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A COMMON COMPLAINT: DINING AT THE REFORM CLUB

By Helen Day

> CUTLETS OF COLD MUTTON (Cold Meat Cookery).
> 714. INGREDIENTS. – The remains of cold loin or neck of mutton, 1 egg, bread crumbs, brown gravy (No. 436), or tomato sauce (No. 529).
> *Mode*. – Cut the remains of cold loin or neck of mutton into cutlets, trim them, and take away a portion of fat, should there be too much; dip them in beaten egg, and sprinkle with bread crumbs, and fry them a nice brown in hot dripping. Arrange them on a dish, and pour round them either a good gravy or hot tomato sauce.
> *Time*. – About 7 minutes.
> *Seasonable*. Tomatoes to be had most reasonably in September and October.
>
> —*Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (336)

WHEN ISABELLA BEETON WROTE in her Preface to *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861) that, in order to compete with the attractions of clubs, well-ordered taverns and dining-houses that serve men so well, the mistress must be conversant with cookery and all other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home, she was making use of a narrative that would have been familiar to many of her readers. Both male and female writers of etiquette and cookery books aimed at the bourgeoisie attempted to persuade their readers of the necessity of household management by drawing on this narrative.[1]

Although Mrs Beeton, by stating that men are "*now* so well-served out of doors" (italics mine), seems to be locating the origins of this narrative in the 1850s (her book was written between 1859 and 1861), we can find similar arguments stretching back to the turn of the century (Beeton iii). *The Ladies Best Companion; or, A Golden Treasury for the Fair Sex* (c1800) advised the industrious housewife how to charm and content her husband. Nevertheless there are good reasons for locating the height of the use of this argument in the early to mid-Victorian era. Not only were there any number of newly married bourgeois mistresses who, separated from the family structure (superintendence of matriarchy) of passing down culinary and other useful information, desperately read these manuals in an attempt to learn how to live in a manner befitting their husbands' status, there was an increase in the number of men working in businesses in the metropolis and a corresponding increase

in the number of what George Sala referred to as "fashionable clubs" to accommodate them. Taverns had become increasingly off-limits for respectable bourgeois men, due to a greater sensitivity to class distinctions (Tosh 125) and these "gorgeous" and "bran-new modern" (*sic*) clubs were, according to Sala, the "growth of one generation" (209).

Charles Dickens's fictional introduction to his wife's menu book *What Shall We Have for Dinner?* (1852) reveals that the attractiveness of the Club was well established and recognised by the 1850s. The short satirical introduction is written by Lady Maria Clutterbuck, the pen name Catherine Dickens chose for her cookery book.[2] Lady Maria tells us that although her late husband, Sir Jonas Clutterbuck, was required to attend corporation dinners and the odd "turtle feast at some celebrated place in the city," his "general practice" was to dine at home, something which she puts down to her "attention to the requirements of his appetite" (Rossi-Wilcox 23). Unfortunately, many of her female friends confide that they are not so happy in their domestic relations, their daily lives "embittered by the consciousness that a delicacy forgotten or misapplied; a surplusage of cold mutton or a redundancy of chops; are gradually making the Club more attractive than the Home, and rendering 'business in the city' of more frequent occurrence than it used to be in the earlier days of their connubial experience" (23–24).[3] Anthony Lejeune in *The Gentleman's Clubs of London* (1979) recalls being told by an old member of Brooks that in his grandmother's or great-grandmother's papers was a diary with the entry: "We have now been married exactly a year, in which time my husband has dined with me but once. Every other night he dined at Mr Brooks's Club" (Brandon 108).[4]

The complaints made by the narrator of *Memoirs of a Stomach* (1853) about the "messes and slops" his bride prefers to the "sterner dishes of life" were used as justification for frequent club dining.[5] In his satire on dining, Charles Selby, as his alter-ego Tabitha Tickletooth, argues that serving up rehashed meat from the previous meal only results in husbands spending more time at their clubs and, as such, is false economy. This passage also reveals that men were anxious to escape from any involvement in domestic management: this mistress has failed to disguise both the work of the house and the prevailing "servant problem" from her husband:

> MASTER OF THE HOUSE. – 'Oh! Mary (*affecting to ignore the soap-suds, and the entrance of the washerwoman with something very like a bottle concealed under her apron*). By the bye, what is there for dinner to-day?'
> MARY. – 'Dinner, sir? (*innocently pretending ignorance*) I think it's hashed mutton.'
> MASTER OF THE HOUSE. – 'H'm. Oh! tell your mistress when she comes in, that I may possibly be detained in the city to-day on business, and she is on no account to wait dinner for me. (*Aside as he goes out:*) Ough! hashed mutton again! I'm sick of the nauseous mess. I'll drop down to Greenwich with Jawkins, and try the whitebait.' (Selby 48)[6]

Alexis Soyer, in his cookery book *The Modern Housewife* (1849), attempts to persuade his female readers that ladies might actually benefit from men dining with other men. As chef of the Reform Club, Soyer has to take a great deal of responsibility for drawing men away from their homes so it is ironic, but perhaps not surprising, that he tries to convince the "Fair Daughters of Albion" of its virtues through his cookery book (2). The reader is addressed through a series of letters between Mrs B (Hortense), a model housewife, and Mrs L (Eloise) her "eager but disorganised friend" who begs Mrs B to teach her "how to run her house

efficiently and economically" (Ray 84). Eloise implies that at least some women did not want a business-free home and longed to engage with the world of politics and commerce:

> And, perhaps, after all, we ladies are not such great losers as we might at first imagine; although we do not immediately enjoy the wit and talent thus improvisatised, yet we may receive it second-hand; as an instance, there is Mrs. –, she knows the sayings and doings of Mr. –, the witty member of her husband's club, just as if she was a member herself. (Soyer, *Modern* 419–20)

Nevertheless, what these texts do reveal is that, in print anyway, both male and female authors believed that one of the reasons married men spent so long at their clubs was the "discomfort and suffering" brought upon them by household mismanagement (Beeton iii). Although we should bear in mind that one reason that this view was expressed by etiquette and household management texts was to sell the books and, in effect, to *create* a *raison d'être* for their existence, it is clear that their solution was to urge women to create a managed, comfortable environment to tempt men back home. As Valerie Mars insists, "a repetitive theme in advising women to produce good dinners at home was to discourage their husbands from dining out" (378).

