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BRILLAT-SAVARIN'S PHYSIOLOGIE DU GOÛT

A HANDBOOK

OF

GASTRONOMY

New and Complete Translation

WITH FIFTY-TWO ORIGINAL ETCHINGS

By A. LALAUZE

NEW YORK
J. W. BOUTON, 706 BROADWAY
1884

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PUBLISHERS' NOTICE.

THERE have been several Editions of Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du Gôut* in an English dress, but they have all been curtailed and more or less altered. The present unabridged translation is, we believe, the first attempt made to offer to English readers this book as it was written.

The Notes marked Tr. are the Translators; the Author is answerable for the others.

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PREFACE.

FOR a long time I wished to say something about Brillat-Savarin. This figure, smiling rather than laughing, this well-lined paunch, this stylish mind and stomach, tempted me. The opportunity could not be better, and I profit by it.

Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, or Brillat de Savarin (for he signs himself thus in his "Essay on Duels"), was born at Belley, in the Ain, on the first of April, 1755, and died at Paris, on the second of February, 1826. He, therefore, lived seventy-one years. He had time enough wherein to eat. Moreover, nature had predestined him for this important function. She gave him a lofty figure, robust health, and an inexhaustible flow of good humour. Without ambition, inclined

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to study, and sufficiently rich, he seemed to lead the peaceable and happy life of a country lawyer, who has a knife and fork laid for him in all decent country houses. Until he was thirty-four years old, people saw him often going to and fro in the fertile country of Bugey, sometimes sitting down in well-provisioned inns, where strings of poultry were roasting, sometimes opposite to some jovial curé, sometimes coping with noisy huntsmen. From that time, there remained in his memory those precious receipts that he was to leave to posterity—the fondue, the omelette with tunny, the stuffed pheasant, &c.

The Revolution came and cut short all these joyous parties. His fellow-citizens, who had learnt to appreciate his good qualities, sent him to the Constituent Assembly. There Brillat-Savarin made not a worse figure than any other; but he did not seem prepared for the great work that was going on. On returning to his department, he was named president of the civil tribunal. Nothing would serve but that he should occupy some position. What did they expect of him? I do not know. The year 1793 found him Mayor of Belley. He thought this work too heavy for his shoulders, and as Switzerland was only a few steps off, he went to seek there a refuge against a movement that he found it impossible to direct or to moderate. I do not know how far we have to believe in the persecutions which were said to have been directed against him; government had to occupy itself with many other things at that time.

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Certain it is, Brillat-Savarin went to the United States, where the repose he enjoyed during two years profited to his beloved studies. The pages which he has written about his stay in America are his best; among them are sketches of rustic glades and interiors, painted with a lightness and a charm that Chateaubriand himself might have envied.

When he returned to France, the Directory was in full swing. Thrown on a sea of adventures, Brillat-Savarin, who had been deprived of his property at Bugey, accepted a post of secretary on the staff of the armies of the Republic in Germany. Afterwards he was sent as commissary of the Government in the Department of Seine-et-Oise. Finally, after the 18th Brumaire, at which he was present, with a resignation that I can scarcely appreciate, the Senate housed him for life, and made him a counsellor in the Court of Cassation.

It was in this haven that he passed the twenty-five last years of his life, scarcely troubled by the overthrow of the Hundred Days, maintained by all governments, which philosophically he refrained from disputing. It was on this magisterial seat that he elaborated his "Handbook of Gastronomy," the work and epitome of his whole life.

We find ourselves here in the presence of a well-known book that can only be mentioned with praise; of a book conceived soundly, proceeding by clever deductions, written in the most natural style in the world, which does not exclude liveliness and an

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originality peculiar to the temperament of its author. I only find a little stiffness here and there in the arrangement, which is even a mark of reverence to the reader, and a proof that the author seeks to please him by cutting up the pieces in small and attractive mouthfuls. Where Brillat-Savarin excels in most is in anecdote: he possesses its real secret, elegance, and tone.

