh, as they always are in Paris and Vienna; the butter must be pure and sweet. And if you possess a fragment of self-respect, enjoy this *petit déjeuner* alone, in the solitude of your chamber. Upon the early family breakfast many and many a happy marriage has been wrecked; and so be warned in time.

At noon once more is man fit to meet his fellow-man and woman. Appetite has revived. The day is at its prime. By every law of nature and of art, this, of all others, is the hour that calls to breakfast.

When soft rains fall, and winds blow milder, and bushes in park or garden are sprouting and spring is at hand, grace your table with this same sweet promise of spring. Let rosy radish give the touch of colour to satisfy the eye, as chairs are drawn in close about the spotless cloth: the tiny, round radish, pulled in the early hours of the morning, still in its first virginal purity, tender, sweet, yet peppery, with all the piquancy of the young girl not quite a child, not yet a woman. In great bunches, it enlivens every stall at Covent Garden, and every greengrocer's window; on the breakfast-table it is the gayest poem that uncertain March can sing. Do not spoil it by adding other *hors d'œuvres*; nothing must be allowed to destroy its fragrance and its savour. Bread and butter, however, will serve as sympathetic background, and enhance rather than lessen its charm.

Vague poetic memories and aspirations stirred within you by the dainty radish, you will be in fitting humour for *œufs aux saucissons*, a dish, surely, invented by the Angels in Paradise. There is little earthly in its composition or flavour; irreverent it seems to describe it in poor halting words. But if language prove weak, intention is good, and should others learn to honour this priceless delicacy, then will much have been accomplished. Without more ado, therefore, go to Benoist's, and buy the little truffled French sausages which that temple of delight provides. Fry them, and fry half the number of fresh eggs. Next, one egg and two sausages place in one of those irresistible little French baking-dishes, dim green or golden brown in colour, and, smothering them in rich wine sauce, bake, and serve—one little dish for each guest. Above all, study well your sauce; if it fail, disaster is inevitable; if it succeed, place laurel leaves in your hair, for you will have conquered. "A woman who has mastered sauces sits on the apex of civilisation."

Without fear of anti-climax, pass suavely on from *œufs aux saucissons* to *rognons sautés*. In thin elegant slices your kidneys should be cut, before trusting them to the melted butter in the frying pan; for seasoning, add salt, pepper, and parsley; for thickening, flour; for strength, a tablespoonful or more of stock; for stimulus, as much good claret; then eat thereof and you will never repent.

Dainty steps these to prepare the way for the breakfast's most substantial course, which, to be in loving sympathy with all that has gone before, may consist of *côtelettes de mouton au naturel*. See that the cutlets be small and plump, well trimmed, and beaten gently, once on each side, with a

chopper cooled in water. Dip them into melted butter, grill them, turning them but once that the juice may not be lost, and thank kind fate that has let you live to enjoy so delicious a morsel. *Pommes de terre sautées* may be deemed chaste enough to appear—and disappear—at the same happy moment.

With welcome promise of spring the feast may end as it began. Order a salad to follow: cool, quieting, encouraging. When in its perfection cabbage lettuce is to be had, none could be more submissive and responsive to the wooing of oil and vinegar. Never forget to rub the bowl with onion, now in its first youth, ardent but less fiery than in the days to come, strong but less imperious. No other garniture is needed. The tender green of the lettuce leaves will blend and harmonise with the anemones and tulips, in old blue china or dazzling crystal, that decorate the table's centre; and though grey may be the skies without, something of May's softness and June's radiance will fill the breakfast-room with the glamour of romance.

What cheese, you ask? Suisse, of course. Is not the month March? Has not the *menu*, so lovingly devised, sent the spring rioting through your veins? Suisse with sugar, and prolong the sweet dreaming while you may. What if work you cannot, after thus giving the reins to fancy and to appetite? At least you will have had your hour of happiness. Breakfast is not for those who toil that they may dine; their sad portion is the midday sandwich.

Wine should be light and not too many. The true epicure will want but one, and he may do worse than let his choice fall upon Graves, though good Graves, alas! is not to be had

for the asking. Much too heavy is Burgundy for breakfast. If your soul yearns for red wine, be aristocratic in your preferences, and, like the Stuarts, drink Claret—a good St. Estèphe or St. Julien.

Coffee is indispensable, and what is true of coffee after dinner is true as well of coffee after breakfast. Have it of the best, or else not at all. For liqueur, one of the less fervent, more maidenly varieties, Maraschino, perhaps, or Prunelle, but make sure it is the Prunelle, in stone jugs, that comes from Chalon-sur-Saône. Bring out the cigarettes—not the Egyptian or Turkish, with suspicion of opium lurking in their fragrant recesses—but the cleaner, purer Virginian. Then smoke until, like the Gypsy in Lenau's ballad, all earthly trouble you have smoked away, and you master the mysteries of Nirvana.

TWO BREAKFASTS

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Spring is the year's playtime. Who, while trees are growing green and flowers are budding, can toil with an easy conscience? Later, mere "use and wont" accustoms the most sensitive to sunshine and green leaves and fragrant blossoms. It is easy to work in the summer. But spring, like wine, goes to the head and gladdens the heart of man, so that he is fit for no other duty than the enjoyment of this new gladness. If he be human, and not a mere machine, he must and will choose it for the season of his holiday.

This is why in the spring the midday breakfast appeals with most charm. It may be eaten in peace, with no thought