

FROM A COOK'S POINT OF VIEW¹

BY ANN ALDERTON

I

HISTORY relates that after a period of experimental asceticism the Lord Buddha decided in favor of a normal diet and conferred some special spiritual honor upon a damsel who appeared most opportunely with a bowl of rice; and I have read that at one time in Turkish lands the professional cook had the rank of the second admiral of the fleet. Except for these two instances, however, there seems to be little honor, mundane or spiritual, for the people who prepare three, or even six, meals a day, for seven days a week, all the year round, year after year. The kitchens of Gil Blas and of the Court of King Arthur are not entirely the outcome of wild imaginings, or representative of a bygone age.

There are some people who like to feel themselves on such a high plane of existence that they don't notice what they eat; so, chafing secretly because they cannot live on fairy pancakes of yellow tide-foam, they snub their meat and potatoes. The majority of people seem to eat, and to eat what they like, because they always have done so, and they enjoy it, and it never occurs to them not to do so, although universities are teaching the science of nutrition and preaching on the psychological aspect of meals. Later on we may arrive where Buddha was

thousands of years ago, and consider the spiritual significance of meals, those important events in the perpetual re-creation of the body. Then perhaps we shall study our own needs and our economical maintenance as seriously and intelligently as we now study those of automobiles and farmyard animals. Then the work created by these needs may be respected as a service requiring spirit and intelligence as well as physical energy unrelated to any abstract processes.

A profession is necessarily an echo of a conviction: it is usually a faint echo reaching us across the cries of the market-place and made discordant by them; but the original music is there for those who desire to hear.

If a lesser teacher seeks inspiration and knowledge he can turn to the greater teachers; they are the creative impulse behind all that is good in education and behind the profession that sometimes conceals them; they unify ideas and ideals; they possess at the same time a power to concentrate and diffuse.

Many of the manual occupations are potential professions but they lack centrifugal force; they are organisms without a nucleus; they are not even organizations; they are a hotchpotch consisting of the relics of slavery and feudalism (preciously guarded by the employer), the work and influence of an occasional artist, and the products, good and bad, of various strikes.

¹ This article is contributed by a cook in actual service who enjoys unusual advantages of education and a background less Celtic than usual. — THE EDITOR.

Anyone who has been a professional wage-earner has consciously or unconsciously possessed certain privileges connected with his work—the possibility of appeal to tradition and history, access to definite sources of knowledge, and social tolerance. But to attempt to be a cook and to grasp the situation as a whole is like trying to read a book by the light of street lamps which are few and far between and often very dim. High standards of skill and artistic conscientiousness must be sought in one place, scientific knowledge in another, and social ideals in yet another.

Universities have got as far as producing trained dietitians, but you have to be very tactful, not to say roundabout, when telling them that you are a cook. On the other hand, if you want work as a cook, it is unwise to let your possible employer know that you have ever seen the inside of a university; you are liable to be condemned unheard as being utterly incapable with your hands; even when you have experience you are looked upon with suspicion.

'You've got something at the back of your mind, and I can't make out what it is,' I was told by the employment secretary of a large concern of eating-places; and she would not put me in the kitchen on the ground that I was too intelligent! This, however, was not a difficulty which I encountered at the outset.

Considering the outcries now raised against the exodus of women from kitchens, it is rather extraordinary to recall the difficulties I had in getting into them, and, judging from what I have seen, I should think it would be more difficult for a woman to achieve an acceptable profession for herself as a cook than it has been for her to fight her way into the ranks of doctors and lawyers.

To begin with, there is a social stigma attached to the work, and one is fighting for something considered valueless even by those who possess it. A Norwegian kitchen-maid I worked with said to me, 'If I could speak English like you I would not work in a kitchen.' This illustrates the fact that the kitchen is the most unpopular place on the market, and many of the people who work in one are there because they know nothing of commercial value, not because they know anything about food or because they desire to learn a skilled occupation.

It is not merely the underlings who complain. I do not know of one good cook who would put his own children to his own trade.

'I have a sister, and if she wanted to be a cook I would cut off her hands!' a French cook declared to me, and, however exaggerated, it is typical of an attitude that is not difficult to understand.

'No one will know what you are doing,' I have been told as an inducement by people who were trying to persuade me to accept some work.

