The Middle Class:

Their Impact on Foodways in England

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His 300 Historiography and Historical Method

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In the Victorian age in England, life was changing in many new ways. In this period, the Industrial Revolution was taking place, and it caused many changes to how things worked within families. For example, new jobs that had not been there before were available now because of factories and industries. To this, the British Empire gained the rule of India, new foods, and items started to make their way into England. For example, curry made its way into the English diet, and with the empire's expansion so did the cities. New factories were being built, and this changed the family life of the middle class.

With the impact of the foodways and the middle class in this era in England many scholars have given much thought to this manner. Some focused on the recipes of the time, others focused on daily life. In an article by Megan Ward called *A Charm in Those Fingers': Patterns, Taste, and the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* which highlighted one of the modes that recipes and other guides were given to the public. In this article as well, it highlights who people in the middle class were and it helps define what the middle class was at the time. In another article called *The Ideology of Domesticity: The Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women's Magazines* by Kay Boardman she highlights the way that the people in the middle class managed their households in the way of servants and how this coincided with women's magazines. Which can be used to understand who the middle class was. However, in an article by Susan Zlotnick called *Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England* she illustrates the impact of the British occupation of India and its effect on the food of England. To this Magaret Beetham wrote an article called *Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs. Beeton* talks about the cookbooks that were present at the time and especially highlights those written by Elizabeth Beeton. Lastly, Andrea Broomfield wrote an article called

Rushing Dinner to the Table: The 'Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' and Industrialization's Effects on Middle-Class Food and Cooking, 1852-1860 which is about the changes that the middle class had on foodways and how industrial life changed the lifestyles of many middle-class people in England. She does this by demonstrating evidence within recipes that were published in women's magazines and cookery books. All of these sources encapsulate the idea that the middle class is responsible for the changes in foodways, and they explain just how they managed to have this impact.

In the Victorian era in Britain, the middle class was considered families that could afford at least one live-in servant. [1] This distinction is what gave many people status in this world. At this time women were very clear to make this distinction from working-class women and middle-class women. For this reason, another distinction was apparent working-class women did the housework whereas middle-class women hired help to help with the housework. Women in the middle class during this age also had only a few jobs that they could occupy their time. Some had the choice due to the Industrial Revolution to work in printing or telegraphy. Whereas before this they had only the choice of being a governess in an aristocratic household. All of these jobs, however, would have had to coincide with their household responsibilities. [2] This leads to how these people made cooking change.

During Queen Victoria's reign, or the Victorian era, the middle class expanded. This was due to the Industrial Revolution that was happening simultaneously within this time period. [3]

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[1] Margaret Beetham, "Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs.Beeton," Victorian Literature and Culture, Vol.36, No.2, 2008, 402
[2] Kay Boardman, "The Ideology of Domesticity: The Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women's Magazines," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, no. 2 (2000): 150–64.
[3] Boardman. 150.

This meant that people in the lower classes had the chance to have more options in life other than the jobs that they had done previously. This created a place where people had more money than they had before, people in the middle class could cook things that they had not before. Cooking became a status marker. [4]

One way the middle class changed cooking was the use of cookery books. One of the best-selling books was *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management,* "selling over 60,000 copies in the first year after its publication back in 1861." [5] In this book it explains recipes and explains the way that food should be prepared. This book also talks about the anatomy and life of the meat that is being prepared. This book and others as Beetham explain, were geared towards the middle class. These books became so popular that they would be bought just as a statement piece to have and show people that they had a copy. However, this was not the case for most people of this period. They used these books often to understand and learn cooking of the time. [6]

Along with the new kinds of books that were coming to the market there was also the new kinds of food that were appearing in the English culinary diet. Curry from India was slowly making its way into cookbooks and other pamphlets. Due to the British Empire's expansion into other areas such as India, curry was being introduced to the English diet. As Beetham says, "'Mulligatawny' soup and 'curry' were words and dishes from the Tamil-speaking part of south India which had become 'domesticated,' both into the English language and into the diet advocated by Beeton. By the 1850s curry was a part of English diet." Beetham also says that

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[4] Andrea Broomfield, "Rushing Dinner to the Table: The 'Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' and Industrialization's Effects on Middle-Class Food and Cooking, 1852-1860." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41, no. 2 (2008): 101.

[5] Isabeth Beeton, *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management: The 1861 Classic with Advice on Cooking, Cleaning, Childrearing, Entertaining, and More* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2020), ix.

