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THE CHEESE OF THE COUNTRY.

By Mary Evelyn, M.C.A.

"Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls ! "

—Mr. Brocklehurst in "Jane Eyre."

" To see life sanely and see it whole " is a game that takes up time, but is worth while, not merely for the fun of the fair, but also for the fact that an all-round philosophy results in less practical mischief than one that is one-sided and narrow.

The difference between the statesman and the professional politician lies in the far-seeing and comprehensive view of the former, his judicious weighing of cause and effect, and the less educated grasp of the latter.

Things that may be quite good in themselves—quite lawful—are not always expedient, nor will they always procure the greatest good for the greatest number.

A study of the Social and Industrial history of our country throughout the last two centuries is most illuminating in this respect, especially where women's interests are concerned.

Industry, home-life, food, character, and behaviour are inseparable and the sooner we realise this the better. Injure any one of these by injustice, or lack of vision, and the others suffer. " In a broad sense no limit can yet be set to the Industrial Revolution," writes Professor Rees, " we are still going through the series of adjustments that were started by the industrial changes of the latter part of the eighteenth century. But a distinction may be drawn between the Revolution and its consequences. If we agree that a revolution implies a sudden and fairly complete disintegration of what existed before it, we may choose the years 1760 to 1800, for then the old order received the full force of the shock. A revolution, however, also involves some attempted reintegration, for human society must adopt some more or less stable form if it is to survive at all."

No one imagined, probably, during those forty years, that the transference of spinning, weaving, candle and soap-making, etc., from the home to the factory, would be the fundamental cause of the Feminist movement, and that the temporary eclipse of home interests, would result in the deterioration of national cookery, and consequent ill-health, with their inevitable reactions on character and behaviour. But they did.

It is, however, curious to find that women have followed their traditional home occupations into the factory and business world. I was struck by this fact this summer, when collecting information and recipes of National Cookery or English Folk Cookery, whichever you like to call the cookery of the country.

Boosting the Foreign.

The publicity given in England to the erection and inauguration of a monument to the creatrice of Camembert cheese naturally turned my thoughts to our English products. I had already (in an article sent in to the Edinburgh Review and published this month, October, 1927), referred to the advantage French has over English and Scottish cookery " Because its merits have been sung in season and out of season, first by Grimrod de Reyniere, then by Brillat Savarin, and other writers, poets and artists," a circumstance which has " encouraged natural gifts and produced genius." We on the contrary, perpetually grumble at our cooks and run down English cookery.

It was a logical sequence to try to do as much for Britain, as we do for France. Nothing can beat our British products, why shouldn't they also be sung ? Take Stilton cheese for example; who invented that ? First I rang up my friend, Mr. Appleford, buyer of the provisions for the Civil Service Supply Association, and asked his advice. He told me the Vale of Belvoir was the district where the best is made, and Mr. Widgery of the Wilts United Dairies arranged for me to go to Harby and stay with the manageress there for a night or so, that I might see a full day's work. There are Cheddar and Cheshire and Dunlop and many other good local cheeses in England and Scotland, but Stilton is exclusively British.

Cheese History.

Harby was chosen, not because it belongs to the United Dairies Limited, but because Mrs. Herbert Watson, the manageress has won the Silver Cup, three years running, at the Leicester Show and now is the Champion Stilton Cheese-maker of Leicestershire, and the owner of the Cup.

Before, however, setting out on my travels, I did a bit of book research work, and learnt that Mrs. Paulet, of Wymondham, near Melton Mowbray, had first made this particular cheese and that it had been sent by her to her brother (?) Mr. Cooper Thorn-hill, landlord of the " Bell Inn," at Stilton, in Huntingdonshire, and that famous inn being situated on the Great North Road from Edinburgh to London, the cheese had been much appreciated by his hungry customers when they broke their stage journey for refreshments, and was talked of far and near, as the Stilton Cheese. It was, however, never made there, but was brought by waggon from Leicestershire.

I promptly decided on staying a few days at Melton Mowbray with the intention of visiting Wymondham, before going on to Harby. I arrived at Melton, and was fortunate in being sent for information to Mr. Thomas Bunney Brewitt, who lives at the Priory, a mediaeval stone house, said to have belonged to Anne of Cleves, to whom the manor and parsonage were granted for life by Henry VII, for as long as she lived in England. It has a very fine old roof and a three-light window, looking on to the churchyard.

