

· EPICURES IN FICTION

BY EDNA KENTON

SOME of the novelists—Thackeray and Dickens, for instance—thrust their personal attitude toward the pleasures of feasting and the sequence of sauces directly upon the passive reader. Others gently insinuate their knowledgeable epicureanism through their characters, and, as in life, there are a thousand hearty, pleased eaters to one epicure. But epicures wander through fiction, sometime with no more detailed atmosphere than the epicure's aura itself—as Dr. Middleton in *The Egoist*, who knew wines. Others bubble with the secrets of their delicate feastings, and gormandise verbally for the delectation of the enhungered reader.

Emerson Hough, in *The Mississippi Bubble*, has a hero who knew a mint julep. He had just met Colonel Blount of the Old South, and introduces himself as follows:

"Well, Colonel Blount, in our family we used to have an old silver mug—sort of plain mug, you know, few flowers round the edge of it—been in the family for years. Now you take a mug like that, and let it lie in the ice-box all the time, and when you take it out, it's got a sort of white frost all over it. Now my old daddy he would take this mug and put some fine ice into it—not too fine. Then he'd take a little loaf sugar in another glass, and he'd mash it up in a little water—not too much water—then he'd pour that over the ice. Then he would pour some good corn whiskey in till all the interstices of that ice were filled plumb up; then he'd put some mint——"

"Didn't smash the mint? Say, he didn't smash the mint, did he?" said Colonel Blount, eagerly, hitching over toward the speaker.

"Smash it? I should say not, sir! Sometime, at certain seasons of the year, he might just sort of take a twist at the leaf, to sort of release a little of the flavour you

know. You don't want to be rough with mint. Just twist it gently between the thumb and finger. Then you set it nicely round the edge of the glass. Sometimes just a little powder of fine sugar round on top of the mint leaves, and then——"

"Sir," said Colonel Blount, gravely, rising and taking off his hat, "you are welcome to my home!"

Most self-revelation is sublimated fiction, so Mary Maclane's choice of relishes—if we are making up a menu according to the heroes and heroines—will not be barred. Mary Maclane loved olives, and she tells us how to eat them:

"I take the olive in my fingers and I contemplate its green oval richness. I set my teeth and my tongue upon the olive and bite it. It is bitter, salt, delicious. The saliva rushes to meet it, and my tongue is a happy tongue. As the morsel of olive rests in my mouth and is crunched and squeezed lusciously among my teeth, a quick, temporary change takes place in my character—"Oh, dear, sweet, bitter olive!" I say to myself."

And on and on for a chapter on the olive. Also Mary worshipped at the incensed shrine of young green onions from California. Marie Bashkirtsef tells us that "the incomparable commencement of a dinner is a cup of broth, a hot calatch, and some fresh caviar." "Calatch" is a species of bread, but one must go to Moscow to eat it.

Thackeray, or his minor heroes, on soups is interesting authority. The choice may be Mirobalant's own for Blanche: "a little potage à la reine, as white as her own tint, and compounded of the most fragrant cream and almonds. Or a clear stock made by the nonchalantly extravagant recipe of Cavalcadour, the pupil of Mirobalant, who stunned Mrs. Gashliegh with his demand for "a

leg of beef, a leg of veal, and a ham." In exactness of quantities Jennifer, Peter Stirling's black man, may serve us better with his clean-cut statement concerning his famous soup: "Dar aint nuffin' in dat soup, but a quart o' thick cream, an' de squeezin's of a hun'erd clams."

Thackeray "On Fish" is trustworthy. Likewise dependable is Colonel Carter of Cartersville, who served "fish, boiled, with slices of hard-boiled eggs fringing the dish, oaled by a hedge of parsley, and supplemented by a pyramid of potatoes with their jackets ragged as tramps.

Here is Colonel Carter's Chad on ter-rapin:

"Tar-pin jes' like a crab, Major, on'y got mo' meat to 'em. Now dis yer shell is de hot plate an' ye do all yo' eatin' right inside it," said Chad, dropping a spoonful of butter, the juice of a lemon, and a pinch of salt into the dish.

"Now, Major, take up yo' fork an' pick out all dat black meat an' dip it in de sauce, an' wid ebry mou'ful take one o' dem little yaller eggs. Dat's de way *we* eat tar'pin. Dis yer stewin' him up in pote wine is scand'lous. Can't taste nuffin' but de wine. But dar's *tar'pin*!"