When I first insisted on being a cook I rather distressed a charming elderly lady who had befriended me. 'My dear, have you ever thought of nursing?' she said.

I had thought of nursing, and how much I should dislike it, for of all occupations it surely must call for the performance of the most difficult tasks, and the endurance of continuous strain. Yet not so very long ago nursing was as 'unthinkable' a profession as cooking is to-day.

The worst of the work of a cook is not necessarily disagreeable; there is a great deal that is pleasant when the conditions of employment are good, and the work of the responsible person in the kitchen requires a fine combination of hand-work and head-work; yet the possibilities of the occupation are un-

recognized by hundreds of bread-winners in overcrowded kinds of employment, and there is perpetual discussion of the vexed problem of the domestic. This is a discrepancy easily accounted for by a great many of the conditions of employment, but not necessarily caused by the occupation itself.

II

My first experience as a 'real cook' was in the family of a Canadian fruit-grower in Ontario. I had been spending the summer in that neighborhood and obtained the work through the Government employment bureau in a large town, from whom I received notice of it.

The worst of this place was that in all probability it was one of the best of its kind. In some ways my employer was surprisingly friendly, but details of the conditions in which I was expected to live are fit only for a report to a sanitary inspector. I will, however, give one instance of a minor atrocity.

As a rule, milk was not sold at this farm, but a cow was kept for the household. My employer always insisted that when the greater part of the milk had been skimmed, the rest of the cream should be blown from the pan into the receptacle for cream. On one occasion she had been in bed for a week with a bad bronchial cold. Almost as soon as she came downstairs she spat into the kitchen fire, called for the pan of milk I was skimming, and blew violently till the last particle of cream had gone. Then she turned to me and said with great pride: —

'There! Now if you ever have a farm of your own you'll know how to manage the milk, won't you?'

I reported conditions there to the Government Agency, but they said they could not afford to make investigations and evidently took no responsi-

bility for the conditions of employment offered by them.

After I left the farm I was constantly in touch with the secretary of the Y.W.C.A. employment bureau. She was persuaded that the cause of most 'domestic' dissatisfaction was the unwillingness to work of the present generation of young women. At that time I was thinking of going to a Domestic Science college. The employment secretary opposed this, as she said that cooking ought to be learned in a kitchen under a good cook. This should certainly be a strongly emphasized part of the training; the great difficulty seems to be to find any kitchen where the scientific side of the work is respected, or any school where the actual conditions and the daily routine of a kitchen are represented. In short, there is no system of apprenticeship and no training school where theory and practice are adequately balanced.

One employer, who ran a large dining-room in connection with an apartment house, consented to take me into her kitchen if the cook would consent; but the cook declared that she had had to learn herself and was n't going to teach anybody else.

After one or two efforts which were failures on account of my inexperience, I landed in a small restaurant where the Government was feeding the unemployed, and where a great many students came to eat regularly on the meal-ticket system.

My experience here was valuable only in so far as this place was probably typical of the small eating-houses that spring into existence in great numbers wherever there are crowds of people who can afford to spend only as little as possible on what they eat.

My employer, who directed two dining-rooms and occasionally visited this one, had consented to take me because I seemed anxious to learn to cook; she

was a good-natured but incompetent woman, who quite frankly thought I was mad.

I did all sorts of kitchen odd-jobs in this place. The reigning cook was a kindly old crone who used to put most of the saucepans on the floor, so that it was difficult to walk about without falling into pots of soup or vegetables. She had seven sons and a lethargic husband who did the carving. They used to come and sit about the kitchen and eat pie.

The dishwasher here regaled me with stories of the ex-chef, a Chinaman, whose great accomplishment had been to cut flies in half with the carving knife he happened to be using.

One day one of the seven sons tried to commit suicide because the waitress was flirting with somebody else. He did not succeed, but the family party was broken up, and the cook departed. She was followed by a woman who was a good plain cook and very clean; but the establishment was so poorly managed that there was practically nothing to cook with.

This woman made one remark which showed plainly her contempt for her own standing, and which I thought would have been a suitable climax for a play of Ibsen's on democracy.