Given the problems with the home, it is interesting to consider how different the London clubs really were. Tosh maintains that clubs were often described in "quasi-domestic terms" (128) but, as Surtees, in his novel *Plain and Ringlets* explains, these "real substantial home(s)" contained "every imaginable luxury, without the trouble of management or forethought" (Brandon 109). Whilst the service, food, privacy, and cosy conversations around the hearth might be seen as a tribute to the home, it was, claims Tosh, the "absence of constraining femininity" that made the club so attractive: "The kind of conviviality it offered was a release from the burden of keeping up domestic appearances . . . All male drinking and dining, cards, billiards and 'man talk' could be pursued in the club without distraction or interruption" (129). This is probably a reference to the excessive etiquette and surveillance of the domestic dinner party. Although dinner parties were opportunities for competitive display and were a convenient means of showing friends, neighbours, associates, and competitors the décor, wife, and food one could afford, the bustle of the mistress, the energy of the servants, and the upheaval of the dining-room made the home a less than comfortable place to be on such nights.[7]

Home was a feminine – even feminised – sphere. Because men were seldom home during the day, furnishings became "the exclusive responsibility of the wife" (179). Advertising and the emphasis on display in women's magazines like the *Englishwoman's Magazine* and the *Ladies Gazette of Fashion* promoted the ideology of fashionable femininity. Every available space was filled with striped wallpaper, brocade curtains, hour-glass ottomans, paper hangings, japanned goods, papier-mâché, paintings, engravings, wax flowers and fruits under glass cases, clocks, and every description of mantel ornament. Men, claims John Gloag, may well have complained that the home was "always being disrupted by expensive novelties" and that "new fashions constantly intruded" (41). The Club rooms, on the other hand, were, according to *London of Today* (1890) "of handsome proportions" with superior upholstery but free from the colours and "graceful superfluities" which characterised domestic homes (Pascoe 117). Clubs were stable worlds where the décor, furnishings, people, and even food were familiar and seldom changed in the way that the home did. A reassuring air of comfort and solidity pervaded, where the emphasis was on tradition rather than fashion. In Gloag's terms, the club provided "comfort before elegance," a direct opposition to the elegance

before comfort expected in the home, especially those rooms, like the dining room, that were emphatically female (60).

For bachelors, young men who couldn't yet afford to set up a household "commensurate with these class dignity," the Club gave them an address and dignified place to entertain, whilst allowing them to economise in humble lodgings (Tosh 128). It was the tone set by bachelors, claims Tosh, that made clubs such an appealing "*alternative* to home life" for married men (129). Clubs offered what Tosh terms "homosociality," the regular association with other men and were "the forum in which masculine standing was appraised and recognized" (6). In fact Clubs were considered by some not only to be "productive of neglect of home duties in married men" but also of "irrevocable celibacy in bachelors" (Sala 213). Indeed Lady Blessington remarked of clubmen that they "prefer a well-dressed dinner to the best dressed woman in the world" (Sheppard 352).

While it was clear that a subscription club in permanent and secluded premises had much to offer both married and single men, it was recognised that Club life was not entirely free from problems. Exclusivity was imposed by the cost of membership as well as the need to be put up for election and interested parties had to be accepted by existing members. Anyone put up for election could be "pilled" or blackballed. William Makepeace Thackeray explains, only partly in jest, that if your name were Smith, "all the Smiths in the club would combine against you, through fear that their letters might be misdelivered to you" (Brandon 106). The newsagent William Henry Smith (W. H. Smith) was blackballed from the Reform Club in 1862 as a "presumptuous tradesman" (Davenport-Hines). Sala reminds us that, even when a member had been accepted, his position remained precarious. The "awful committee" with "dread complacency" could "unclub a man for a few idle words inadvertently spoken" and "blast his social position for an act of harmless indiscretion" (214).[8]

Despite the draw of Clubs as places free from domestic surveillance the *Leeds Mercury* in 1849 commended clubs for providing "a mutual surveillance and a favourable influence" on men who found it inconvenient to dine at home (Tosh 128). Concerns about being invisible – not being seen by the right people – or too visible – having one's behaviour exposed – reveal that there was a male economy of surveillance in operation. Much as they attempted to separate themselves from the "home," the behaviour and concerns of members was often remarkably similar to that of the master and even mistress of the bourgeois household.

In an effort to find out what conditions were like in Clubs, especially the food and service, I visited the archives of the Reform Club in July 2005. This was the Club where Soyer, French chef and author of *The Modern Housewife: or Ménagère* (1849), presided over the kitchens from 1837 until 1850. The Reform Club, on the south side of Pall Mall, between the Travellers' Club and the Canton Club, was founded by the Liberal members of the two Houses of Parliament at the time of the Reform Bill, 1832 when Edward Ellice the Whig party Whip and others of a radical political persuasion were refused entry to Brooks's.[9] In 1850 Peter Cunningham, in the *Hand-Book of London*, records that the club has 1000 exclusive members of either House of Parliament, entrance fee 25 guineas, annual subscription for the first five years of election 10/ 10*s*, subsequently 8/ 8*s*. By 1865 there were 1400 members and the entrance fee was 26/ 5*s* (Cruchley).

The Club's membership, according to Stephen Mennell, embodied the peculiar political blend of the early Liberal Party – "the good living of the Whig grandees with the austerity of the early capitalists, bourgeois vulgarity with social concern" (151). Two of the founding members, Edward Ellice and James Morrison, for example, were both merchants and

politicians. There were authors and educationalists, election agents, civil servants, police magistrates, and economists and even the landscape gardener and architect Sir Joseph Paxton. Of fourteen early members and those on the founding committee noted in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, about a third went to university and were called to the bar; the majority were either self-made businessmen and politicians or had taken on the family business.[10] Financial loss followed by commercial success, threatened by bankruptcy was a common narrative. Of these fourteen members, most were married with children; indeed ten were already married and three married in the 1840s leaving only one – William Joseph Denison, banker and politician, unmarried.[11] The majority also had an average of five children, with two having ten children: these were no doubt the husbands bemoaned by the friends of Lady Maria Clutterbuck.