And Colonel Carter himself on game cannot be omitted from this symposium. The canvasbacks were brought in, and the Colonel spoke:

"Lay 'em here, Chad, right under my nose. Now hand me that pile of plates sizzlin' hot, and give that carvin' knife a turn or two across the hearth. Major, dip a bit of celery in the salt, and follow it with a mou'ful of claret. It will prepare yo' palate for the kind of food' we raise gentlemen on down my way. See that red blood, suh, followin' the knife? There, Major, is the breast of a bird that fo' days ago was divin' for wild celery within fo'ty miles of Carter Hall—Now Chad, the red pepper."

"No jelly, Colonel?" said Fitz, with an eye on the sideboard.

"Jelly? No suh, not a suspicion of it. A pinch of salt and dust of cayenne; then shut yo' eyes and mouth, and don't open them

except for a drop of good red wine. It is the salt marsh in the early mawnin' that you are tastin', suh, not molasses candy. You Nawtherners don't really treat a canvas back with any degree of respect. You ought never to come into his presence when he lies in state without takin' off yo' hat."

On the etiquette of the serving of venison Colonel Carter also spoke feelingly:

"Ven'son is diff'nt. That game lives on moose buds, and the soft bark of the sugar-maple, and the tufts of sweet grass. There is propriety and justice in his ending his days smothered in sweets, but the wild duck, suh, is bawn of the salt ice, braves the storm, and lives a life of pey'il and hardship. You don't degrade an oyster, a soft-shell crab, or a clam with confectionery. Why a canvasback duck?"

One might well cook quail as the Frederick Carrolls of Jesse Lynch Williams cooked theirs, "encased in an envelope of oiled paper to retain the flavour and juices." And an interesting course prepared by your own recipe could be tagged "Frawgs' laigs à la Delmonico" à la *The Virginian*.

Poor Cousin Pons ate good food with Cibot, prepared by Madame Cibot; a ragout, for instance, "made of scraps of boiled beef bought at a cook shop and fricasseed in butter with onions cut in fine strips until the butter was wholly absorbed by the meat and onions and had the appearance of something fried. Other days there were odds and ends of chicken sauté, or a fish cooked in a sauce of Madame Cibot's own invention in which a mother might have eaten her children without perceiving it."

In "Au Soleil" Maupassant gives a verbatim recipe for a dish not half bad to try as a gastronomic or literary experiment. Says he:

It is made of chicken or mutton. After cutting the meat into cubes, it is fried in a little butter. Then take hot water (I should think broth would improve it) and add a large quantity of red pepper, a dash of pi-

miento, pepper and salt, onions, dates and dried apricots, and boil these until the fruit is quite soft, when it is poured over the meat. It is simply delicious.

In *Virgin Soil* the Subotcheffs had "fowl roasted on a spit with saffron," that is distinctively foreign to Anglo-Saxon cookery, and is smoothly savoury.

Or, to go back to Mirobalant, his method of serving roast lamb may be filched for quaint, modern use, "laid in a little meadow of spinaches, surrounded with croustillons representing sheep, and ornamented with daisies and other savage flowers," finished the passionate lover, Mirobalant.

As for salads, Turgenev hints darkly many times of the varied content of Russian salads. George Horton, in *The Long Straight Road*, that novel of mediocre American life, discusses the amount of vinegar and oil due an American potato salad, and cites this detail of a Crissey Sunday dinner:

"What's this," asked Crissey, as Lena brought on something in small dishes. Oranges?"

"Taste it and see how you like it," replied his wife. "It's orange salad. I got the recipe out of this morning's paper. How do you like it, Miss Aikin?"

It was one of those abominable dishes which we Americans perpetrate under the absurd name of salad—in the present instance, sliced oranges, lettuce, peanuts, and garlic, with olive oil.

"As for me," commented Crissey, in a judicial manner, "I prefer my lettuce in a Christian manner, with vinegar and sugar."

George Ellwanger's *The Story of My House* contains full directions for "A Blue Violet Salad" that might be quoted here:

There was a great bunch of double violets on the table, the lovely dark variety (*Viola odoratissima flore pleno*) with their short stems, freshly plucked from the garden, and the room was scented by their delicious breath.

A bowl of broad-leaved Bavarian endive,

blanched to a nicety and alluring as a siren's smile, was placed upon the table. I almost fancied it was smiling at the violets. A blue violet salad by all means! there are violets and to spare.