Mr. Brewitt was much interested in my quest and remarked : " As it happens the Rector of Little Dalby was discussing the subject with me, only yesterday. He said the first Stilton cheese was made at Little Dalby, and that he knew where it was made: at ' Bunney's Spinney.' As it happens my name is Bunney, the Bunneys or Bonneys had been established at Little Dalby for centuries, there is a charity named after them, and I happen to be one of the present trustees."

Mr. Brewitt went on to tell me that a Little Dalby girl had married the innkeeper of the Bell Inn at Stilton, and that the whole story might be found in Nichols' History of Leicestershire.

I had already looked up Wymondham in Nichols', but not having the " Little Dalby " clue had missed the connection. Finally, however, the following story was pieced together :

In the early part of the eighteenth century, a certain Elizabeth Scarbrow was housekeeper to the Ashby family at Quenby Hall, seven miles from Leicester, where she was accustomed to observe the making of a most delicious cheese, known as " Lady Beaumont's Cheese." When she married Farmer Orton and went to live at Little Dalby, between Quenby and Melton Mowbray, she took the recipe with her and made it for her own family. In 1730 she began to make it for sale, in small quantities, and it was known in the family and amongst the neighbours as " Quenby cheese," (its second " naming")!

Nichols says : " Since the beginning of the present century, the making of cheese has become an article of importance in Leicestershire ; and a very considerable quantity, manufactured in various parts of the country is sold annually at Leicester Cheese Fair."

In Marshall's " Rural (Economy of the Midland Counties," published in 1790, we find : " There is one excellent species in particular which finds its way more principally to the metropolis, under the name of Stilton cheese. Mrs. Paulet of Wymondham, in the Melton quarter of Leicestershire, the first manufacturer of this cheese is still living." In another place he refers to " Mrs. Paulet being a relation or acquaintance of the well-known Cooper Thornhill." Goody Orton likewise was living at this time.

Now we are also told that up to 1756, this cheese was only made by three people; and it is possible that Cooper Thornhill's wife and Mrs. Paulet were both Little Dalby girls, perhaps both daughters of Mrs. Orton of Bunney's Spinney, whom Nichols mentions as the original maker in 1730, and traces back to Quenby Hall, where she was housekeeper.

Anyhow, strung together thus, it makes a good story, and the inspection of the Church registers at Little Dalby would probably elucidate the mystery.

"At length," continues Marshall, " the place of produce was discovered and the art of producing it learnt by other dairymen in the neighbouring villages of Rutlandshire. Many tons are made every year : Dalby is said to pay its rent with this produce only. Thus, from a single circumstance, the produce of an extent of country is changed and in this case very profitably. The sale is no longer confined to Stilton ; every innkeeper within fifteen or twenty miles of the district of manufacture is a dealer in Stilton cheese."

But we have not yet solved the mystery of its origin. Even if we accept the above story, Mrs. Orton was merely the first to make it commercially, whilst Mrs. Paulet was evidently the first distributor ; Quenby Hall was its origin. How then did it come to be called " Lady Beaumont's Cheese ?" The Beaumonts lived at Stoughton and Cole Orton as they do now. Did she also merely hand on the recipe ? The mystery deepens, when we find in " The Receipt Book of Ann Blencowe," a.d. 1694, a recipe for a cheese marked Mrs. Bennet's, for the Bennets and Ashby families intermarried ; here anyhow is the " receipt." Have we at last reached the original maker ?

" Take ye night's milke of seven cows and take ye creame of it; then take ye morning milke

of 7 cows and ye morning milke and ye night's creame together. Then take a handfull or two of marrigold flowers well-picked and bruised ; then boil the marrigolds in a gallon of water a whill ; then strain the water into ye said milke and creame and put as much rennet as will make it com. Covere it close with a blanckett that it may com hard ; and when it is com take two chese cloaths and lay them into stands, and give your curd one stirr, and lay it your curd without breaking of it or sinking of it; then let it stand one houre ; then crush it with bords till ye whay is all out ; then lay it in water halfe an houer ; then crush it with bords till ye whay and water is all out. Then make it up into ye vatt and put a little salt in ye middle of it; then sett a fifty pound weight on it for an houer, then shift it into fresh cloaths every houer for 3 or 4 houers, then put it into the press and when you take it out of ye press, salt it but not two much ; then pinn a cloath about it to keep it upright till it is stiffe."