The Reform was a handsome and imposing palatial structure and in 1837 the architect Charles Barry won the competition for the design of a new clubhouse which opened in 1841, providing a morning room, coffee room, Stranger's room, audience room, parliamentary library, drawing room, and map-room. 1837 was also the year that Alexis Soyer became chef. It was considered a sign of quality and prestige to have a French chef and by 1844, the *Times*, in envious terms, writes that the Reform Club has, for some years past, "lived entirely upon the reputation of its club-house" and "the supposed reputation of its enormously-puffed culinary department" (Brandon 104).

The Coffee Room Complaints Book

AMONGST THE ROWS OF leather-bound books in the Reform Club archive, I found the "Coffee Room Complaints Book 1837–42" (thereafter "Complaints Book"), the book which recorded the replies of the Club Committee to complaints written in the Coffee Room (the main dining-room) by members. Many of these complaints were written on the Bill of Fare. According to Sala, most of the members "never [trouble] themselves about club matters, save when they are called upon to vote" and the affairs of the Club were managed by a "snug little Committee" who "do all the work and all the talking," taking on the responsibilities of finance, service and order (203–04). This was remarkably similar to the role of the bourgeois "Mistress" of *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, who, like the "leader of any enterprise" entered into a "knowledge of household duties" for the "happiness, comfort and well-being" of her "family" (1). She was required to balance the household accounts, engage (and fire) servants, and superintend staff. In a similar manner to the Mistress, the Committee was "the Alpha and Omega in the government of [its] establishment; and it is by [its] conduct that its whole internal policy is regulated" (18).

The "Complaints Book" records 199 replies in the five years from June 1837 until August 1842.[12] One letter counts as one complaint even if more than one dish or ingredient or even if more than one type of complaint is mentioned. Although in the first year, 1837, complaints are answered (good intentions) almost every month, in later years replies tend to start every month and then tail off into batches every three months or so. There are some large gaps, such as between May to Nov 1838 and July 1839 to Jan 1840, and from Aug 1840 to May 1841. It is difficult to know whether there were periods when more or less than average complaints were made as we have no way of knowing when the letters from members were written. Batches were obviously dealt with when the Committee met, averaging five or six complaints a month in most months, although in a few this is raised to

twenty (July 1837), fifteen (May 1839), and nineteen (June 1842) all in the late Spring and Summer months (perhaps when some of the servants took leave). This is really too small a sample to draw many overall conclusions about the number of complaints per month; it is far more interesting to look at the type of complaints made and to compare these concerns with those detailed by Mrs Beeton. Although there were any number of cookery books and books on domestic economy published in the 1830–1850s, I have chosen *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861) not only because Isabella Beeton combines recipes with instructions but for the wonderful essays she provides on the role of the mistress and her servants, vignettes that sum up early-mid century attitudes towards managing a household.

Three Main Complaints: Cost, Quality, and Service

THE THREE MAIN TYPES of complaints detailed by members are about cost, quality, and service. The aims of the Committee, as far as I could discern from this "Complaints Book" alone, are to provide and serve quality goods at the best prices, and this can be seen in three letters. In one the Committee will "endeavour to procure such provisions as will give satisfaction to a member of the Club," in another, that "no effort shall be wanting to procure the best deal" and in another "to make the attendance to Members of the Coffee room as perfect and satisfactory as possible."

The letters detailing these concerns illustrate the same tensions and contradictions that are at work in the domestic economy. The need to display quality cooking and ingredients is juxtaposed against concerns over economy. The same committee who need to be seen to "deal" with servants who have annoyed members have anxieties about finding and keeping good staff. They also have to explain to members who are rather above being concerned about where their food comes from, the reason that the price of certain foods fluctuates according to season and availability. Indeed, the contradictions that the Committee have to live with are similar to those faced by many middle-class women during this period.

The Committee makes every attempt to explain reasons for cost, quality, and service and to assure members that complaints are taken seriously and, where applicable, will be dealt with. In many letters, it is not clear what the problem is, only which servants have been called to account. If the Cook and Steward are cautioned, as they frequently are, this could be an issue of quality or of service, the quality of raw ingredients, the cooking or the dressing and serving of a dish. I have divided responses into instances where the complaint is unequivocally "upheld," instances where the complaint is definitely "not upheld" and those where a compromise has been reached. The compromise might be that the Committee just expresses its concern and assures the member that they always endeavour to assure that such a thing does not happen, but no action is taken or, in the case of complaints about wine, action is delayed; i.e., if this is a one-off nothing will be done but if the problem reoccurs the wine will be sent back to the merchant. Where a complaint is upheld I have noted which servant or tradesman is spoken to or cautioned or indeed dismissed.

Replies to members are always courteous and the Committee endeavours to behave in a gentlemanly manner, treating every complaint as serious and endeavouring to find a solution:

> Mr D Gillow Esqu 27th July 1839
> With respect to the fish, that [the Committee] will endeavour to make such arrangements with the fishmonger as will enable them to reduce the price charged in the Coffee room; with respect to the

> price charged for a fowl, I am to acquaint you that looking at the price paid by the Club for the fowl (4/?) the Committee are of the opinion that it should have been charged 4/6. The Committee have given directions that prawns shall in future be charged cost price, which the Steward would have done in the present instance had he been able at the time to ascertain the cost of them. The charge for cauliflower is an error which the Committee regret, but which they hope will not occur again. ("Complaints Book")

The question about "What it is to be a gentleman?" asked by Thackeray in *The Book of Snobs* 1846 "haunted the Victorians in the . . . mid-century years" (St George 38): "Is it to be honest, to be gentle, to be generous, to be brave, to be wise, and possessing all these qualities, to exercise them in the most graceful outward manner? . . . Ought [a gentleman's] life to be decent, his bills to be paid, his tastes high and elegant, his aims in life lofty and high?" (Thackeray 270). The Committee are expected to "be" all these things but, perhaps more importantly, to show by a "graceful outward manner" that they possess these qualities. The entire discourse of complaints was mediated by this requirement to display conduct that was beyond reproach, as anyone could read these replies.