On a separate dish there was a little minced celery, parsley, and chives. Four heaped salad spoonsful of olive oil were poured upon the herbs, with a dessert spoonful of white wine vinegar, the necessary salt and white pepper, and a tablespoonful of Bordeaux. The petals of two dozen violets were detached from their stems, and two-thirds of them were incorporated with the dressing. The dressing being thoroughly mixed with the endive, the remaining flower petals were sprinkled over the salad and a half dozen whole violets were placed in the centre. The lovely blue sapphires glowed upon the white bosom of the endive!

A wide choice there is of literary desserts. From *Pierre et Jean* may be culled one of "four high dishes, one containing a pyramid of splendid peaches; the second a monumental cake gorged with whipped cream, and covered with pinnacles of sugar, a cathedral in confectionery; the third slices of pineapple floating in clear syrup, and the fourth black grapes brought from the Southland."

Or there is the Christmas pudding from *David Harum*, "of steamed Indian meal and fruit, with a sauce of cream sweetened with maple sugar." Or Owen Wister who has sent *The Virginian's* "Frawgs' laigs à la Delmonico" to deathless fame, can supply the sweet in Lady Baltimore cake.

Lord Henry Wootton, in *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, dallies exquisitely with dessert at the close of a dinner: "He spilt into his plate a little crimson pyramid of seeded strawberries, and through a perforated spoon snowed white sugar upon them."

Then, for the closing note, what better than Hichen's detailed Eastern coffee, made by Hamza for Bella Donna:

There was a saucepan containing water, a brass bowl of freshly roasted and pounded

coffee, two small, open coffee pots with handles that stuck straight out, two coffee cups, a tiny bowl of powdered sugar, and some paper parcels which held sticks of mastic, ambergris, and seed of cardamon. Hamza poured water from the saucepan into one of the coffee pots, set it on a brazier and sank into a reverie. Presently there came from the pot a murmur, and Hamza took it instantly from the brazier and the bowl of coffee from the ground, let some of the coffee slip into the water, stirred it with a silver spoon, and set the pot once more on the brazier. Then he unfolded the paper which held the ambergris, put a

caret weight of it into the second pot and set that too on the brazier. The coffee began to simmer. He lit a stick of mastic, fumigated with its smoke the two little coffee cups, took the coffee pot and gently poured the fragrant coffee into the pot containing the melted ambergris, let it simmer for a moment, then poured it out into the two coffee cups, creaming, and now sending forth with its own warm perfume the enticing perfume of ambergris, added a dash of cardamon seed—

And looked toward Bella Donna to add the sugar.

HENRI FABRE: HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

I

OF the forty million inhabitants of the British Isles, I doubt if four hundred had ever heard of Henri Fabre before the publication of Maeterlinck's essay on *The Insect's Homer*. I certainly was not one of those four hundred; but the essay stimulated me to immediate enquiries. I found that, at the time, the London Entomological Society owned only a part of the volumes forming the *Souvenirs entomologiques*; that there was a complete set at the British Museum and not, as far as I could discover, anywhere else in London; and that a condensed translation of the first volume had been issued by Messrs. Macmillan, in 1901, under the title of *Insect Life*. I thought that it would be a desirable and pleasant task to translate the remainder; and I was preparing to negotiate with Paris for the English and American rights of the whole work, when Messrs. Adam and Charles Black sent for me.

It appeared that this leading firm of publishers had acquired the right to issue an English edition of *La Vie des Insectes*, an illustrated volume of extracts from the *Souvenirs*, which had lately been published in France, and that they

wished me to undertake the translation. This "popular" form of publication did not exactly coincide with my views, which contemplated a complete and uniform edition of the whole series of essays, uncurtailed and figuring in their order as written; but the agreement between the French and English publishers was already signed and I accepted the offer of the translation, which received the title of *The Life and Love of the Insect* and appeared in 1911. It was arranged that, if the same house issued the English edition of a second, similar volume, I was to translate this also; and I was a little surprised, early in the following year, to see that Mr. Fisher Unwin was announcing *Social Life in the Insect World*, by Henri Fabre, translated by Bernard Miall. I was also more than a little disappointed, not so much because the work had not fallen to me—for Mr. Miall is one of our very ablest translators and his version was admirably done—but rather because this somewhat scattered method of publication threatened to frustrate my comprehensive plan of a uniform edition. It must be mentioned that the two volumes had also found different publishers in America, where they were issued by