

PANACEAS FOR POVERTY.

The folly of exercising so much ingenuity in the discovery of substitutes for expensive articles of food, is admirably exposed in the following article from the last number of Blackwood's Magazine.

We in Ireland know well that "potatoes and milk" will support nature—the difficulty lies in persuading John Bull to accommodate himself to such slender diet. It is less difficult to find out "substitutes," than to induce people to be satisfied with them.

"I like not this humour of bread and cheese."

From the days of Job, downwards, Courtiers (to me) have always seemed the most impudent set of people upon earth. For you may see, nine times in ten, that they actually gratify themselves in what they call "consoling" their neighbours; and go away in an improved satisfaction with their own condition, after philosophizing for an hour and a half upon the disadvantages of yours.

There are several different families of these benevolent characters abroad, and each set rubs some places in a manner peculiar to itself.

First and foremost, there are those who go, in detail, through the history of your misfortune shewing (as the case may be) either how completely you have been outwitted, or how exceedingly ill or absurdly you have conducted yourself—and so leave you with "their good wishes, and an invitation to" "come and dine, when your troubles are over."

Next, there are those, a set, I think still more intolerable, who press the necessity of your resolving immediately upon "something" and forthwith declare in favour of that particular measure, which, of all the *pis aller* of your estate, is the most perfectly detestable.

Thirdly come the "whorson caterpillars," who are what people call "well to do" in the world; and especially those who have become so (as they believe) by their own good conduct. These are very particularly vile dogs indeed! I recollect one such—(he was an opulent cheese-monger,) who had been porter in the same shop which he afterwards kept, and had come to town, as he used to boast, without cash enough to buy a night's lodging on his arrival.

"This man had neither love nor pity for any human being. He met every complaint of distress with a history of his own losses. No living creature, as he took it, could reasonably be poor, so long as there were birch brooms or watering-pots in the world. He would tell those who asked for work, that idleness was the root of all evil;" prove to people "that a penny was the seed of a guinea," who were without a farthing in the world; and argue all day, with a man who had nothing, to shew that "out of a little, a little might be put by."

Fourthly, and in the rear, march those most provoking ruffians of all, who uphold the pretence of always "putting the best face" (as they say) on "an affair." And these will even your broken leg by setting it off against somebody else's hump back, and so soundly demonstrate that you have nothing to complain of; or admit, perhaps (for the sake of variety) the fact that you are naked; and proceed to devise stratagems how you shall be contented to remain so.

And it is amazing what a number of (mad upon that particular point), but otherwise reasonable and respectable people, could be so easily seduced by proving that *The Poor* have an enviable condition. The poor? Poor! They seem really to have been set up as a sort of target for ingenuity to try its hand upon; and from Paine the Bone Digger, down to Cobbett, the Bone Grubber,—from Wesley, who made cheap physic, and added to every prescription "a quart of cold water," to Hunt who sells roasted wheat (*exsic coffee*) five hundred per cent above its cost—an absolute army of projectors and old women has, from time to time been popping at them. High among these philosophers, indeed, I might almost say at the head of them, stands the author of a tract called, "A Way to save Wealth," which was published, I think, about the year 1640, to shew how a man might thrive upon an allowance of TWOPENCE per day.

The observations prefatory to the promulgation of this insinimable secret, are worthy of every body's—that is every poor body's—attention.

First, the writer teaches, generally, upon the advantage of "a thin, spare diet;"—exposing how all beyond is "mere pitiable luxury;"—enumerating the diseases consequent upon high living, and pointing out the criminal acts and passions to which it leads;—evidently demonstrating, indeed, to the meanest capacity, that no man can possibly eat goose, and go to heaven.

Shortly after he takes the question upon a broader ground; and examines it as one of mere worldly policy and of mere convenience.—"The man who eats flesh, has need of other things (vegetables) to eat with it; but that necessity is not felt by him who lives upon vegetables only." If Leadenhall market could stand against that, I am mistaken.

The recipes for *cheap dishes* will no doubt (when known) come into general practice; so they shall be given in the Saver of Wealth's own words.—Here is one—(probably) for a Christmas dinner.

"Take two spoonfuls of oatmeal; put it into two quarts of cold water, then stir it over the fire until it boils, and put in a little salt and an onion. And this" continues our economist—"this does not cost above a farthing, and is a noble, exhilarating meal!" For drink, he afterwards recommends the same dish unadmitted, not to form of regimen, it must be admitted, can be more simply contented. Now this man was certainly, as the phrase is "sparing thing like" a projector in his way. And it seems probable that he met with encouragement, for, passing the necessities, he goes on to treat of the elegancies of life.

"Take this recipe, for instance, next—"

"For dressing (dressing) a hat. "Smear a little soap on the places of your hat which are filthy, and rub it with some hot water and a hard brush. Then scrape with a knife, what felth sticks; and it will bring both soap and grease out."—The book of this author is scarce; I suspect the hatters bought it up to prevent this secret from being known.

Only one more recipe, and really it is worthy of being written in letters of gold,—it is worth to stand beside that never-to-be-forgotten discovery of Mrs. Rundell's—(she who now in the kitchen of the gods roasts!—that "roasts" in a proper sense, not is roasted.)—her immortal direction to prevent the creaking of a door, "Rub a bit of soap on the hinges!"—This is it!

"To make your teeth white. "Take a little brick dust on a towel and rub them." The mechanical action, the reader sees, not the chemical; but potent notwithstanding.