Members too, are expected to follow gentlemanly codes of conduct. On only one occasion does the Committee have to admonish a member for his comments. A separate letter, dated 18 November 1852 (after the "Coffee Room Complaints Book" was discontinued and Soyer had left) reveals that M. Forster MP's letter of complaint about being overcharged for breakfast has resulted in a special meeting of the sub-committee to deal with his "offensive character." His reply is extremely sarcastic and amusing, mocking the format and language of the Committee's own letters:

> I am sorry to have been the unthinking and unconscious cause of occupying the time of the sub-committee which might be so much more properly and advantageously employed in the better management of the club, the bad management of which has been much complained of for some years past. ("Letter of Complaint from M Forster MP, 3rd Jan 1852")

Complaints about Cost

THERE ARE FORTY-SIX LETTERS of complaint about cost: twenty-five are about the cost of individual articles or dishes while twenty-one are queries about charges. There are two types of queries over charging: one that members have been charged too much for an individual dish; these are usually attempts to point out mistakes or argue a case. The other type of query over a charge involves misunderstandings about what is included under the heading "Table." "Table" referred to the bread and other accompaniments that were served automatically at every meal for a set charge. It also probably functioned as a service charge for individual items to make it worth while preparing, since a charge is made for "Table" when "a simple sandwich is had either before or after 4 o'clock" ("Complaints Book").

While only thirteen complaint letters about cost (inclusive individual items, charge queries, etc.) are ratified, twenty-nine are not upheld, showing that, in general, the committee believe they have authority in such matters and that they have indeed procured the best possible deals.

Cost of Individual Articles/Dishes (Twenty-five Letters)

AS THE MENUS FROM the Reform Club were mislaid, probably during a "clear out," it is doubly fortunate that we can learn the prices of some dishes from these letters. Parsley and Butter sauce was 6*d* while Pork was 2*d* and the charge for two artichokes was 1/. John Robertson was acquainted on 8th Aug 1837 that the committee did not consider the charge of 1/6 per head for Ham to be an "overcharge." Likewise, the committee regrets that members should have found the price of cold lamb to be high but it is "an expensive joint."[13]

C E Jenningham Esquire is told on 29th June 1839 that the charge of 2*d* for lamb is "the same as at the Atheneum (*sic*) and other leading clubs." A complaint about the price of fish lead to an enquiry about the price of the same dish at the Clarendon Hotel, "the price of 3 portions would have been 10*s*/" while the charge at the Reform "being 7/6 or 2/6 per portion," suggesting that the Club wanted to keep its prices competitive in relation both to other clubs and to Hotel restaurants.

W A Smith Esquire complains about the "High price charged for new potatoes" and is informed that "as soon as the market price of potatoes is lowered, a corresponding reduction of the price to be charged in the Coffee room will be made" (20th June 1837). This letter suggests that prices for dishes changed according to the cost price to the Club and that the Club was keen to pass on savings to members rather than make a profit. If the cost of an ingredient was raised in the marketplace however, the Club made sure it was not running at a loss.

There often seems to be a system of financial negotiation between the Committee and its members based almost entirely on market-place economics, the amount of money paid by the Club rather than to the time taken to prepare the dish or the expertise required. The Committee consider that, even though the price of three lamb chops was charged according to the Bill of Fare, it "might be reduced to 2/" and that they have "now reduced the price of a lettuce without dressing to 3*d*."

An exception to this rule is made for the *Vol-au-Vent*, one of the only prepared dishes mentioned in the letters. The letter refers to a complaint about the high price of this dish. The Committee's response is that, while it can reasonably reduce the price to 3/ "without subjecting the Club to a loss," considering the "expensive materials of which that dish is composed," they cannot agree that "it was charged twice what it ought to be." The member's perception that the dish was overpriced could have arisen from visiting other clubs, or restaurants but it is more likely that he had little knowledge of how long *Vol-au-Vents* took to make, how much effort was expended on getting them to rise and brown perfectly, and how valued they were in the culinary profession. The following recipe is from Soyer's *Gastronomic Regenerator:*

No. 1140. Vol-au-Vents

> Of all things in pastry require the most care and precision; they that can make a good vol-au-vent may be stamped as good pastrycooks, although many variations in working puff paste, all others are of a secondary importance. Make a pound of puff paste (No. 1132) giving it only six rolls and a half instead of seven, leave it an inch in thickness, make a mark upon the top either round or oval, and according to the size of your dish, then with a sharp-pointed knife cut it out from the paste, holding the knife with the point slanting outwards; turn it over, mark the edges with the back of your knife, and place it upon a baking sheet, which you have sprinkled with water; egg over the top, then dip the

> point of the knife into hot water, and cut a ring upon the top a quarter of an inch deep, and half an inch from the edge of the vol-au-vent, set in a rather hot oven, if getting too much colour cover over with a sheet of paper, do not take it out before done, or it would fall, but when quite set cut off the lid and empty it with a knife; if for first course it is ready, but if for second, sift sugar all over, which glaze with the salamander. (483–84)[14]

Although a few merchants may have been aware of the cost of some ingredients, for many married men, it would be their wives who were in charge of budgeting on a day-to-day level while bachelors would be used to dining out or dining at their club and would not themselves purchase ingredients from shops or market stalls. These replies may have educated members about the cost of ingredients: however it is more likely that the primary concern of members was value for money. The economic reasoning and clear instructions about cost price and price charged by the Reform Club was something most bourgeois men would have found familiar and reasonable.

The comfort of the clubs was "such as to be unattainable in a private family except by the opulent, though here brought within the means of those whose means were comparatively moderate" (Weale 293). There was more variety and, according to Sala, a man could dine on drink and food of a better quality than he could get for the same amount in his own home, as long as the consumer could afford to pay cash, credit not being acceptable. An added benefit was that prices were clearly marked on the Bill of Fare enabling members to ensure that they did not inadvertently go beyond the sum they thought fit to spend on a meal.

The Club seems to make every effort to give the members what they request for dinner and go to somewhat extraordinary lengths on a few occasions. A member querying the price he was charged for red mullet is told that, because he ordered a dish "not on the Bill of Fare," the Steward was "obliged to purchase it at the market price." However, the Committee also find that the Bill of Fare was not "so efficient as it ought to have been" and that the Clerk of the kitchen has been admonished. The price was reduced from 4/ to 2/. This suggests that one of the Clerk's jobs is to procure the best ingredients and to go to some lengths to search out what is available in the market-place. The fact that a member was told that he should pay the 2/ for sole au gratin "as that dish was not on the bill of fare for the day" also suggests that dishes were chosen for the bill of fare partly for economic reasons. If a fish was particularly expensive, due to season or scarcity at a particular time of year, it was not purchased by the Club unless requested. By detailing lists of "Times when things are in Season" Mrs Beeton shows us that this knowledge, once common, was rare, largely as a result of city living (33). In her introduction to the fish recipes, Mrs Beeton notes, "*Nothing is more difficult than to give the average prices of Fish, insomuch as a few hours of bad weather at sea will, in the space of one day, cause such a difference in its supply, that the same fish – a turbot for instance – which may be bought to-day for six or seven shillings, will, tomorrow, be, in the London markets, worth, perhaps, almost as many pounds*" (115).