Cheese Technique.

This recipe lands us in another mystery ; the mystery not of origin but of " making " ; in another account we are told Mrs. Paulet held the original receipt (which is a point more in favour of her being a daughter of old Mrs. Orton, especially as she is described as a sister of Cooper Thornhill who married a Dalby girl), and that a gallon of water and marigold juice was added to " the milk of seven cows and the cream of the same number" for the purpose of colouring the cheese.

(Incidentally this answers Professor Saints bury's question in the introduction he wrote to Ann Blencowe's Book when it was printed in 1925 ; " For instance the marigolds in Mrs. Bennet's receipt for cheese. Were these for colouring ? ")

There are other points of resemblance, but this cannot be followed up here, as there is so much else to be written. Suffice it to say, that Mr. J. Marshall Dugdale, " who combines the skill of the expert with the energy of the enthusiast," at the end of the nineteenth century accepted a commission from the Royal Agricultural Society to visit the Stilton district in order to report the present methods of making Stilton cheese, and says, " that as his visit of inspection proceeded, it became more and more evident that the task upon which he had entered was a most difficult one." Every cheesemaker seemed to work upon different lines, and he was unable to find any two cases where all details were carried out in the same manner after the curd is ladled into the straining cloths ; "at this stage, and in the treatment of the curd before salting, diversity sets in, and as many as three different methods in successful current use are described in detail."

The result of Mr. Dugdale's inquiries appears in Vol. X., No. 36, of the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society.

Collecting and recording information on the conditions of rural England appears always to have been a favourite occupation. We have Tusser writing in verse in the days of Elizabeth, Arthur Young, in the second half of the eighteenth century, described twenty-six counties as seen in his Tours ; then we have William Marshall, from whom we have quoted, making a " General Survey of the Rural (Economy of England " and for this purpose dividing the country into six divisions to each of which he gave two volumes, and in them supplies more detail than Arthur Young gives us. Later still we have William Cobbett publishing his " Rural Rides " in 1830, and still later we have Sir James Caird collecting into a volume the valuable and interesting letters which he wrote upon this matter as Commissioner for The Times.

Twenty-five years ago, the late Sir H. Rider Haggard published in book form, with the title "Rural England," the articles he had been commissioned to write for the Daily Express.

When he visited the Melton Mowbray corner of Leicestershire it was Mr. T. B. Brewitt who took him round. "Desiring to learn at first hand the secret of how to make the best Stilton cheese," he was taken by Mr. Brewitt to see Mrs. Musson of Wartnaby, "who was celebrated locally for her skill in the art " :

"First," Sir Rider Haggard says, "the milk that came from Shorthorn cows—which she considered the best for the purpose, although some makers keep other breeds of cattle—was strained or sieved into a big tin vat, where it stood until it had cooled down to 80 degrees. At this temperature the rennet is put in, which coagulates the milk and turns it to curd. As to the amount of rennet necessary to this end, there seems to be no fixed rule—at least, Mrs. Musson said that in this matter she was guided by experience. When the curd is ready it is ladled out with a big scoop into straining cloths, which are placed over a curd-sink, the whey which is used for pig food, running into a cistern outside the chamber. Here the curd remains to ripen in the surplus whey for a length of time which depends on the weather and other conditions. When the weather is hot it would, I was informed, mature in about 48 hours, the cloths meanwhile being tightened from time to time.

