

The Potato

THE STORY OF ITS DISCOVERY AND ITS USEFULNESS

Though it Has Many Eyes, They Have Never Been Opened Far Enough for Their Owner to See Its Own Worth

It is not alone in the human world that the tragedies and comedies of life are enacted. The secret decision of the wise men of France to let the good honest American potato into their banquet halls after nearly forty years of exclusion shows vicissitudes in the vegetable kingdom that are not to be outdone on any stage of the human. It is a curious coincidence in the history of this apple of the earth, as the Frenchman called it, that it figured on the same great stage that Louis XVI made famous and in a measure shared its rise and fall with him. In the beginning of his reign the potato was deemed a rank poison by Frenchmen generally. Its one friend was the famous Parmentier, who cultivated it under difficulties till Louis XVI became convinced of its worth and granted Parmentier lands and protection for his potato plants. At once the despised vegetable leaped to glory along the path of its royal patron. The potato flower was worn in the button hole of the monarch and the all-potato banquet became the climax of the French chef's art and an event in the history of this most eventful period.

It was the day of the great Lavoisier, whose achievements in the world of science and interest in agricultural chemistry gave him more than national fame and authority. To win him to his cause Parmentier gave in his honor a great feast in Paris, where every dish was made of potatoes and even the brandy and liquors were produced from them. Many of the distinguished men of the day gathered at this banquet, which was deemed one of the most remarkable in history, and the glory of the potato reached its climax. But alas for the vanity of earthly honors from potato fields to thrones. The king lost his head and the potato its valuable eyes, which were no longer planted two in a row as enterprisingly as the horticulturists recommended in the high noon of its favor. Nevertheless, a vegetable with eyes was not to be despised, especially when capable of repeating itself in some 600 or more species through the use of them. It came out from its eclipse in France, as elsewhere, and by good breeding began to recommend itself to royal horticulture societies and men of science and learning of all lands. Even before its fluctuating fortunes in France it figured in the history of nations and was borne across seas and continents by scholars and explorers who gave it an honorable place in classic literature as well as foreign soil.

In various Spanish books of the sixteenth century the introduction of potatoes to the Spaniards by voyagers from Peru receives elaborate notice. Humboldt describes their place in the New World at its earliest discovery. Sir Walter Raleigh honored the North Carolina and Virginia potato tubers not only by historic notes, but by cultivation on his estate near Cork. Gerard, in the first edition of the "Gerard," not only gave the potato plant and flower the distinction of a frontispiece, but of glowing paragraphs wherein he described it as "a food, as also a meat for pleasure, equal in goodness and wholesomeness unto the same, being either roasted in the embers or boiled and eaten with oil, vinegar and pepper, or dressed any other way by the hand of some cunning cookerie." In Johnson's day it figured in the "Paradise," which one of his closest friends and associates put forth, and the suggestive names, "Triumph," "Excelsior," "Climax," "Bountiful," "Beauty of Hebron," which it achieved in the vegetable world in its different varieties, show the bright side of its history, which no French scorn of its early American characteristics can long cloud.

The patriotic defender of home products is quite right when he asserts that "the American potato permits of no comparison, whether boiled, baked, fried, scalloped, chipped, mashed or served with its jacket on." Parmentier's secret of converting it into brandy and liquor is all that is needed to make it grander in the land than the sheaf of Joseph, to which all the others did obedience. There are indications, too, that in some of those dry regions where orange rinds serve as whiskey jugs and bulldozers eat reporters, a great necessity, which is the mother of invention, will wrest the liquor juice from the bosom of the potato, and no French chef surpass the ingenuity of the thirsty American in securing the "gifts the gods provide." No offense need be taken from this suggestion either, by the temperance societies, since there must be some sparkling and stimulating cup that cheers but not inebriates, hidden in the bosom of nature somewhere, to meet that life principle, impulse, or whatever it is, that raises a thirst for it in human breasts.

