FIRST LESSONS

IN THE PRINCIPLES

OF

COOKING.

IN THREE PARTS.

BY

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PART I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE day has come in English social history when it is absolutely the bounden duty of every person at the head of a household—whether that household be large or small, rich or poor—to see that no waste is permitted in the preparation of food for the use of the family under his or her care. I am quite aware that such waste cannot be cured by theories, and that nothing except a practical acquaintance with the details of household management, supplemented by a conviction of the necessity of economy, can be expected to remedy the evil. At the same time, it is possible that ignorance of the fundamental principles of the chemical composition and of the relative nutritive value of the various sorts of food within our

reach, added to the widespread ignorance of the most simple and wholesome modes of preparing such food, may be at the root of much of that waste.

Many excellent works have been written on household management and expenditure on both a large and a small scale, but I am not aware of any book so small as this, which exactly supplies the need I speak of, or which, laying other details aside, deals only with the subject of the preparation of food, and yet is not exactly a Cookery Book.

I shall attempt in this part to give in a condensed form the reasons why one sort of food is better than another, more nutritious, and therefore cheaper, and also why certain methods of preparing that food will cause it to be more easily digested, and render it more wholesome. It must be stated in this, the very beginning, that these "reasons why" are not the result of any crude theories of my own, but are drawn from a careful study of works upon the subject by practical chemists. Whenever the question is a vexed one, or learned doctors have agreed to differ upon it, I omit it altogether, confining myself entirely to the discussion of subjects upon which there is no doubt, and stating the results of years of patient study and incessant experiments as briefly and simply as I possibly can. Although it is perhaps somewhat alarming to come across scientific expressions in so unpretending a little book as this, still I must entreat my readers not to be scared away by words which are unfamiliar to them; and I may truthfully add my own experience

to bear out the common assertion that the best and highest method of learning any subject will always prove the easiest in the long run.

Instead of helplessly wringing our hands and crying out about the high price of fuel and food, let us accept the present state of things as the inevitable and natural result of past years of extravagance and carelessness on our own part. The sooner we make up our minds that what we regretfully speak of as the "good old times" with their good old prices will never come again, the sooner we shall cease to look fondly back on a cheaper past, and brace ourselves up helpfully and bravely to face the increased cost of the necessaries of life. It is much more sensible to do this, instead of going on in our old ignorant way, buoying ourselves up with hopes of a shadowy millennium of butchers' meat, of a future day when carcases of Australian or South American sheep and oxen shall dangle in English shops. Believe me, that time is a long way off, and even when it does come there will be many more thousands of hungry mouths to be filled, so that the supply will only keep pace — even then rather lagging behind, as it does now—with the demand of the coming years. If fuel and food cost nearly twice as much at present as they did ten years ago, then surely it becomes our imperative duty to see how we can, each of us, according to our possibilities, make the material for warmth and cooking go twice as far as they have done hitherto. Nor in making such an

attempt are we blindly groping in the dark, feeling our way step by step along the unaccustomed paths of scientific experiment. It has all been done for us whilst we were stupidly spending our capital, by men whose clear sight could discern the dark days ahead; men who have, many of them, gone to their rest, before the dawn of these dark days, but who have left behind them clear instructions how to make the most of certain necessary substances whose increasing value they foresaw twenty or thirty years ago. If, therefore, we have the common sense to avail ourselves of the results of these researches and experiments, which are still carried on day after day by worthy successors of the great practical chemists I speak of, it is quite possible we may so utilize their information as to make our available material go a great deal further. At present we all confess that the balance is uncomfortably adjusted, and a great many people are throwing a great many remedies into the uneven scales. Let us try a few grains of science, and a few more of common sense, and see what the practical result will be.

Before we proceed to do this, however, I should like to endeavour to disabuse my readers' minds of the idea that economy and stinginess are synonymous terms. In point of fact they are precisely opposite. An individual or a household habitually practising economy has a far wider margin for charity and hospitality than the shiftless people who never can keep a penny in their purses or a meal in their cup-

boards through sheer "waste-riff," as the north-country people call it. "Take care of the scraps, and the joints will take care of themselves," would be a very good motto in nine-tenths of our middle-class households, and the practical result of such a theory should be better food and more of it.