[6] Margaret Beetham, "Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs. Beeton," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol.36, No.2, 2008, 391-406

some recipe books were even slower to incorporate curry and other Indian foods into their books and it was not until 1884 that some books added it. [7]

Eventually, over time curry and other foods from India were domesticated and were culturally British. The people in England incorporated curry into many different meals and eventually, curry became a staple in the British diet. Many people in Britain considered curry a "naturalized" part of the regular diet. This in and of itself excuses the fact of where curry came from originally. British people had become so used to curry at this point that they felt that it was a normal staple to the English diet. Curry had made it so far in England that the Duke of Norfolk said, "that the starving Irish might want to consider curry powder as an excellent and nutritious substitute for their rotting potatoes." This shows that the Victorians were very accustomed to curry and its taste and popularity. [8]

Although the reason for curries entrance into English society is attributed to middle-class women, the middle class itself was viewed as one that showed "domesticity," and this had the effect of identifying the middle-class identity. The middle class is also one that meshed with the national values with imperialism. In this way, they took what people saw as British values and principles and brought things like food from British-occupied places such as curry to the British homeland of England. This is what gave women of the middle class the ability to bring in curry and make it an English staple. It was also the middle-class women such as Eliza Acton and Isabella Beeton who created cookbooks that had curry in them that introduced the people of England to curry and made it a staple in English food. [9]

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[7] Beetham. 401
[8] Susan Zlotnick, "Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 16, no. 2/3 (1996): 51–68
[9] Zlotnick. p.54

In the Victorian era, there was one thing that separated the middle class from the upper class or aristocracy and that was the food that people were eating. While the upper class was eating the latest French food, the middle class were eating the staple English food. The upper class would have spent lots of money to have the best cooks from France hired to make the latest French cuisine. That itself made the divide in the classes. To this, the cookbooks that were out there like the ones written by Beeton were not the only ones. They were the most popular but there were also ones that were made by French cooks and were sold to the upper class. These of course leave out all the old English food that its people had been eating before the French took over the upper-class kitchens. In this way, this meant that the middle-class preserved what food was English. [10]

The upper class or the wealthy did on the other hand have a few things that were still considered English food. They still made cider at their county estates and hand-smoked beef, ham, and vegetables. All these smoked ingredients would have been used for the French food that they were eating during this time. Whereas people of the middle class did not have a country estate where they could supply their ingredients like those of the upper class. The wealthy also preserved and made their food all the way up to the world wars because they were self-sufficient in food. [11]

Due to the expansion of the middle class and the Industrial revolution, cooking changed in a third way. This was caused by the amount of time and preparation that took to create the standard English recipes that had been around in the centuries before. It also caused the staple

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[10] Zlotnick. p.59

[11] Andrea Broomfield, "Rushing Dinner to the Table: The 'Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' and Industrialization's Effects on Middle-Class Food and Cooking, 1852-1860." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41, no. 2 (2008): 101–23.

recipes to be all but gone by the 1930's. This was because in previous years before the Victorian era there was a bigger divide between the upper and lower classes. When the middle class started to expand, the people that belonged to that class began to cook the old staple English recipes. This was a challenge because most people in the middle class did not have the time or the money to follow the way that these recipes had always been done. [12]

Another thing that changed cooking is the Industrial Revolution and its demand on the middle-class family. Before this revolution, middle class men were available to help with the preparation of food. But with men having to go to work this changed the family schedule and made it harder for men to help with cooking. This made it harder for women of the time to use the old cooking methods that they always had before. This also meant that the time for dinner was also pushed back further in the day to account for men's return home. [13]

Industrialization came to the cities, which meant that more factories were being created to make advanced goods. This meant that people in the middle class especially were moving into the cities. This was one of the main reasons that people had to buy from shops for their food instead of growing it themselves. During this time, the introduction of these schedules meant that they revolved around men going to work. This created a situation where the middle class could no longer preserve and store their own food. People who lived in the cities also had to rely on markets that had vegetables, fruits, dairy, and meats. Because people had to live in cities where they worked, their homes were built exceedingly small and did not have the room necessary for cooking. To this, the pantries built in these houses were nothing more than a small closet. They

[12] Broomfield. 102
[13] Broomfield. 108

also did not have the equipment that people were used to, they had the new closed coal burning ranges whereas before they had open ranges and hearths. [14]

Instead of using the recipes the way that they had been done before, the Victorian middle-class sought out new ways of making them. This included the use of processed foods and other methods. Since most people in the middle class lived in urban areas, they would visit the local grocers to get "tea, sugar, citrus fruits, and spices." They would have had to rely on other people in town to get the supplies that they needed. In the years before people had to live where they raised their food. They also had to preserve their own food and grow it to cook the recipes in the centuries before. To this people before could breed livestock, grow their own fruits and vegetables, and brew their own cider and beer. On the other hand, the middle-class people that lived in the country still had the capacity to have the land and equipment needed to keep their food and for the old English recipes. They had access to raising pigs, so they could have ham and bacon and all other sorts of livestock. [15]

