

PRIMER OF DOMESTIC ECONOMY

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Primer of Domestic Economy by Edith A. Barnett & H. C. O'Neill

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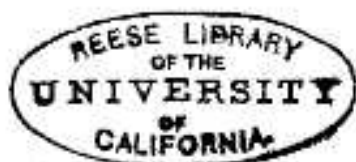
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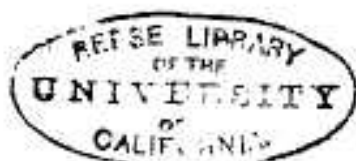
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EDITH A. BARNETT & H. C. O'NEILL

AUTHORS OF
'OUR NURSES, AND THE WORK THEY HAVE TO DO'
'NEW LIFE: ITS GENESIS AND CULTURE'



London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1894



PREFACE

IN teaching Domestic Economy one is led to observe that the interest of the class depends on their perception of the direct connection between this lesson and life. Practices familiar from babyhood step out of the corners of their minds and link themselves on to troublesome theories. Each illuminates the other. Everyday life was dull; scientific theory was difficult; on a sudden they have both become easy and interesting. And as very often happens in after-life, the "dunce" and the "scholar" change places in class.

But this combination of science and practice is precisely what makes Domestic Economy difficult to teach, and still more difficult to write about. Every science is laid under contribution by turns. The housewife must care for human beings, and therefore she should know something of the structure and functions of the human body—that is, of anatomy and physiology; she wishes to keep her family in health, and to do that she must be acquainted with

the laws of health or hygiene. She intends to provide for their intellectual as well as for their bodily growth, and at once she finds herself surrounded by problems of educational and mental science. In her daily work she is brought face to face with the laws of trade, buying and selling, supply and demand. She must reckon with the laws of mechanics and physics, which govern the movements of wind and water; and she needs mechanical skill sufficient to manage the machinery, which every year plays a larger part in household work. The chemistry of everyday life, a phrase familiar to us all, interferes in the choice of our food, and mixes itself up with our cookery; while what we know about the storage of food and about putrefaction is due to the recent researches of biologists. Not content with science, our housewife is expected to be a good practical cook, arithmetician, and needlewoman. And yet Domestic Economy is a subject which many women think beneath their capacity!

One thing must be remembered. Life is not long enough to study all these sciences for oneself. The average housewife must be content to accept the results of scientific discoveries without following out the steps by which they were reached. Domestic Economy is not a thing of words, in or out of a book, but of deeds in the home. It is nothing if not practical. To study the subject is waste of time,

unless by means of the knowledge obtained one gets better health, or more comfort for one's housemates or oneself. It is all very well to read up the subject; but reading can never stand in the place of seeing and observing. Household management comprises many branches of the science of everyday life, and the material of it, the illustration of it—nay, the thing itself—lies, not in books, but around us as we walk through the world with open eyes. What is the good of hearing about the water supply unless we intend to find out where the water we drank this morning came from, or was stored? If we trouble ourselves to read of drains or dust-bins it cannot merely be on account of the attractiveness of the subject, and so we lay down the book and walk into the backyard, where we shall enlarge our competence more than by months of reading without seeing.

Dealing with so large a subject in a book of this size, one is necessarily cramped for space. Not in a single chapter is all said that could be said. One must select, and selection implies omission. We offer no apology for omitting all recipes. There are cookery books and household books filled with them from cover to cover. We have endeavoured to explain principles only. Details of management are only part of our scheme when needed for illustration.

Sometimes when we perceive that an everyday old world custom is based on a scientific truth, we seize

hold for the first time in our lives of a notion of the reality of things, of the way in which true principles universally apply to things all the world over ; and herein lies, as we think, the chief value of Domestic Economy as a subject to be taught in schools.

September 1892.