Queries over Charges (Fourteen Letters)

IN MANY CASES CHARGES were made in error: "the charge of 1/- was an error committed in the absence of the Steward" and "Steward to return overcharge of 1/6," "the charge of one shilling for a cup of coffee served up in the manner described to you was wrong and should only have been 6*d*." The Committee does endeavour to explain that "in the hurry of

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business in the Coffee Room it does sometimes happen that mistakes are made by the waiters in making out Member's bills." From this we can see that the overall responsibility for the bills and for returning overcharges was that of the Steward of the Coffee Room.

The Committee seem always ready to take another look at an issue concerning members and to respond to changes in circumstances. There are two letters about the "prices charged at the Stranger's Table." This was the table set aside for members dining with invited non-members of the Club. The first letter states that "enquiries have been made and it is believed that the mode of charging at the Stranger's table, at the Reform Club, is more specific as well as more moderate than at other clubs when Strangers are admitted." The second letter, following closely on the heels of the first, introduces a change in policy so that "the prices to be charged in future at the Stranger's table will be the same as those charged to members of the Club" with the exception that "one shilling will be charged to the strangers as 'table'" but only 6*d* to the members who invited the Strangers. This suggests that both Strangers and the Members who invited them sat at this Stranger's Table but that while in the past they had been charged different amounts for the main dishes this was no longer to be the case.

We learn that, although members can order whatever they like from the Dinner menu, if they require Supper they pay a set price for all the dishes laid out, whether or not they eat all of them. One member complains in May 1838 that he has been charged 2/6 for a salad and is directed that "members who take supper at [the supper table] pay 2/6 each whether they partake of only one or all of the dishes on the table." A year later in 1839, when the same complaint is made, the Committee explain that a member ordering salad "apart from the supper table" will only be charged sixpence.

Queries over Charge of "Table" Items (Seven Letters)

FOR MATTERS SUCH AS cost and for ascertaining which items should be included in "Table" the Committee often compared their prices and practice with those of other London Clubs; the Committee have ascertained that "no club in London includes peas in the charge for 'Table'" (letter to John Robertson, 8th Aug 1837). By combining information in three letters we learn that the 6*d* for "Table" includes bread, Cheese, Beer, and vegetables and that it is charged "on all dinner after 4 o'clock" and that the 6*d* is the same charge in all Clubs "except the Windham and Senior United Service Clubs where a higher price is charged." Four months after a statement that "Pickles have always been charged when called for," there comes a letter indicating that, after an enquiry about the practices at other Clubs, another change of policy will take place. These letters were probably from new club members who were not familiar with the schemes for charging at "Table" and Supper or perhaps those who had visited other clubs and enjoyed a different policy.

In November 1841 a separate "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841," was commissioned by the Committee to show how far the Club had benefited, or otherwise, by the "recent increase of 3*d* in the charge for 'Table.'"[15] The reason for this increase appears to be concern over the cost to the Club of dinners for an increasing number of servants. The following table is offered as part of this "Report" and the conclusion reached that due to the corresponding increase in the number of member's dinners, the proportion of member to servant dinners remains stable:

	Members Dinners	Establishment	Servants Dinners	Proportion of Member Dinners to Servants
1840	1911	35	980	34 to 35
1841	2945	50	1400	52 to 50

(Table 1: "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841")

In the eight weeks ending 6th Nov 1841, the number of members who dined in the Coffee room was 2,701, while the number of Strangers was 244, making a total of 2,945 meals provided. The "extra receipt arising from the increasing charge of 'Table'" was:

2, 701 members at 3*d*	33.15.3
244 Strangers at 6*d*	6.2.0
	Total £39.17.3

(Table 2: "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841")

The club provided roughly 340 meals per week, around 50 per day. We can see just how much effort went into keeping costs as low as possible whilst ensuring that the Club did not make a loss and that decisions made were primarily financially based.

Complaints about Quality

THERE ARE FIFTY-THREE LETTERS complaining about the quality of food and drink and nine about alcohol. The word "quality" is frequently used and seems to cover all manner of concerns that the food is not acceptable. Complaints include those about the texture of the food – "tough," "raw" – those about the way dishes were dressed and served up – "cold," "underdone" – and those about quantity – "insufficient." There is, however, little clarification about what is understood by "quality" food and drink and few descriptions of what the food tastes like.[16]

Most of complaints seem to be about quality of food supplied by tradesman rather than the quality of cooking but there are some occasional comments such as a complaint that "the veal cutlets supplied for . . . dinner were not fit to be eaten" and another that the fish "was carelessly dressed and not eatable" and yet another that the "beef was tough and the potatoes were sent out cold" and two where the "leg of mutton" and the "fowl" was "tough." "Toughness" was a relatively common complaint. There were a few complaints that food or drink was served cold, "tea," "coffee," and "potatoes," and two about food being underdone: "the pudding and potatoes" were "not quarter done" and "the mutton served up for . . . dinner was 'raw and hardly fit to eat'" (letter to Mr A Smith 8th March 1839).

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The only explanation given in these letters for the poor quality of cooking is one for trout where "the 2nd cook, by mistake, powdered it with salt instead of sugar" (letter to Hon D McDonald, Jan 4th 1840). There is a similar apology for "the mistake which occurred in dressing your dinner."

Although the word "quality" is mentioned in the majority of these letters ("the quality of coffee supplied to members of the club [was deficient]" letter to Edward Kendall Esquire Jan 27th 1838), there is no clarification about what is meant by quality i.e., too tough, too fatty, salty, sweet, strong, weak, tasteless, unbalanced, etc., although the complaint that the potage was "indifferent" does suggest that it did not taste of much. Instead of the descriptions of food we might expect in restaurant reviews today all we really get are value judgements that the food did not meet the diner's expectations. There is significant use of gradable adjectives: normative ("good," "bad"), comparative ("better," "inferior") and superlative ("finest," "best") but few hints as to how members are arriving at these positions.