For my own part I have little hope of any real progress being made in the right direction until it shall have become once more the custom for ladies to do as their grandmothers did before them, and make it their business to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the principles and details of household management. In many cases there may be no actual pecuniary necessity for such supervision, but it would at all events serve the good purpose of setting an example, besides teaching servants the real good and beauty of a wise economy, a liberal thrift. So long as the world lasts, so long will there be a Mrs. Grundy; but if Mrs. Grundy can only be induced to go down into her kitchen and insist on a good use being made of sundry scraps and bones, and odds and ends which at present may be said to benefit no one, then will she deserve a statue in the market-place. If Mrs. A., whose husband's income may be one or two thousand a year, is able and capable to show a new cook how such and such things should be done so as to combine economy with palatableness, then will Mrs. B., whose income is barely a quarter of that sum, not consider it beneath her dignity to do so. If this movement is to do any good, it will have to

be inaugurated by people whose social and pecuniary position makes them, to a certain extent, unaffected by the pressure which weighs so heavily on their poorer neighbours. And I am going to attempt, so to speak, to kill two birds with one stone; to persuade even rich people to insist on a due economy in the consumption of the necessaries of life, and to assure poor people that it is possible to make a good deal more of the scanty materials within their reach than they do at present. When I speak of inducing rich people to be economical, I have no culinary Utopia in my mind's eye, when millionaires will prefer to dine off cold mutton or to lunch on bone broth. What I mean is, that rich people can surely be made to understand that it is now-a-days absolutely a greater good to the commonwealth if their households are so managed that little or no material for human food can be wasted in them, than if they subscribed ever so liberally to all the great charities of London. It is just in proportion as people's minds are enlarged and their field of mental vision extended by culture and true refinement, that they will be able to perceive the importance of the question. For that reason I hope and expect that the warmest supporters of the attempt now being made by the National School of Cookery to teach the mass of the English people how to make the most of the material around them, will be found in the higher ranks of our society, and that from them it will spread downwards until it reaches the cottage where

the labouring man is fed from year's end to year's end on monotonous and often unwholesome food, as much from lack of invention as from shallowness of purse.

Before ending this preliminary lesson I feel it incumbent on me to state most emphatically that I do not wish or intend to organize a crusade against cooks! In the course of nearly twenty years' experience of that class of servants, I can declare that I have found very little intentional dishonesty. Waste, extravagance, and bad management I have met with over and over again, but these evils have almost invariably arisen from want of opportunities of learning better, and I can scarcely remember an instance where there has not been an effort made to lay aside bad habits and acquire fresh ones. It is only too true, as dear Tom Hood says, that—

> "Evil is wrought by want of thought,
> As well as by want of heart."

So, if we can even teach our servants to think twice before they throw things into the pig-tub, it will be taking a step in the right direction.

If a cook and her mistress are at daggers drawn, each regarding the other as a foe to be distrusted, then, indeed, there is little real economy to be expected. But if a cook sees that her mistress is willing to give her fair wages for her services, and to consider her comforts in other ways, whilst at the same time the lady thoroughly understands *how* the

cook's duties should be performed, the chances are that the servant will readily submit to be taught a thousand little helpful and comfortable ways. Such knowledge on the mistress's part is not incompatible with accomplishments and refinement of taste and manner, but it is not to be learned from reading this book or any other book. It can only come from study and a possibility of acquiring practical experience on the subject whilst the future matron is still a young girl; and if the scheme of the Committee of the National School of Cookery can be carried out according to their views and intentions, it will be a woman's own fault if in future her first visit to her kitchen be made as an inexperienced bride with a dozen years of apprenticeship before her ere she can venture even to make a suggestion to her cook, or dream of "tossing up" some little dainty dish with her own hands.

LESSON I.

THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF OUR FOOD.

THE old German poet who wound up each verse of his famous drinking song by the assertion that "four elements intimately mixed, form all nature and build up the world," was not so far wrong after all. The jovial song-writer referred to his favourite formula for brewing punch; and according to him the world of