'Them wot comes 'ere ain't no better than wot we are,' she declared firmly, speaking of the customers. *'If they was, they would n't come.'*

Soon afterward I answered an advertisement for a scullery maid in a hospital kitchen. The dietitian who interviewed me seemed interested in my experiment and allowed me to put in what hours I could in the kitchen while taking a course of cookery at a school in the town.

The chef was an Irishman and a good cook. The work of the scullery-maids was to wash the pots and pans and a

few dishes and to prepare vegetables for from two to three hundred people. There were usually three scullery-maids.

I found this experience very useful because I learned ways of handling large quantities of food and had practice in doing so. I do not know of any school which could have provided this amount of training.

I will go into a few details of this hospital experience because I have since heard that deplorable conditions exist in many hospital kitchens, and because it convinced me at the very outset that only a part of the problem of kitchen sanitation is being solved by the training and the employing of dietitians. If the cook had a certain amount of scientific training with which to supplement his craft, and had also the standing of the dietitian, the outlook might be more hopeful; but at present the conditions of kitchen employment keep out the fastidious type of employee, and the available types help to make kitchens what they are; so there is a vicious circle.

In the hospital where I worked most of the maids lived in a house near by, under the supervision of a very nice clean Irishwoman of the 'uneducated' type. I think I am right in saying from memory that there were from forty to fifty girls living in this house, and that there were only two bathrooms. At any rate the conditions were such that the supervisor when talking of the accommodation said, 'No wonder the girls are sick!'

The bedrooms were very crowded, and the night cook, who finished her work about three o'clock in the morning, had to share a room with a day worker, so that both occupants suffered.

After working in the scullery for about two months I was the night cook in this hospital, but I did not live in the maids' quarters. I was allowed

ten dollars a month extra to find an outside room for myself.

If I had had to accept the conditions offered to the maids I should not have stayed in the place, and I cannot feel that it was surprising to find in the kitchen scullery-maids who blew upon the food, and used tea-towels to wipe their hands and hot foreheads. From the point of view of kitchen sanitation I think it would be interesting to have a record of the women who buy the most expensive and, presumably, the most sanitary food for their children, yet congratulate themselves that they employ the cheapest possible 'kitchen help' to handle it.

In New York I wanted to find an entrance into kitchens where there were fine workmen, and I thought it might be possible to work in a hotel kitchen in the way in which I had worked in the hospital kitchen, taking courses in subjects that would supplement the manual work I was doing.

An employment agency had been recommended to me by a reliable source and I went to see the man who ran it. He was extremely discouraging. He said that he knew all the hotels and restaurants in the city from A to Z, and that there were only two or three kitchens in which it would be at all possible for me to go. He said that the kitchen was the last place on earth in which he would want to see any of his 'women-folk,' and that one who worked there must have the 'hide of a rhinoceros' and a few other similar protections.

Finally, by extreme good fortune, I was allowed to visit, as often as I pleased, a restaurant where there were a great many French and Italian cooks. The chef was an Austrian under whose management the working of the kitchen ran like a beautiful machine; he saw everything and said little — but he could say very effectively whatever he

wanted to, and with equal ease, in German, French, and English.

I have never met with greater generosity or courtesy than I did in this kitchen, neither have I seen more skilled workmanship than I did there. This was a matter partly of inheritance and partly of long practice.

'You'll do it all right when you've done it three or four hundred times,' the cooks would declare when I was allowed to struggle with a pastry bag or a slippery fish, and, 'It's all right after the first ten years!'

All the same they tried very hard to persuade me not to think of becoming a cook. 'Go out into the streets about eight o'clock and watch the doors open, and you'll see the cooks come out,' they said; 'they are all so big . . . and they walk like this. . . .'

In this kitchen the simplest operations were performed with the skill and rapidity of a conjuring performance. The fillets of fish were cut with two or three movements of the hand, and the fillet bore the perfect imprint of the bones from which it had been separated; each dismembered part was as symmetrical as the entire fish had been. It was worth a long journey to see an onion cut up, and the sound of the activities was an education in itself.

Running tea-rooms, just now, is a very popular occupation and perhaps may help to change the attitude toward kitchen-work. At the same time, the management of them seems to be the chief attraction, and as far as I know them they are managed by women who could not take the place of the people they employ to do the necessary manual work. If the preparation and serving of foods is to be a possible profession for women it seems a pity that they should not seek some sort of apprenticeship under the best and most experienced workers. If they leap at manage-

ment before they have learned to handle tools they will only arrive in a field from which are missing the aristocrats and artists of the profession.