Likewise, the Committee uses similar language in its responses: the steward has been directed to "be extremely particular in ascertaining that the quality is good," and "only the best description of meat" should be served, "unacceptable," "not of good quality." The "melted butter" was "bad," and oranges, "inferior." The Butcher is warned that meat should be sent in "the finest description" and in a letter to Messrs Palmer and Jay, 4th May 1939 the Fishmonger is warned that "a part of the fish supplied by you to the Club yesterday was of very inferior quality" and requested to "supply better fish" or "fish of the best quality." At the beginning of each of her recipe sections, Mrs Beeton provides information on how to ascertain the freshness and quality of meat and fish. In purchasing lamb, for example, she advises the mistress that "the quality of the fore-quarter can always be guaranteed by the blue or healthy ruddiness of the jugular, or vein of the neck" while also informing her that "amongst epicures, the most delicious sorts of lamb are those of the South-Down breed, known by their black feet; and of these, those which have been exclusively suckled on the milk of the parent ewe, are considered the finest" (330). However, even Mrs Beeton does not describe how the lamb actually tastes.

Overall members demonstrate little of the language of food criticism. Gastronomic writing in England largely followed the French model of Grimrod de la Reynière whose Jury des Dégustateurs met weekly to pass less than objective judgements on dishes from restaurateurs and food merchants (Mennell 267–68). Mennell insists that, "whatever influence gastronomes had in shaping taste was exerted in a consistent direction – towards discrimination, choice and delicacy in matters of eating" (272). Through gastronomic literature such influences began to spread to the wider public. To speak of a new dining public, meant, by definition that "there was now such a thing as *public opinion* in matters of culinary taste" (Mennell 143).

Gastronomes like Lancelot Sturgeon and Abraham Hayward encouraged talk about food, as this paragraph from Sturgeon's *Essays, Moral, Philosophical and Stomachial on the Important Science of Good Living* (1822) reveals: "It formerly was considered well-bred to affect a certain indifference for the fare before you; but fashion has acquired more candour, and there is now no road to the reputation of a man of *ton*, so sure as that of descanting learnedly on the composition of every dish" (41–42, qtd. in Mennell 274). What is more, for men, gourmandism could be presented in terms of "political economy" and therefore a suitable and popular conversation topic. In the words of the gastronome Brillat-Savarin in *La Physiologie du Goût* (1825):

> It is gourmandism which sends wines, spirits, sugar, spices, pickles, salted food, and provisions of every kind, down to eggs and melons, across the earth from pole to pole. It . . . determines the relative price of things mediocre, good, and excellent, whether their qualities are the effect of art or the gift of nature. . . . It . . . forms the livelihood of the industrious throng of cooks, confectioners, bakers, and others of all descriptions concerned with the preparation of food, who in their turn employ other works of every kind for their needs, thus giving rise at all times to a circulation of funds incalculable in respect to mobility and magnitude by even the most expert brains. (133)

Whatever the graduations of social status outside the Club, gourmandism helped to create the identity of the "Club-man": gourmandism "gradually draws out that convivial spirit which every day brings all sorts together, moulds them into a single whole, sets them talking, and rounds off the sharp corners of conventional inequality" (Brillat-Savarin 138). Club dining, according to Valerie Mars, was at "the core of male networking" and promised useful business and professional contacts. It even provided opportunities for "dining with those who could not be invited into the home for reasons of incompatibility of their rank or reputation" (378). Reciprocal social dining was impossible for those, like Karl Marx, who had status but lived in poverty. The Club offered a "semi-private" place to dine that was "more neutral" than the home: "Clubs were ideal places not only for hierarchists and individualists to meet, but for them to meet isolates" and hear their views and ideas (Mars 378–79).[17] Soyer, in particular, was much in favour of male-only dining, as he attempts to convince his female readers: "When men of wit and talent meet together around a table, upon which the viands are well chosen and artistically prepared, I can imagine that the mind of man is more amiably disposed than in ordinary times, and ready to impart the talent which he possesses in bright corruscations (sic) of wit or new flights of genius to those around him" (*Modern* 419).

Mennell argues that, overall, gastronomic writing had the democratising result of "widening the circle for good eating" (275). When it came to alcohol, and especially wine, however, a more complex language and understanding was necessary. Complaints about wine were often "referred to the Wine Committee" but we only have one letter where the Committee attempts to offer a suggestion about why the quality of a bottle of port was not good and this was "Crockford's" that had been much used by the Club without previous complaint: "the particular bottle served" might "be 'corked' or otherwise inferior to the general stock."

There are only nine letters complaining about the alcohol served in the Club. This could be because members complained directly to the Wine Committee or to the Butler or Steward. In a few cases the wine was "on trial" (Justerin & Brooks Champagne) and the member is assured that, as it "doesn't appear to be approved, no further supply of it will be had." A "sub-committee" is appointed "to consider the state of the cellar and to make arrangements for serving to the Club, in the future, a supply of better wines." A letter addressed to "Gentleman" in the Committee which agrees that they "will avail themselves of [their] offer to supply the Club with Madeira on the term made in [the] letter, 45 per dozen and 1/6 off for bottle returned" reveals that some members were clearly involved in the wine trade.

The Committee nearly always compromises in its responses to complaints about wine, that is, they defer action until the next bottle of wine: "there is only now in the cellar 3 dozen of that wine and if it should appear that the next bottle which is uncorked is not good, the Committee will return it to the merchant who supplied it." The relatively few number of complaints about alcoholic drinks, however, could be because members had little idea

about what constituted a "good quality" wine. While it is easy to complain that the meat was "tough" or the potatoes "cold," one needs a more complex language to describe wine. Also, unlike the members mentioned earlier, those who were unsure of whether they could judge quality, might be wary of appearing ignorant and perhaps betraying their class origins.[18]

Responses to Complaints about Quality

THIRTY-SIX COMPLAINT LETTERS about the quality of the food are upheld and, the fact that there are no instances where the complaint is definitely not upheld, suggests that the Committee agrees with, or feels it should support, all its members who complain about the quality of the food. The number of servants and tradesmen who are called to account for themselves before the Committee supports this. In a number of letters to club members there is mention of the Fishmonger (eight), Butcher (twelve) and Potatoe (*sic*) Merchant (three) being warned that, unless the quality of meat or fish supplied to the Club are of the best quality, the Club will discontinue dealing with them.

