

**THE GOURMET'S GUIDE TO
RABBIT COOKING,
IN ONE HUNDRED AND
TWENTY-FOUR DISHES**

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The Gourmet's Guide to Rabbit Cooking, in One Hundred and Twenty-Four Dishes by An Old Epicure

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AN OLD EPICURE

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BY
AN OLD EPICURE.

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INTRODUCTION.

AND why should I not, as a good gastronomer, publish some of my experiences in the "social science" of cookery? When so many misguided authors find that, for all their devotion to the Muses, they are barely requited with bread, can it be wondered at that I, as an enlightened votary, should prefer "keeping the pot boiling" under more generous auspices? No. Nor do I deem it to be a derogation of my dignity to take up a pen in favour of so gracious a subject—rather esteeming it an honourable advancement, to leave the mazes of Imagination for the more profitable paths of Reality, and to unfold the pleasantness of so preparing the gifts of Creation, that in the eyes of humanity they may appear to the best advantage.

In the good old by-gone times, when the culinary art had arrived at such perfection as to permit of its being distinguished as a "faculty"

second only in importance to medicine, its professors were so numerous that it is recorded of them that many, for want of employment, *degenerated* into troubadours, jongleurs, and poets! So, then, am I right in proclaiming it promotion to secede from the service of the Nine, and put on armour (my apron) for the advancement of the *ars coquinari*?

You will ask why, to show my adherence to the art, I have made choice of the subject treated in the following pages? Listen: When I was a little baby—and you, too, gentle reader, were a baby once, and likewise suffered all I endured in that painful period—well, when in infancy, upon frequent occasions, I experienced more than ordinary uneasiness, proceeding either from depletion, or dentition, or repletion—which was commonly my case—there was one unfailing remedy that eased my pain, beguiled me from my griefs, and even lulled me to the sweetest repose. Merely to mention it was sufficient; its name alone was a talisman which dried my tears, assuaged my complaints, and implanted peace in my palpitating bosom. This potent agent of my happiness was nothing tangible; it was never manifested to me or mortal baby; it remained a myth—an invisible charm, which was held up in promise but never in

bodily substance. It was the origin of expectation—the first thing that inculcated hope in my budding spirit, and in waiting for which I throve and grew.

Well, what was this indispensable auxiliary to the happiness and health of infancy? Reader, you know as well as I, that this, the best boon of babyhood, was the magic "rabbit-skin," which my paternal parent was reported to be hunting for my especial benefit! The power of rabbits then operated favourably upon my infant mind: in them I recognized the most supreme solace that could be afforded to afflicted humanity, and under their influence I developed in intelligence, and improved in condition. Anon I became a sportive child, and they who guided my steps into the ways of the world took pleasurable pride in rearing my tender thoughts, and in teaching my young idea how to shoot. Rabbits were my first aim. Ah, would that I could now by any action awaken so pure a joy as I in childhood felt when, fondly dreaming, I discovered a resemblance to a rabbit on the wall, which I had executed entirely by an exercise of my own unassisted abilities! The pride of authorship, or the charms of cookery, are nothing to it!

Next in our reminiscences of rabbits, we look

back with delight to that dawn of adolescence, when we were allowed the pleasure (unreciprocated, alas!) of keeping some tame ones of the species. Unfortunate animals! how they survived our unceasing attentions to their comfort is a miracle; for, labouring under a delusion that they approved of our caresses, we narrowly escaped tearing them to pieces in the repeated paroxysms of our tenderness; indeed, in more senses than one, they were continually kept in hot water. May the following pages prove a noble reparation to the whole race for what they then endured at our hands; and the mature attention we have bestowed upon their treatment indemnify them for all the errors of misapplied affection they observed in our youth; for now, in our riper years, when the downy spell of a rabbit's-skin would no longer be efficacious in alleviating a sorrow or a suffering; when beholding a rabbit in shadow would only inspire sadness at its not appearing in a more solid shape; when having to keep live rabbits would, instead of affording amusement, be an exceeding annoyance to us; still clinging to their prestige as, at our evening meal, we indulge in that pseudonymous preparation, a Welsh rabbit, we smile at the recollections awakened by the name; and, associated as they are with such plea-

sant memories of our early days, is it unnatural that I continue to derive a substantial comfort from the cause which erst gave such an amount of sentimental satisfaction?

I should not only revolt you, my dear reader, but do myself, and perchance my publisher, an irreparable injury, were I to transcribe the encomiums bestowed upon rabbits by naturalists. You would abhor us as conspiring to cook, and being accessory to eating, the tenderest parents and the most affectionate offspring to be found in the whole extent of animated nature. I should, instead of making an epicurean example of them, be defeating the ends of culinary justice, by recommending them to mercy, on account of those domestic virtues by which they are so pre-eminently distinguished.

I shall, therefore, confine myself to the claims of a more public character which rabbits have upon our consideration. Firstly, to quote from our friends the French, who possess an aptitude for delicacy of expression of which an English cook is totally deficient, the charm of rabbits consists in their being so easily and agreeably *accommodated* (mark the word), and in their capability of producing a variety of compositions, which, if proceeding from the hands of an able *artiste*, may,

for elegance, be ranked amongst the most *recherché* dishes that can dignify the table of refined and enlightened amphitryons. Another thing commendable in rabbits is their cheapness. Even one solitary rabbit will make a pretty appearance at a dinner, whereas its equivalent money's-worth of butcher's meat would be quite an uncomfortable object to contemplate. They are likewise easily obtained, being in season nearly throughout the year, are quickly dressed, have very little weight of bone, will keep well, and, besides being considered wholesome and easy of digestion, have, according to the following old rhyme, a property ascribed to them which confirms us in our estimation of their merits, and exemplifies the wisdom of the originators of cookery, in causing so favourable a combination of forces as ensues from their alliance with the admirable esculent which usually accompanies them in their culinary career:—

“For onions, you know, are generally said
To be an excellent remedy for a cold in the head;
And rabbits, I'm told by those who are smart,
Are a capital cure for a cold in the *heart!*”

I can adduce nothing stronger than this in favour of my subject, so conclude with the farewell greeting of the good people of Vienna, who, in