It is quite true that good clean food may be served without the highest degree of skill; but if a despised occupation is ever to become attractive it seems foolish to eliminate from it its most artistic possibilities; and these are not to be found merely in pink and green dinners, but are more closely bound up with the dexterity of hand that can come only from 'a long patience.'

I have worked in the kitchen of a cafeteria that is very admirable and flourishing. The social ideals there are as praiseworthy as the food; and this is a compliment to both. The arrangement of hours and the conditions offered to workers are little short of ideal; there is, in fact, so much that is good that it is perhaps exacting to desire more. Yet I found the kitchen disappointing after the fine workmanship and the ingenious management I had seen in the other kitchen. It was under the supervision of very nice young women whose only drawback seemed to be that they had had no training under first-rate people of their own profession. This showed itself both in details and in the general management; their knowledge of the handling of their tools was elementary, and the general arrangement was unnecessarily inadequate. The pot-washer had no light over the sink; there was no place for the collection of plates that had been used in the preparation of food, and these were often scattered about in the limited space required for the next piece of work; no definite plan had been made concerning available space and the arranging of prepared food, and the consequence was that the kitchen was clogged and uncomfortable while there actually was room elsewhere for the

overflow. The manager merely said, 'A kitchen will be higgledy-piggledy.' A good chef would have made short work of her.

The worst faults of this kitchen were those of amateurs; and so long as schools and universities teach manual occupations not as ends in themselves, but as supplements to some non-manual wage-earning profession, the desire to manage without training will probably be prevalent, and the worth of those things given by schools will be undervalued by all except graduates.

In the very early stages of one's mathematical efforts one learns that the whole is greater than the part; and while there are many kitchen-problems that must be worked out by an educated mind with organizing ability, there is much that can be learned only by daily contact with workers of long experience. The subject is not treated as a whole by those whose grasp should be the most comprehensive. There seems to be so great a gulf between schools and kitchens that an attempt to cross it must be a leap in the dark. It is not a leap to be made by refined young women who feel that they would lose caste by eating in kitchens and being called by their first names.

III

The position of the cook in a private house is fundamentally worse than that of the cook in a business concern. As a result of much agitation the hours of the workers in hotels and restaurants have been limited within reason. I believe fifty-six hours a week is the maximum, and one free day is given. One of the cooks in the restaurant I visited told me that he had been on strike five times because of the conditions he worked in: at that time the cooks stood for fourteen hours a day over a red-hot coal-stove, and even after that were

liable to be called upon for night duty. The men who struck against these conditions were considered unreasonable because of the amount of pay they received.

However, there is still no protection for the worker in the private house, and conditions exist there that actually are criminal, and would be legally criminal in any institution of a public nature.

Two women-employers may say with equal truth, 'I give my maids one afternoon a week off, and every other Sunday afternoon.' (I have heard this said as if it were an extraordinarily gracious concession.) Yet the routine of one household may be such that the servant can lead a more or less reasonable existence, while that of the other may be such that the worker has to leave her position or undermine her constitution because of her daily life.

The demand for definite hours is not a demand for less work; it is a demand for properly organized work; and until there is a readjustment — or rather a revolution — which establishes housework on a business basis, arbitration on other issues is vapid.

I worked for some months in the kitchen of a very rich family, where there were about twenty other servants. I kept a record of my working-hours for two weeks which were typical. During one week I was on duty just over eighty-four hours, and during the other just over ninety-four. The eighty-four-hour week was the week in which I had 'one afternoon off' and Sunday afternoon. The 'afternoon off' began after nine hours' continuous work, with the exception of about ten minutes for breakfast and about fifteen minutes for lunch. The Sunday I was not off I was 'on' for little short of fifteen hours.

Under other employers the conditions may be better, but in the absence of legislation such conditions are possible, and are, I believe, frequent; for the

average servant feels the kitchen situation to be hopeless and turns to some other branch of domestic employment or seeks work of another kind. I have frequently heard the demand in employment agencies, 'Give us anything but the kitchen!' And it is not to be wondered at.