In some cases the letters to the tradesmen are copied into the "Complaints Book," presumably so that members can see that their concerns have been acted upon. On 30th Sept 1837 Mr May the Fishmonger is asked "if you have any explanations to offer, you may have an opportunity of doing so before the House Committee on Friday next at 4 o'clock." Mr May's stay of execution only lasted until 11th November when he was discharged. Unfortunately the next Fishmongers, Messrs Palmer and Jay, are also cautioned on 4th May 1839 that "a part of the fish supplied by you to the Club yesterday was of very inferior quality and that unless you in future supply fish of the best quality the Club will be under the necessity of discontinuing dealing with you." On 29th Feb, 1840 a member is reassured that, since the oysters supplied to him were "not good," another fishmonger has been appointed to supply oysters to the Club.

Overall there are four discharge letters to merchants, two to the Fishmonger and one each to the Butcher and Potatoe Merchant. What comes across clearly in these letters is that tradesmen were easily exchanged and that threats to discontinue service were followed through.

One particularly fascinating letter of 6th Oct 1837 outlines the responsibilities that both the servants and tradesmen have in ensuring that the food served is of good quality. Because the Cook is the last person to have a choice about whether a food should be cooked and served or not, here it is intimated that he has more power than might otherwise be expected. Nevertheless we might imagine some of the arguments that ensue below stairs when the final provisions are delivered:

> The Butcher and Fishmonger have been again called before the Committee, and have been informed that unless the articles supplied them are of the first quality the Club will not deal with them in future. The Steward has been cautioned to be particularly careful in the selection of provisions and the Cook has been ordered by the Committee to refuse to cook such provisions as do not appear to him of the best description.

Servants are regularly summoned before the Committee on matters of quality. The Cook is called ten times, the Steward five, implying that the ultimate responsibility for the quality of food served up to members is the Cook's. On 5th March 1838 a member is informed that

the Cook has been discharged and it is hoped that "the Cooking in the Club will be better in future." Since this "Cook" was obviously not Soyer, we can assume that references to "Cook" in the letters are not the great chef himself but the head cook who actually cooked the majority of dishes for everyday fare in the Club House.

Soyer's role was to teach his apprentices, to invent dishes and to device menus, especially on the occasion of private or celebratory dinners given at the Club.[19] It was also his job to show people around the Reform Club kitchens.[20] These had been designed by the architect Charles Barry in consultation with Soyer.[21]

In the later years of his employment, Soyer began to express concerns about the quality of food coming out of his kitchens and indeed he left in 1850. According to Volant and Warren his secretaries, he felt the proposed change in policy over admitting Strangers would not only challenge his status but also dilute the quality of the meals he provided:

> M. Soyer, finding that a change was intended in the admission of strangers into the coffee-room, expressed his disapprobation, and intimated that, if they were really admitted every day, as contemplated by the Committee, instead of twice a-week, as heretofore, he considered that the Reform Club would become a regular restaurant; not that he cared what they made of it, but the number of assistants in the kitchen must then be greatly increased, and as he thought that the same attention could not be bestowed, and the members served in the usual style of cookery, he, therefore, would retire from the Club, as soon as the Committee could get suited with a cook. (Volant and Warren 163–64)

Complaints about Service

AT THE CLUB, MEN could dine at whatever hour suited them, according to the circumstances which they were placed by their business. It is no mistake that Sala chooses to visit the "Fashionable Club" on his *flâneur*'s excursion around London at "Five O'Clock," the time when married men were expected home for dinner. As Tosh argues, bourgeois men were increasingly disturbed by "the tyranny of the five-o'clock tea" (7). Time had become a social weapon, especially for women, who allotted specific times for social functions like tea, the visit, and dinner (St George 116). At the Club time had less meaning, since one could always be served food without fuss, even if it was only toasted cheese.

Nevertheless, there are more complaints about service than anything else, suggesting that, for members, this was the aspect that they considered most important. It may be that members were more sensitive to issues of attendance by servants because they had problems at home and came to their Club expecting to get away from such concerns. Because this was a familiar matter, it may also have been that members felt more confident asserting their rights to good service. While it was the role of the mistress to deal with most of the servants (who were most often female) at home, here this devolved to the Committee.

The relation of servant to employer at this time was a strange hybrid, partly commercial, in that servants could take their labour elsewhere, and partly that of subordinate towards superior (Horn 125). Although reports of studied insolence were satirized in *Punch*, the custom of moving to a fresh situation was far more common. Pamela Horn claims that domestic records indicate just how often servants did leave their place but it is impossible to tell from the "Complaints Book" how many servants left of their own accord. Most of the

complaints are about poor service by staff in the Coffee room, although there are a few about the rudeness of staff.[22]

In a large club like the Reform, where meals were served in different circumstances (in the Coffee room or upstairs in a member's room), it wasn't always clear whose responsibility certain jobs were. If a snack was requested in the evening, after the main kitchen facilities were closed, was it the role of the cook or the housekeeper to provide it? This letter to R R Preston Esqre of 24th Nov 1837 is my favourite of all the complaint letters: "Regret that you should have suffered any inconvenience in consequence of a misunderstanding between the Cook and Housekeeper. The matter has been settled by the Committee and no misunderstanding as to whose duty it is to prepare toasted cheese can exist in the future." ("Complaints Book"). Mrs Beeton takes pain to point out the "grave" error, into which some mistresses fall, of not "when engaging a servant, expressly [telling] her all the duties which she will be expected to perform." This is "an act of omission severely to be reprehended" since it can lead to domestic contention and the frequent exchange of servants (1861, 7).

Response to Complaints about Service

IT IS MUCH EASIER to collate information about service from the responses rather than detailing the complaints, as was done for "cost" and "quality." The complaints against servants were most often about "irregular" or "deficient" attendance and carelessness: the Committee express their "deep regret that the coffee and muffins of which you complain should have been improperly served up."

The fact that forty-five complaints about service are upheld reminds us of the status of the Club members and the unwritten rule that the Club is a place of privilege where it is the Committee who has to deal with servants and ensure the smooth running of the place. In most cases the letters inform members that the appropriate servants have been reprimanded: the Cook is reprimanded fourteen times, the Steward nineteen times, the Housekeeper three times, the Waiter five times, and the Bar servants once. Despite the number of cautions, only one servant is dismissed: "one of the head waiters has, in consequence of complaints similar to yours, been discharged from the service of the Club and the Committee trust that the new arrangements which have been made will prevent any irregularity in future."