After this the curd was broken up, the salt having been added to the amount of 7 lbs or 8 lbsto 25 lbs. of curd, the whole is put into a hoop with holes in it, but neither top nor bottom, through which the whey drains. In these hoops it stands for seven or eight days, the whole mass being turned each day. Occasionally also, skewers are driven into the hoops to assist in ridding them of the whey. On the seventh or eighth day it is slipped out of the hoop and invested with a binder or cloth, which is changed every day for another eight days or so, the cheese being turned at the same time. When the bind cloths are found to be quite dry upon the cheese, the use of them is discontinued. By this time, the cheese should have assumed that wrinkled appearance with which we are familiar in Stilton. It is then moved into a coating-room (which must be kept damp and have a cool draught of air passing through it) where, Mrs. Musson said, it remains for a week or more, and the surface assumes a light grey colour. After this it is transferred to the store-room, that should be damp and dark, where it is turned, and brushed daily for a period of about six months, during which time it sinks from 18 lbs. to 14 lbs., or 15 lbs. in weight."

"Now, if all things have gone right, it should be a perfect Stilton cheese and ready for eating. One of the first qualities of this making of Stilton cheeses—of which Mrs. Musson remarked that with the exception that they made no noise they were more trouble than babies—is that all rooms wherein they stand during their manufacture, and everything that touches them must be kept scrupulously clean. Another is that the temperature must be carefully watched and not allowed to rise too high or fall too low. So far as I could discover, it takes five quarts of milk to make 1 lb. of curd and 25 lbs. of curd to make a ripe Stilton of 15 lbs. weight. Mrs. Musson continued to make cheeses up to the end of November, but when the frost comes, the curd begins to go back in quality. The finest cheeses she disposed of to factors or at the fairs at Melton Mowbray or Leicester. I gathered that the best price was obtained from the factors, who, however, made a habit of picking the best cheeses and leaving those that were inferior to be disposed of elsewhere. It should be added that the excellence of the cheese depends greatly on the quality of the grass on which the cows are fed."

It is, as a matter of fact, just this matter of pasturage that is so important, and " The upland farms in Leicestershire and other noted districts adjoining, including the beautiful herbage and acid grasses of the Vale of Belvoir, are believed to produce a character of curd which for fine texture and delicacy of flavour is unsurpassed."

" The best season for making cheese is during those months when the cows can be fed with grass, that is from the beginning of May till the end of September, or in favourable seasons, the middle of October. In Leicestershire, however, where the cheese made is known by the name of Stilton, the most experienced makers of cheese do not consider it proper to commence the making of the prime sorts until the buttercups have disappeared, from the prevailing idea that that flower has a tendency to impart an unpleasant flavour to the milk."

It is said that real Stilton cheese can only be made in that part of Leicestershire of which Melton Mowbray is the centre and that the grass lands are so rich because they have never been touched by the plough.

Cheese Conversation.

When I reached Harby and was talking to Mrs. Herbert Watson, the Champion Stilton Cheesemaker (Manageress of the United Dairies Cheese Dairy at Harby) happening to mention my conversation with Mr. Brewitt concerning the first Stilton Cheese, Bunney's Spinney and little Dalby, she exclaimed :

" But I was born at Little Dalby ! " " Now, that," I said very impressively, " is most interesting, because the gift of Stilton-cheese making is said to be hereditary."

" So it is," she said. " My mother was a noted cheese-maker and even as a small girl I loved to help her with the curds."

" Yes ! but I mean more than that," I explained, " probably if we only knew you have inherited your gift from one of the original makers, because it is said to have originated there."