In a house of the type in which I was employed, it was quite impossible for the kitchen workers to have the proper amount of out-of-door exercise; even if freedom could be obtained for one hour, or a little over, during the afternoon, this occurred after working on one's feet from 6 A.M. to 3 P.M., and it required a great effort to change one's clothes and drag one's self into the fresh air.

On the walls of an employment bureau I noticed a set of regulations for women employees in certain institutions. I think it included factories and shops and eating-places. Among other conditions demanded, the hours of work and times of employment were limited, sufficient time for meals was to be allowed, chairs were to be provided and the workers permitted to use them. If these conditions were universally accepted the servant problem might begin to dwindle. It was merely conditions that I found impossible.

The work in itself was not too hard, and a great deal of it was very interesting. There was nothing that a woman of average strength and health should not have been called upon to handle. At the same time, in a kitchen one is working under a nervous strain, fifteen hours a day (with ten minutes off 'to wash your face'), for many continuous days. It is not a mode of life that can be endured by any but the roughest type of woman, and not always by her. It was not a leisurely fifteen hours, either. As the kitchen-maid I worked with said, 'When you walk you must run, and you must never sit down.'

At the end of three months in this house I was obliged to give up the work because it was a physical impossibility to continue it. I was advised by a doctor to spend half the day in bed and the other half out of doors for at least two weeks.

I cannot feel that any amount of money could compensate for the life of a kitchen worker (either the chef or his assistants) in that household. My wages were certainly not good, considering the hours of work required and the money that had to be spent to recover from the effects of the strain and the long hours.

I wondered whether I found this work such a strain because I had not had a very long experience of the conditions I was living in. I asked the chef if he considered there was any work in that kitchen which an 'educated' woman could not do because she was educated. He said that there was not, and that there should be at least one other woman employed there. I also asked the doctor whether she thought that education made women less able to do physical work, and if that accounted for my inability to stand the life in the kitchen. She considered the long hours sufficient to account for a breakdown. I was interested to find afterwards that the other kitchen-maid, a large Norwegian woman, had also been obliged to find employment elsewhere. A little later the laundress, also a Norwegian, had to stay three weeks in a hospital as a result of overwork and rheumatism which the doctor attributed to the conditions of her employment.

One of the chambermaids who had at one time worked in a large kitchen, in either England or Scotland, said that she had been obliged to give up the work because of ill health. She had had to spend a great deal of time kneeling on damp stone floors which she was

cleaning, and the doctor whom she consulted considered her illness the result of the work she had been doing.

I was very fortunate in the chef under whom I worked, and it was only because I valued the training under him that I stayed as long as I did in that household. After I left the house he allowed me to go and watch him work whenever I liked, and was extremely patient about answering questions, and very generous in his attitude. He quite realized the general feeling of contempt for manual workers, and I think was somewhat astonished to find anyone with an admiration for his work; he would not on any account have his children trained to be cooks.

IV

The most pleasant opening for anyone who likes to cook is to be found with employers who are willing to give definite hours, and sometimes these can be found through the advertisement columns of leading newspapers. I know of only one instance where definite hours were given to resident workers. The demand for them is very unpopular among employers. Their introduction presupposes a real organizing ability and a willingness to experiment. Most of the employers who have given definite hours have considered the arrangement a success on the whole, and are unwilling to revert to the usual indefinite system, which cannot fail to keep out of household employment the more intelligent type of woman and drive into it the very type whose shortcomings the housekeeper is the first to bewail.

The commercial side of the question is a very complicated one. If the employee is to 'live out,' she must have higher wages to support herself. I think that it simplifies matters sometimes if she has her food as part of her wages, for as a rule it does not cost the em-

ployer the amount that it would cost the employee to buy and prepare, or to buy ready prepared.

This is a difference that has to be allowed for and adjusted according to individual preferences, but if the employer is anxious for a new type of worker, new conditions must be offered, and they must be worth while financially.