Since the middle class could no longer preserve their own food, they still wanted to keep up with others, for example, with dinner parties and other engagements. To do this they brought ingredients that had flavors that would mimic those that were found in the wealthiest of dinners. Eventually with the time restrictions that the middle class had due to working hours, they started to buy cakes and biscuits instead of making them themselves. With this, recipes started to change to have store bought cakes in them. [16] In a recipe from the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*,

[14] Broomfield. 106-109
[15] Broomfield. 102-106
[16] Broomfield. 115

it includes a recipe that calls for a sponge cake that costs a shilling. In this we can see that the middle class was finding new shortcuts to cooking. [17]

Along with buying cakes and biscuits, the middle-class Victorians brought lemon powder instead of buying lemons to zest them and curd them. Lemon powder created the flavor of the lemons without having to spend money on tropical citrus fruit. To this, they also used baking powder and baking soda to make drop cupcakes. They also used "stale bakery bread" to make certain puddings. To this they used certain brands of instant gelatin in different recipes such as different creams and puddings. They also had fruit powder that they used to mimic the fruit flavor of their drinks in the summer which consisted of chemical compounds. [18]

After these processed shortcuts to making food recipes had been around for a while people in the upper middle class and the upper class started to push back on the idea of these foods. They said that the way that the recipes has been done for years was the best way to make them with the real flavors. Many people that did not have the money or the time continued to not care about the taste of the food, but the upper class and upper middle classes that had the money continued to use the long ways of doing things. However, the lower middle class did not have the space or money to keep up with the maintenance necessary for certain old recipes. As Broomfield says, "One way worked for centuries, albeit with error, while the other became the domain of the processed foods industry that people today take for granted." [19]

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[17] Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine, Vol. VII, 1853-1859.
[18] Andrea Broomfield, "Rushing Dinner to the Table: The 'Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' and Industrialization's Effects on Middle-Class Food and Cooking, 1852-1860." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41, no. 2 (2008):115-116
[19] Broomfield. 116

Overall, the time that the Victorians lived in was seen as a disadvantage to them because they were living in a time where the traditional recipes of the past could not be cooked the way that they always had, not only because of the resources, but also because the new innovations that were being added. The closed iron range that had only been available only to the wealthy was now affordable. The difficult part now was incorporating the old ways of cooking and transitioning them to the cooking times of these new ranges. This in and of itself changed cooking for the future. [20]

With this in mind the people of the time had to look at different cookbooks or cookery books as they called them, to figure out how to cook different recipes. There were many ways they found recipes, but one magazine that circled around the middle class was the *Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine*. In the Victorian age, there were many other kinds of this kind around, but this was one of the most popular in the middle class. As Megan Ward says,

> Distinguishing itself from these magazines, the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine targeted a middle and lower-middle-class audience; at 2d. it was significantly less expensive than the one-shilling lady's magazines of the past. It was also less extravagant in appearance: about the size of a modern paperback book, with a plain cover and thirty-two pages of closely spaced type. [21]

These columns tell the story of how cooking changed because they give a cookery section that overtime the changing of cooking can be seen. For example, in earlier versions of the magazine, there are recipes for fruit drinks made for the summer like lemonade. The way the lemons were preserved changed or rather the middle class used the shortcut of lemon powder. This was done mainly because when lemons were preserved, they could only be preserved for three months. To

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[20] Broomfield. 107

[21] Megan Ward, "A Charm in Those Fingers': Patterns, Taste, and the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41, no. 3 (2008): 250.

do this, though, the lemons must be placed in jars and wrapped in paper. Then they had to be wiped every ten to twenty days. [22] On top of this, to make lemonade the old way it would have required not only lemons to juice but also the rind of a lemon that had been juiced before making lemonade. On top of that, if a person wanted to keep lemon juice for other recipes or for this one, they would have had to have storage that could hold the amount of juice from the lemons. [23]

Overall, the middle class was responsible for the changes that happened to foodways during the Victorian era. They helped create new cookbooks that had not been there before, they introduced new foods, controlled what was English food, and created shortcuts to making the old recipes. The middle class had the help of the Industrial Revolution to make some of the changes that were made to cooking. Overall, cooking would never be the same after this period in history.

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[22] "Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine." Vols. I-VII, 1852-1879. Vol.1. 308

[23] Isabella Beetham, "Beeton's Victorian Cookbook." *Topsfield, Mass: Salem House Publishers*, 1988. 198; Maria E Rundell, "A New System of Domestic Cookery," From the Library of Congress, Katherine Golden Bitting Collection on Gastronomy (1810): 223

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