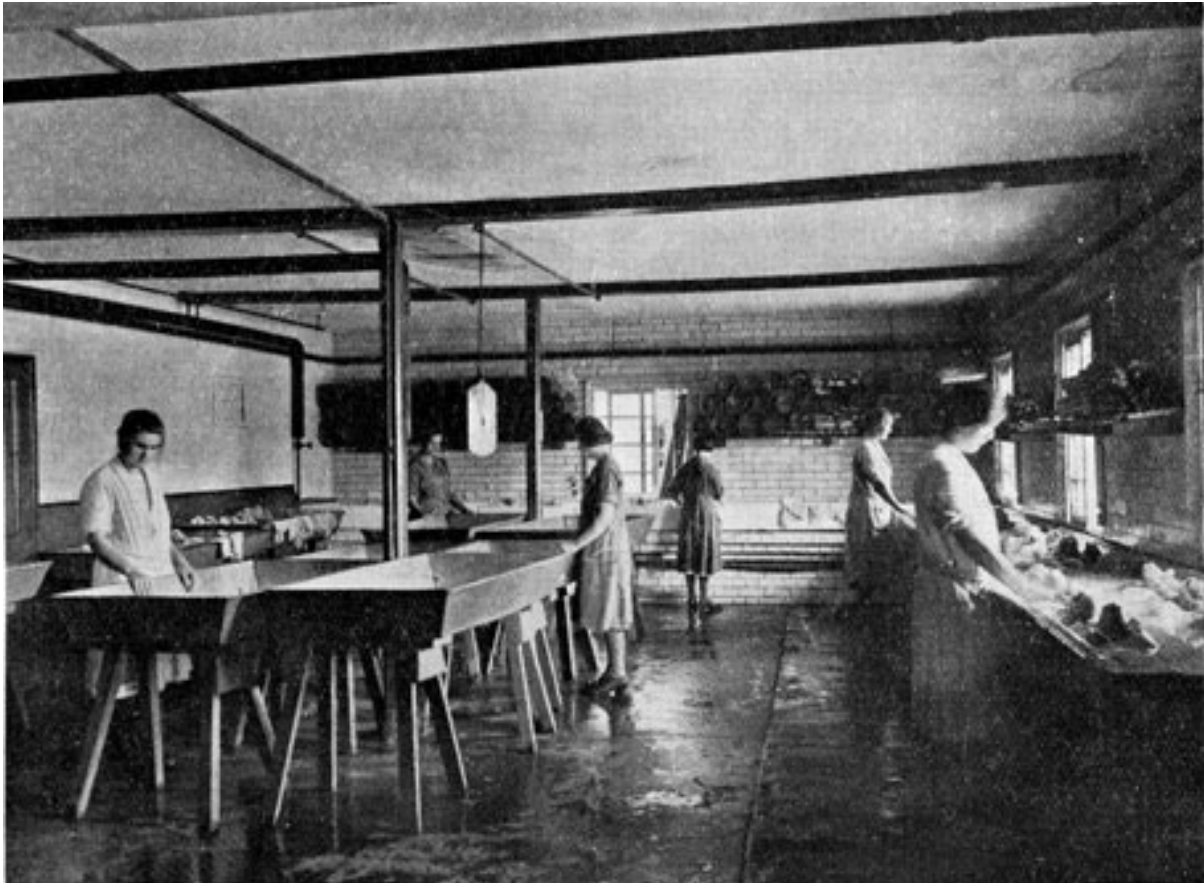
" That is interesting," she remarked thoughtfully, " we lived on the next farm to Bunney's Spinney, but I never knew Stilton was first made there."

Mrs. Watson is young and charming with lovely colouring, and full of enthusiasm and vitality. Her husband, who manages the place, is equally capable and interesting ; an extremely well-read man.

The Stilton Cheese making at Harby is carried on on factory lines, although as may be seen from the photographs it looks like a farm dairy. The milk is, however, supplied by the neighbouring farms and comes in twice a day, morning and evening. Some send it; from others it is collected. There are four rooms, two up and two down ; and the cellars ; with a large open entrance place where the pans, cloths, etc., are washed and sterilised. Everything is scrupulously clean, and the temperature and ventilation are scientifically correct.

"A Stilton cheese measures from 8 to 12 inches in height and some 8 inches across, and may weigh from 10 to 18 lbs. In appearance it is drab in colour, showing a curiously wrinkled

rind like the net work markings on some varieties of melon. The rind should ' give,' but at the same time feel elastic under pressure from the fingers. When it is cut, it is a pale, creamy white, opaque, and interspersed with veins of " mould,' green, rather than blue in colour, at least in the earlier stages of ripeness. Of smooth velvet-like body, the texture gradually becomes open and in the end markedly flaky, though the firm silk-like consistency of the separate portions should be maintained. In the best textured cheese the mould radiates from the centre."



MODERN STILTON CHEESE MAKING

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" Many makers sell the cheese at a month or six weeks old for the cheese merchants to mature in their own cellars. A cheese of this type seldom matures under four months and more often requires six before it is fit for the connoisseur's table."

At one time a Stilton cheese was not considered ripe for cutting until it was two years old, but this was by the old methods. With improvement in equipment, and more scientific knowledge, the ripening process is now shortened, and the best cheese is better than ever. This is the opinion of a connoisseur who is not financially interested.