'She ain't generous, and she don't know; I don't think we shall ever make anything of her,' was the criticism I once heard of an unpopular employer. And even though generous employers do exist, it is doubtful if there are any who can be said to 'know' even as satisfactorily as the average business woman with a position of responsibility over other women. The housekeeper has rarely had the same type of experience as her servant; she has not gone into another woman's house as a paid employee, and would probably be insulted at the very idea. Even the most amiable are apt to confuse the expressions 'shelter' and 'home.' Those who have ideals about service leave the word servility out of their vocabulary, but expect it in their daily lives.

Housework is too often, for the servant, a perpetual readjustment to moods, unpunctual habits, and untidy ways of living on the part of the employer.

'They are the livers; we are the existence!' was the slogan of an Irish cook I once knew — literally saintlike in the way she bore with a kind-hearted but preposterously difficult employer who left all orders until the last minute, and changed them frequently after they were given, and yet was proud of her housekeeping.

It has been said that 'reforms begin at the top, revolutions at the bottom';

strikes might be the swiftest cure for the unsatisfactory conditions of the household worker, as they have been the mitigation of some of the ills of other occupations of the manual laborer. If, however, the reform could come from the top in this particular instance, it would be a greater sign than has yet been given of woman's capacity to deal with matters of public import.

Indeed, in writing on 'The New Generation of Women' (*Current History*, August 1923), Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman makes a woman's attitude toward such affairs the touchstone of her mentality.

'It may fairly be said,' she writes, 'that so far the woman's mind does not manifest in the same degree the qualities of individual initiative and of creative power that we are accustomed to consider peculiar to the man's. That some instances do exist, however, shows that it is not a sex-distinction. *Perhaps another century or so must pass, with great development in the belated household trades*, and an ennobling specialization in child culture, before it can be authoritatively stated that there is any essential difference in mental qualities: whether, in short, there is sex-distinction in the brain.'

If the feminist agitations have been part of an evolution, and not a mere by-product of the times, the administration of those concerns which are naturally a woman's will predominate in her public life. This will not happen so long as the 'belated household trades' are so beyond the social pale as to be fit only for some far-away and unreal servant-class and out of the question as a means of employment for women of intelligence and training.

THE MYSTERY AND POWER OF LIGHT

BY ELLWOOD HENDRICK

ALONG in the early seventies of the last century there was a boy who herded oxen through the long summer nights on the plains of Serbia, and all unconsciously he put himself through as severe an intelligence test as we can well imagine. Having the gift of vision, he looked at the stars, and he saw something. Bearing in his mind the ringing poetry about the firmament, which his mother repeated from the Psalms of David, — the Psalms of Saint David I believe they say in the Eastern Rite, — his proper and wholesome youthful curiosity was aroused, and he asked himself the question, What is Light? He then set himself the most far-reaching problem in physical science, one that still remains unsolved; and to this day he and many others who live in enlightenment are diligent in the great quest. Incidentally he has given us such discoveries as long-distance telephony, important features in radio-transmission, and other inventions, besides a life of inspired teaching. I refer to Professor Michael Pupin, now of Columbia University.

That is the way of Nature. She is not at all interested in us, but she is amazingly rich and lavish in her gifts. Whoever is able to keep his precious endowment of curiosity, — which most of us lose at school or in college, or allow through weakness of will to become strangled by the stupidities of our daily toil, — who has a mathematical sense of proportion, and enjoys diligence in research, is almost certain of a reward.

He is sure to find something worth while in response to his inquiries of Nature, even though the most cherished goal remains hidden from him.

I

Light, as Sir Evelyn de la Rue has said, is our nearest visible approach to infinity. Its velocity is the greatest known. It dashes through space at the rate of over 186,000 miles a second, and it seems to be 'beyond numbers,' for it remains constant from an approaching or a retreating body. That is, if we add to it, it does not increase, and if we subtract from it, it does not grow less. Does not this partake of the nature of infinity? We shall soon reach another instance in which arithmetic at first glance seems to be wrong, but not in so confusing or bewildering a measure as this curiosity in regard to the velocity of light.

Experiments in physical science point to the conclusion that all matter, whether in the heavens above, the earth beneath, the waters under the earth, or anywhere else — in the substance of all the stars and planets and moons and satellites and meteorites throughout the universe, is composed of positive and negative charges of electricity — and of nothing else. The ninety-two chemical elements, of which we know all but four, differ from each other only in the number and arrangement of the positive and negative charges in their atoms or smallest particles.