But Mrs. Rundell deserves better than to be quoted, in and on an occasion like this; pay, merits herself to take rank, and high rank, among our public benefactors. Marry, I say, that the thing is so, and shall be so for, even amidst all the press and erudition of her moral and culinary precepts,—even while she stands already, as a man may say, "in a double trust," teaching us how to save the pepper, and good living in another; here, holding up her ladle against "excessive luxury," such as "Essence of Ham"—(praised be her thick doctored, but for which the world had never known that there was such a perfume;) and, presently, pointing out the importance, and sweeping over the rarity of such "creature comforts" as strong coffee, and smooth melted butter;—ever and anon, even amidst all these complicated interests, the kind lady finds room to edge in a thought of care about the poor.

*Pour excellent.* "The cook should be charged," says Mrs R. "to save the boiling of every piece of meat or ham, however salt; the pieces of meat which come from the table on the plates; and the bones made by the family." "What a reform," adds she, "to the labouring husband, to have a warm, comfortable meal!"—the rind of a ham, for instance, after Mrs R. had extracted the "Essence of Ham."

And again she goes on.—"Did the cook really enter into this, (the love of her fellow creatures;) she would never wash away as useless, the peas, or groats, of which soup, or gruel, have been made;—broken potatoes;—the outer leaves of lettuce;—the necks and feet of fowls!" &c., "which makes a delicious meat soup, especially for the sick."—Sure, people would be falling sick, on purpose to eat it!

The sick soup, essay concluding with a farther direction to the cook, not to take the fat off the broth, "as the poor like it, and are nourished by it" and with a calculation which, if we know any thing of the mathematics, might make Demouivre himself look to his laurels;—"Ten gallons of this soup," concludes Mrs R., "from ten houses, would be a hundred gallons; and that, divided among forty families, would be two gallons and a half to each family."

*Ten Martis quam Mercurio.* And one more, a little more fully, ten to one else!—*Ten Cooker quam Kitchener.* And this lady is dead! It almost makes us waver in our faith!

Turn over ye casks of table beer, Ye steaks, forgot to fry; Why is it you are let stay here, And Mrs Rundell die?

But whims, if they happen to take hold at all, take the strongest hold commonly upon strong understandings.

Count, therefore, though an ingenious man, had a touch of this *bon chere* *à la d'argent* disease; and his essays afford some pleasant illustrations of the slashing style in which men construct theories, when the practice is to fall upon their neighbours.

After exhausting himself upon the smoky chimneys of the world, the Count strips to the next of his nuisances, the beggars.

He was to feed the poor; *encore* the Poor!—and his point was, of course, how to feed them at the cheapest rate.

"Water," then, he begins,—the cunning rogue! "Water, I am inclined to suspect, sets a much more important part in nutrition, than has been generally supposed." This was a good advice hobby to start upon; and, truly, his Counsellor, in the sequel, does outside all the field.

First, he sets out an admirable table at which he *mes twelve hundred* persons, all expenses included, for the very reasonable cost of one pound fifteen shillings, English.

But this, which was three dinners for a penny, was nothing; and, in a trice, the Count, going on with his reductions, brings down the meal for twelve hundred, to one pound seven shillings.—And here, he beats our Saver of Wealth, the contractor at two pence a day, hollow; because, with his dinner found for a farthing, a man must be an example of debauchery—a mere reprobate to think of getting through such a sum as twopenny a day; out of which, indeed, he might well put by a provision for himself and his wife, in old age; and it furnishes for two or three of his younger children.

The Count's running commentary upon these evolutions, too, is a *chef d'œuvre* in the art of reasoning. At one time, it seems he dieted his flock, partly upon bread begged publicly in charity, and partly upon meat which was the remainder of the markets. Even out of evil the wise man shall bring good. The charity bread was found extremely dry and hard; "but, therefore," says the Count; "we found it answer better than any other; because it made mastication necessary, and so prolonged the enjoyment of eating." As for the meat, he soon finds that an article quite unnecessary, and actually omits it altogether in the people's soup, without the fact being discovered!

But his interesting feature of all, and there I leave Count Rumford, is the experiment which he makes in eating, to be quite certain, upon himself; arguing upon the nutritious and stomach-satisfying qualities of a particular "cheap" dish, he puts the question to issue—thus:

"I took my coffee and cream, with my dry toast, one morning" (not given) "at breakfast, and ate nothing between that and four o'clock.—I then ate," [the particular dish,] I believe, however, it was a *three farthing* one, "and found myself perfectly refreshed." And so the Count finishes his dissertation upon food, in the world, clearing the Chinese!

Now, I can best cook in the world, there would seem to be something accomplished here. No doubt, if our labourers would eat farthing dinners, and get rid of that villainous propensity which they have to beef-steaks, their "savings," and consequent acquisition of property, would be immense. But does the Count not perceive, and did it never strike your coadjutors, that, if this system were acted upon, the poor would rably greater nuisance than they are in their present condition. I grant the existing evil, but do not let us exchange it for a greater. The question is a difficult one, but there he minds that can cope with it. Such a turmoil as to what the poor shall eat! I say, there are plenty of them—let them eat one another.

People must not be startled by the apparent novelty of this plan—those who can swallow Count Rumford's dinner, and eat an acre, swallow any thing. I have examined the scheme which I propose narrowly, and (prejudice apart) can see no possible objection to it. It is well known, that rats and mice take the same mode which I hint at, to thin their superabundant population; and what are the poor, but mice in the cheese of society? Let the public listen only to this suggestion, and they will find that it ends all difficulty at once. I grant that there might be some who would be ravenous at first upon their diet; especially any who had been living upon Mrs. Rundell's soup; but that is an evil which would correct itself; because so admirably operative and perfect is the principle, the mouths would diminish in exact proportion with the meat. 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