Cheese-maker's Life.

The work of making is most arduous and fell heavily on the farmer's wife. Worked as a business Mrs. Watson considers it a most interesting occupation, but it is not everyone who will take the trouble to be interested. Those girls who do, enjoy it thoroughly. It requires hard work, much care and good judgment, but although the judgment must always have been as good, the work must have been even harder in days gone by than it is to-day, because improved methods and appliances and up-to-date conditions make it easier.

" To turn the cheese in the hoop is in itself an art, and requires much skill as may be imagined when one realises that each hoop contains about 26 lbs. of curd and salt."

" Cheesemakers have to be up early in the morning. At Harby work in the dairy beings at six, breakfast is at 7.30 a.m., and dinner at 12.30 p.m. Then everyone goes off duty until 4.30 p.m., when they all come on again until 6.30 p.m., to attend to the morning's curd and to take in and rennet the evening's milk. At 6.30 p.m. all go off and then take it in turns to come back at 8.0 p.m. and ladle off the curd."

About 1,200 gallons of milk are collected at Harby, and 70 cheeses turned out daily. The 200 to 250 pigs kept to consume the whey get fat. They are then sold to wholesalers in Nottingham and eventually find their way to small smokers.

Harby Stiltons are noted. Although last year was a bad season they were as good as ever and sold as well.

The advantage of being part of a big organisation is that there is never any lack of capital to supply all up-to-date needs, and whilst the produce is made in the country the organisation in the centre of the business world sees to all sales and watches the market. The farmer may be a very good farmer, but he may not be a good business man. The union of farming and business should be beneficial. Only those who have had their hearts broken through working with insufficient capital can realise what a comfort it must be not to lose a chance through lack of money.

There are other advantages ; combined forces can work a business more economically, by utilising all by-products, manufacturing for their own needs, etc. Efficient working may enable such an organisation to keep prices at a reasonable rate. On the other hand the desire for high dividends may tend unduly to raise prices to the consumer without giving the producer his share.

It is of course the business of any commercial organisation to carry on as efficiently and successfully as possible.

It is equally the housewife's job to see that she is not overcharged and that the producer is properly paid. Her traditional occupations have been removed from the home to the factory, but she still retains her administrative powers in the home if she cares to use them, and the release from heavy manual labour leaves her with more time and strength for administration.

She may still be the " lady " : the bread-giver.

As the founder (in her own home) of modern organised industry it is her business now to study the economics of the questions of production and distribution of which the first stage

is the land and the last her dining-room table.

As consumer she has unrivalled power ; if prices are too low in one respect and too high in another, it is her business to exercise her powers of control and re-adjust them. She can do this if she knows how.



PACKING THE CHEESES

She will need to study very widely and deeply and act judiciously. It is useless to play at Housewives' Associations. Knowledge must precede talk, otherwise the result is only " hot air." Courses of social and industrial history, applied economics, and practical dietetics are the present need. Housewives' Associations can profitably work with food producers, without eliminating or trying to eliminate the useful and necessary middleman. From being home manufacturers, they can proceed to help (collectively) to keep the economic balance, between the farmers and distributors, by their weight as purchasers. This is a function housewives have so far never consciously exercised in England ; but they have exercised it most successfully in Australia and America, with benefit to all concerned, even to the large commercial organisations they controlled; and most certainly to the farmers, and growers of raw produce, as well as to their own household purses. Their slogan might well be : " To see life sanely and see it whole." Their aim to give the children bread and cheese instead of burnt porridge without endangering anyone's immortal soul.

The world has need of the statesman spirit, as a protection against the professional politician, and self-seeker; and with this spirit a social conscience.

Apart from that: " It is to be noticed, and that with no small degree of satisfaction, by those interested in the progress of agriculture that wherever a factory is established the farming of the neighbourhood begins to advance, and to rise in the scale of effective working. This, after all, is what but little thought is necessary to shew would be a natural result. It is an almost necessity of the factory system that the milk supplied to it by the farmers shall be of the best possible quality ; other than this will not do for the results they aim at; other than this will not therefore be bought by them."
