

Kitchen Essays

Agnes Jekyll

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Extract

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KITCHEN ESSAYS:
WITH RECIPES AND THEIR
OCCASIONS

by

AGNES JEKYLL

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“Here I have but gathered a nosegay of strange
floures, and have put nothing of mine unto it but
the thred to binde them.”

Montaigne, Book III.

P R E F A C E

THESE short essays in cookery embody a number of recipes, treasure trove from many sources, collected during years of house-keeping under varied conditions. Their re-appearance in book form is due to requests from readers of *The Times* who have found them of practical use in kitchens where old-established standards and experience have in many cases disappeared during the recent years of upheaval.

Detailed directions for the fundamental processes of cookery are available in so many excellent books that a knowledge of ordinary kitchen practice has been here pre-supposed ; but when homes dissolve and re-form, or the main prop of a household is withdrawn, it is often found that a good tradition or a valued formula, painstakingly acquired, has

vanished beyond recovery, and that the pleasant things we enjoyed in youth, the unfamiliar foods which added interest to our travels abroad, or the *spécialité* of some clever long-lost cook, have all been swept irrevocably down Time's rolling stream.

This slight attempt at salvage is made for the benefit of those who come after, and if a few stray reflections have been thrown in with the salt and the sugar, it may be that, in the words of Lucretius, "One thing shall thus give light to another."

AGNES JEKYLL.

Midsummer to Easter, 1921-22.

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KITCHEN ESSAYS

I

OLD FRIENDS WITH NEW FACES

“MY nature demands that my life should be perpetual Love,” wrote dear Lord Beaconsfield to one of his female friends in a moment of spiritual expansion, and Dr. Swift recommended women to “turn their attention less to making nets, and more to making cages,” so that there might be fewer unhappy homes.

Our mothers were apt to speak with almost brutal frankness about the way to the human heart ; and as its topography does not change, it may be well to give closer study to it, with a view to entering and entrenching ourselves firmly in that citadel. This can only be accomplished by persevering and intelligent

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effort. If, then, we would have laughter and shining faces at our board—if we would preserve the devotion of our husbands, the enthusiasm of our children, the preference of our friends, and the contentment of our domestics—let us as housekeepers give more of our best brains to the work. We must put those thoroughbreds, Imagination, Generosity, Invention, into harness with our jaded hacks, Custom, Thrift, and the Common-place, as they drag along Time's hurrying chariot to the often depressing sound of the family gong.

It is the old friend greeting us in the piquant disguise of a new acquaintance that interests us, the unexpected that stimulates our listless appetite, begetting thereby brilliant talk and happy memories. For long industrious years have you not ordered weekly a Roast Leg of Mutton, inevitable as a mother-in-law, dreary as the weekly washing book ; but now . . . re-christen it *Gigot de Six Heures*, and having begged the butcher (who must be not your enemy

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but your friend and ally) for a specially nice small one—Welsh for choice, in compliment to recent additions to our House of Lords—ask your cook to treat it thus :—

Stick into the thick part of the joint a refined little clove of garlic, cover the bottom of a braising pan, into which you have put a walnut-sized piece of fresh butter, with a liberal allowance of fresh vegetables, onions, carrots, celery, some thyme, parsley, and a bay leaf. Lay your gigot in the vegetables and fry quickly and thoroughly, turning the meat constantly so that it may brown well. Then add half a bottle of claret and a dash of brandy—if it can be spared—with a breakfast-cupful of good stock. Let these simmer gently from about 4 o'clock till dinner-time, basting the meat often. Before serving, strain the gravy from the vegetables, remove the clove of garlic, and place your gigot on a roomy dish, preferably of brown earthenware, and garnish this, pouring over the gravy, immediately after carving it delicately, and handing it round, very hot, with some browned potatoes and any other vegetables liked, such as creamy turnips or braised haricots.

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Soubise sauce is a good addition ; and if the butcher is sympathetic and will let you have two calves' feet, well scalded and cleaned and cut up, to be added to the meat while braising, both your shares and the cook's will rise in the home market.