He has gained and gains many men every day to gastronomy solely by the perfect wisdom of his precepts and by his good and well-balanced common sense. Coming after Grimod de la Reynière, he united in a body of doctrine the teaching and the scattered information that he had gathered from him. He fixed them for ever. There was between Grimod de la Reynière and Brillat-Savarin the difference that there is between a great eater and a delicate eater.*

Grimod de la Reynière was a Rabelaisian, a per-

* We must make everything enter into a biography, even a discordant note, on the condition that it comes from an authority. Now, this title of "delicate eater" has been denied to Brillat-Savarin. And by whom? By the Marquis de Cussy, to whom no one will deny authority. I am quite amused in transcribing the following lines from his *Art Culinaire*:—"Brillat-Savarin ate copiously and ill; he chose little, talked dully, had no vivacity in his looks, and was absorbed at the end of a repast." In other respects, the Marquis de Cussy was willing to praise his rival. At the beginning of the Observations that he has left on the "Handbook of Gastronomy," he said:—"To perceive some slight spots on the sun does not prevent us from recognising the brilliancy of its rays." This is right; but as a guest he is not less cruelly, and, I fear, unjustly attacked. Brillat-Savarin was like the rest of the world—he had his good and his bad days.

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petual starveling, with a number of preferences nevertheless, and a man who could not be prevented from casting a tender regard on the junketing at Camacho's wedding. His enthusiasm, which was unbridled, drove him to cry out somewhere, "I would eat my own father with such a sauce." And he would have done it. Brillat-Savarin does not go so far. He would never have eaten anybody with any sauce whatever.

The principal merit of Grimod de la Reynière, and that one which endows him with sovereign claims to our gratitude, is that of having been the historian of cookery. His eight years of the "Almanack of Gourmands" represent eight years of contest. He has, as all journalists have, a good many inevitable faults, compliances, injustices, and careless judgments, but one cannot deny him ardour, devotion, and that faith which raises pie-crusts. We may say of him that he kept going the kitchen-stoves, after having saved them, perhaps, during the great shipwreck of the Revolution. At all events, he is the connecting link that unites the past to the future.

Brillat-Savarin is more especially a legislator. In him there is something of Boileau. Yet he warms up now and then. His saying, "And you will see marvels," has become celebrated. The "Handbook of Gastronomy" has had many editions, but not in quick succession: its success was made slowly and surely. Now-a-days it is what is called a library book.

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I have questioned many people who knew Brillat-Savarin, especially in the society of the Récamiers, of whom he was a relative. Their opinion was unanimous about him; he was amiable, delicate, highly fashionable. His hobbies were connected with his favourite passion, and it is thus that he upset the feelings of all his colleagues in the Court of Cassation by the smell of the game that he carried in his pockets to get high. A frequenter of the café Lemblin, he came there with a dog who became legendary. He lived in the Rue des Filles-Saint-Thomas. His widow lived long after him. M. Lefeuve affirms that she was still living in 1859, in the Rue Vivienne.

I have read nearly all that has been written about Brillat-Savarin. Can it be believed? The article about him in the *Biographie Universelle* is by Balzac, one of the least eating men that has ever existed in the literary world, a man who did not spend more time at table than Napoleon. But gastronomy is made up above all of lost time. We do not "take a snack" in the kingdom of Comus. The article of Balzac is none the less well composed, as all that has come from the pen of this writer, who has carried so far his gifts of intuition and assimilation.*

* Balzac owed this compliment to Brillat-Savarin, for it is his *Physiologie du Goût* that inspired him with his "Physiology of Marriage." He introduces also Meditations and Aphorisms, and borrows the professorial accent.

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Some other littérateurs, Alphonse Karr, Eugène Bareste, &c., have also published notices on Brillat-Savarin, but I can see nothing characteristic in any of them.

The *Physiologie du Goût* has had an imitator or rather a continuer in the anonymous author of a book which appeared in 1839, under the title, "Neophysiology of Taste, or General Dictionary of French Cookery, Ancient and Modern," &c., &c., dedicated to the author of the "Memoirs of the Marchioness of Créquy" (Paris: one large octavo vol. of 635 pages). It is a very excellent repertory, very practical, filled with amusing digressions, and which deserves to be better known. Its author, who is assuredly a born gastronomer, teases often on several points his illustrious predecessor, which does not prevent him from rendering justice to his high competence. From indications almost certain, and especially from the dedication, I believe that I am right in attributing the "Neophysiology of Taste" to the Count de Courchamps. This was also the opinion of Roger de Beauvoir.