Old World scientists tell us that they are already at work upon a whiskey which will exhilarate, but not intoxicate, and it may be that Parmentier's secret will soon be out and the potato crown the discovery is significant that with all the gay rousing over the potato brandy and "our" at the "greatest feast of

the nation Lavoisier, the prime guest, was not found under the table nor were any of his distinguished friends helped home by the gents d'armes. To drink with an air that, like Lamb's furious and incessant smoking, could "command the respect of his friends" would certainly be a consummation devoutly to be wished by any well-devoted drinker, and Ingersoll's famous whiskey letter to his friend Walston H. Brown shows what poetic possibilities lurk in the brain of the wise drinker. It may be that it would not be so easy to find "the breath of June and the shadow chasing each other over billowy fields" in the potato beverage, but if it did its appointed work some glorification out of the dews of night and the teeming bosom of earth would no doubt attend it.

It would certainly be well for the potato to have its own eyes opened to all the virtues within it, even if unvirtuous mortals were inclined to abuse its rich gifts as they have the liquid joy in the staves of oak or the luscious juice in the heart of the grape. Over both of these, however, the potato holds the Parmentier record of "a merry, drinking, laughing, quaffing time," which showed no death in the cup nor a single drop of poison to "steal away man's brains." Whatever the new developments in name or fame that may await this modest vegetable of the garden, it is more than probable that such effort as Cassius made at nomenclature, when he cried out in anguish at his overthrow: "O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by let us call thee devil!"

One of the most circumspect newspapers of the land declares that whatever may have been the matter with the American potato in 1875, when France rejected it, there is nothing the matter with it now. That certain figures which show the increase in the production and the demand made upon it for home consumption by people not given to feeding on poison when they know themselves. Putting all things together it might be well for Americans to keep their potatoes on their own soil; at any rate until they are well assured that there is not a hungry child left in their borders to pray in vain "Give us this day our daily tatoes," for that truly is the kind of vegetable tragedy no country can afford.

TO EXTEND TERMS

Legislature Will be Asked to Do So After It Convenes

Harrisburg, Pa., Dec. 6—A bill will be prepared for presentation to the Legislature soon after it convenes to carry in effect the constitutional amendment respecting terms of city officials, Councilmen, school directors and justices of the peace.

This bill will cover not only the extension of the term of those now in office whose tenure would have expired in April or May next, but also authorized the beginning of terms of their successors on the first Monday of December, as stipulated by the amendments.

It is stated at the Capitol that this will probably be the only bill needed to enforce amendments, everything else being cared for in the schedule which was ratified by popular vote.

It is stated at the Capitol that the new legislative reference bureau has all of the data necessary to show what laws have been passed relative to counties having more than a million population and will probably be able to assist in the drafting of what measures conditions in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties. This will be one of the first tests of the new bureau which was established immediately after the last session.

Saved From Awful Death

How an appalling calamity in his family was prevented is told by A. D. McDonald, of Fayetteville, N. C. R. F. D. No. 8. "My sister had consumption," he writes, "she was very thin and pale, had no appetite and seemed to grow weaker every day, as all remedies failed, till Dr. King's New Discovery was tried, and so completely cured her, that she has not been troubled with a cough since. Its the best medicine I ever saw or heard of." For coughs, colds, lagrippe, asthma, croup, hemorrhage, all bronchial troubles, it has no equal 50c, \$1.00. Trial bottle free. Guaranteed by S. B. Bernhart & Co.

The Battle of Gettysburg

Mr. William McNair, a prominent attorney of Pittsburg, will give his popular lecture on "The Battle of Gettysburg" at Emanuel Lutheran Church, at Lancaster, under the auspices of the Luther League, on Friday evening, December 16. Mr. McNair is a native of this place, and has risen very rapidly in the legal profession, and is also very active in politics. He has been president of the Luther League of Pennsylvania, for three successive years.

The Teachers Met.

The annual local teachers' institute of the district comprising Mount Joy Borough and township, Elizabethtown, West Donegal and part of Rapho townships, was held here on Saturday. Prof. P. M. Harbold, of the Millersville Normal School, delivered and address.

The institute was very well attended and the program as given in these columns last week was ably rendered by the participants.

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