Your spinster aunt will certainly accuse you of undue extravagance after she has partaken freely of this dish. Score off her with a delicious and economical *Clear Consommé without Meat*, a household stand-by during the rationed, meatless years.

Fry in margarine or dripping a few carrots, turnips, 2 or 3 onions, and 2 bay leaves, add a teaspoon of "Marmite Vegetable Extract" (obtainable at Stores) to cold water in the quantity required—for four diners, say 4 large cups of water to a teaspoonful of marmite, or even less—and boil from 3 to 4 hours. Then strain and cut up the best of the flavouring vegetables as a garnish in the soup. Celery is an improvement, bay leaves a necessity.

After roast mutton comes our kind old friend rice pudding, but one which will be

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acclaimed at luncheon, even by the returned schoolboy, if invested with novelty and charm in the simple manner here and now set out, and re-baptized *Dundee*.

Boil sufficient rice in milk until cooked rather firm, sweeten, and fill in therewith a fireproof glass or nice-looking pie-dish, adding a spendthrift's spreading of juicy home-made marmalade, and leaving a small valley in the centre for the following mixture to fill in : Butter, $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz., melted but not allowed to oil, adding to it, while warm, $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz. sugar and the yolks of 5 eggs mixed well together and beaten till light. Pour this all over. Bake in a not very hot oven from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ hour. It should be a pleasant *café-au-lait* brown on the top, like the ideal sponge cake, and there should be enough for six people without the second helpings they will ask for, which are as inartistic as encores at the opera.

These two are familiar friends, but now comes an acquaintance from abroad in the shape of a summer luncheon sweet, popular in Sweden, under the name of *Röd-Grö*.

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Boil currants and raspberries with a little water and sugar in the proportion of 2 lb. of fruit to a tea-cup of water and a $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of white sugar. Pass through a sieve, and put it into an enamel stewpan with a large teaspoonful of sieved arrowroot, stirring gently but inexorably till smooth, when it should be of the consistency of gooseberry fool. Serve very cold, and if convenient, slightly iced, in shallow white china or cut-glass flat dish, and let plain fresh cream and either boiled rice or *petit choux* complete the offering.

After these two very simple but pleasing sweet dishes, here is another of a more recondite nature, *Russian Ice*, acquired from a Muscovite friend, and useful to those who can beg, borrow, or pluck from black-currant bushes a large handful of their youngest leaves.

These must be thrown into a pan of boiling syrup made in the proportion of $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. white sugar to 1 pint water. Cover the pan and let it cool for 2 hours. Then strain, and add the juice of 6 lemons and freeze in the usual manner, as you would when making lemon water

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ice, which it will resemble in appearance, but the flavour a far more ethereal one and endued with the compelling power of the Blarney Stone.

This subtly flavoured sweet, served in pretty tall glasses, should have as followers a glass bowl of luscious black currant compote (freshly gathered, if possible; if not, the best bottled brand) and some crisp home-made Cat's Tongue Biscuits, or even the harmless useful sponge rusk out of a newly opened tin, to go round your table of six or eight fortunate guests on a hot summer evening.

From food to drink. Here is a pleasant "refresher," specially suitable for the young after lawn tennis or sports on hot days, but acceptable also to their elders when exhausted by church, depressed by gardening, or exasperated by shopping.

Raspberry Vinegar.

Take 1 lb. raspberries to every pint of best white vinegar. Let it stand for a fortnight in a covered jar in a cool

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larder. Then strain without pressure, and to every pint put $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. white sugar. Boil 10 minutes, let cool, and bottle in nice-shaped medium-sized bottles saved perhaps from some present of foreign liqueurs or scent. A teaspoonful stirred into a tumbler of water with a lump of ice, or introduced to a very cold syphon, will taste like the elixir of life on a hot day, and is as pretty as it is pleasant.

In some such ways as these—and there are many, many more—can affection won be kept alive and tender, and have we not the highest authority for knowing that without love we are nothing.