Has gastronomy progressed since the time of Brillat-Savarin? This is a question that I hear often put, and to which I would gladly reply in the affirmative; but I look in vain for the tables that are praised or the hosts that are renowned. Where are the great cooks? What names have we now to oppose to those of Carême and Robert?

Yet, nevertheless, we eat a great deal; restaurants

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are multiplied to infinity. What has cookery gained? I ought rather to say what it has lost. Nearly all the roasts are now done in the oven. An abomination!

An old and worthy cook, finding himself without resources, went out one morning concealing as best he could under his overcoat something long and slender wrapped in paper. He turned towards the pawnshop of the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux, the central depôt and mother-house of the French *monts de piété*. There he went before one of the windows and put his parcel before the clerk.

"What is this?" said the man.

"It is Ernestine, the faithful companion of all my life."

And in pronouncing these words, the cook wiped away a big tear.

"Open the parcel," said the clerk.

The cook did so; and exhibited a spit, sharp and shining.

"The queen of spits!" he murmured.

"We don't lend anything on that here," replied the clerk.

"Did you speak?"

"I told you that we never take spits in pawn."

"Unless they are set with diamonds," said another facetious clerk.

The cook remained immovable, without understanding, while everybody laughed around him.

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"Now, be off," said the employé; "you are in the way."

"What do you want me to do with it?" sighed the poor man; "they don't cook more anywhere!"

"Pack up and hook it, I tell you."

"O Ernestine! what will become of us?"

After this cry, which would have melted the heart of a wild beast, but which did not move the clerks of the pawnshop, the unhappy man picked up his spit, which he did not take the trouble to wrap up, and ran out with quick steps. In the road everybody turned to look at this weeping man, brandishing this rod of iron.

The solicitude of the practitioners of the present time—and there are many clever ones—is entirely devoted to the ornamental matters of the kitchen, to decorations, to the service of the table. They attend to the "aspics," "chartreuses," or any "set piece;" they merely work for show.

A cook is now only an impresario of a theatre, whose whole mind is exclusively engrossed with decorations and costumes. Therefore, why not let Chéret paint meals for us? In all stages, and among all classes of society, I encounter this invading mania of "keeping up appearances." Shall I speak of official cookery, of ministerial dinners, where a band plays at intervals; a theatrical invention, injurious to the guests, and which destroys conversation. These are not the dinners to which people go to eat. There, especially, the cook is

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more proud of a Chinese kiosk on a rock in coloured and spun sugar, which no person dare touch, than of a carp à la Chambord treated in a masterly way. Since the days of Cambacérès, official cookery has ceased to exist.

Another cause of the stationary state of gastronomy is, that all dinners are like each other. That which you ate yesterday in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, you will eat to-morrow in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. At the end of the week you recognise that you have merely changed your knife and fork; the chief dishes of the *menu* have always been the same; a turbot with two different sauces, a "filet à la royale," fowls "à la Perigueux," a York ham, and a dish of crayfish. This poverty of imagination, this absence of research, are unworthy of a country such as ours.

We must act. But how? Formerly there were groups, series of intelligent and special men, who met to eat. These groups were a perpetual stimulant for the cooks; they have disappeared and are not now replaced; but they may be. Without looking too far, we find, principally amongst certain doctors, a few sparks of the sacred fire. The Renaissance may also come from the clubs, which only have to show themselves more imperious in the matter of their dinners. One of the last good "chefs" of the Jockey Club of Paris was Jules Gouffé, whose style was pretty and easy, without too much show.

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Good female cooks have become more rare than the phenix, and are worth their weight in gold. Upon the whole, the situation should be more cheerful. French gastronomy lives on its past, and has lost nothing of its prestige in the eyes of the stranger; but this is not enough. The pause is too marked. May the perusal of Brillat-Savarin excite ambitions and determine vocations.*

CHARLES MONSELET.

PARIS, *30th Nov.* 1879.

* I add a last note to perpetuate one of my surprises. Neither Brillat-Savarin, nor Grimod de la Reynière, nor even the Marquis of Cussy, have given a great importance to wine. It seems that they only considered it as a digestive element. Provided that it was good, they did not ask for more; and they did not make any distinctions between our innumerable brands of Burgundies and of clarets. Was the exquisite sense of this important part of taste entirely wanting to them? In this respect, at least, we are superior to them.

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