A rising scale of responses to staff can be discerned from the discourse used by the Committee Chairman: servants are "spoken to," "directed," "admonished," "cautioned," and "reprimanded" although it is unclear from the letters why exactly some instances of "inattention" or poor service warrant a stronger response than others. The Servants in the Bar department are "admonished to be more careful in the preparation and serving up of coffee"; the Committee "have cautioned the Steward and Cook to be more careful in the future"; a Waiter is "reprimanded by the Committee for inattention" and, at the end of the scale the Cook has been called before the Committee and severely reprimanded, and the Committee "have reason to expect that a similar mistake on his part will not occur again."

In eleven cases, the Committee compromises, expressing its regret that such an occurrence took place, but no action is taken against anyone. In many cases, an explanation is offered: "on the day on which your complaint is dated, there was an unusual demand for Coffee room dinner, and considerable confusion occurred in the Coffee room." On 11th May

1841, a member is informed that "owing to the absence (through illness) of the Clerk of the Kitchen, and the number of the Coffee Room Stewards not being equal to the demand for dinner, great inconvenience was experienced by members on the 5th" but that the Committee have "made such arrangements as they think will remedy the defects of which you complain."

"When a Member of the Club thinks fit to make a complaint to the Committee, no servant of the Club is permitted to remonstrate with the member so doing." This reply to Edward Kendall Esquire reveals that, although the Steward is "cautioned against doing so in the future," he is not discharged: it is worth considering why the servants who were cautioned a number of times were not dismissed when tradesmen seem to be discharged with some regularity. Although it would have been fairly easy to replace servants, good servants, especially male ones, were valued, especially those who were well trained in the running of an establishment like the Club. In the earlier Victorian years a male servant was considered essential for those aspiring to gentility. The luxury aspect of the male servant was emphasised by the levying of the servant tax. In 1808 for example, the domestic employer of one male servant had to pay £2 4*s* per annum; of two servants, £2 16*s* for each of them and so on (Horn 29, 9).

As well as being provided with good food, servants of the Club were well paid. In Milton Manor, Berkshire, a large domestic establishment, a Housekeeper in 1845 might get £25, a cook £11, while at Lamport Hall, Northampton, a Cook-housekeeper was paid £34 in 1837 while the Butler-House Steward received £60 (Horn 211–12). In 1839, the Butler of the Reform Club earned £75 per annum while in 1836 the House Steward's annual salary was £200. Soyer reckoned that, with his salary and apprentice fees plus half the profits of the *Gastronomic Regenerator*, he was earning around £1000 a year (Brandon 132).

Soyer measured his worth partly in economic terms and took a great interest in how much money the Club had made from the dinners each day. Volant and Warren report that he would enquire how much money the day's work had brought in and calculate, with the clerk, the expenses incurred. Often he would "delight at the prospect of announcing to the Committee, that the sixty or seventy servants of the establishment had been kept at the rate of 4*s*. 6*d*. or 5*s*. per head per week!" He was delighted that "through the luxury of the members, the servants could be well kept, and at a cheap rate" (Volant and Warren 167).

The "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841" mentioned earlier, also debates the cost of keeping servants. Although the cost of Butcher's meat, bread, and flour has risen slightly, there is a "diminution of the cost of the keep of each servant of 1*s* $^1/_2$ per head in favour of the present year – the expective average being":

1840 Servants Board	10" 5 $^1/_2$
1841 Servants Board	9" 5
Difference in favour of 1841	1" 0 $^1/_2$*d*

(Table 3: "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841")

The report claims that the Club has actually saved 11*s* 8*d* over the 8 weeks compared with the corresponding period of 1840. The Secretary also requests that the Committee compare the cost of servants per head at the Reform with that in other London Clubs:

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1840 Clubs	1840 No. of servants	1841 Average per head each servant	1841 No. of servants	1841 No. dined in 8 weeks	1841 Average per head each servant
University	33	12/9	33	1,917	12/6
Union	35	9/10	35	2,665	6/7
United Service	43	10/1	43	2,738	11/3 $^{3}/_{4}$
Junior U Service	49	12/5	49	4,051	10/1 $^{1}/_{2}$
Atheneum	32	9/9	32	2,654	7/6 $^{1}/_{2}$
Reform	35	9/6	50	2,945	9/5

(Table 4: "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841")

It is probable that the increase in servants from thirty-five to fifty from 1840 to 1841 was in consequence of the newly opened Club House in the latter year. It is noted that "the average cost to the Board of Stewards appears to be somewhat higher than in some of the London Clubs" but the Secretary justifies this by recalling the reputation of the Club's kitchens: "The Cooking in the Reform Club is acknowledged on all hands to be far superior to that in any other similar establishment, whilst the prices charged are almost the same. . . . Good cooking must necessarily cost more than cooking of an inferior description" ("Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841").

Despite Soyer's popularity and obvious value, Brandon insists that his career at the Reform Club was "punctuated with sessions at which he was required to account for himself in one way or another by the Committee." In August 1843 Soyer was found guilty of insolence towards Captain WG Beare and "severely censured" by the Committee; he apologised but in March 1844 the Committee was again considering "the conduct of M. Soyer towards a certain member of the Club" (Brandon 136–37). His loyal secretaries Volant and Warren record that "many were the scrapes he had to defend in the presence of the Committee" from which "he made his exit always victorious" (164–65). Nevertheless, his position at the Club was still inferior to the members; a Club chef, however good, was still a servant and this is one of the reasons Soyer was so delighted, upon leaving the Club and pursuing his charitable works in Ireland and the Crimea, to be accepted for the gentlemanly pursuit of philanthropy.

Competitive Complaining

IT WAS WELL KNOWN that matters of food and wine were among the main issues debated by the club committees.[23] The "Complaints Book" at the Reform shows that club members regularly complained about cost, quality, and service. Yet, from reading Soyer's *Gastronomic Regenerator* and various accounts of the Club kitchens from the period, we get the impression that the dishes invented and cooked at the club were of a high standard. We can also assume that the service was better than the average home, since the club, as a large establishment,

probably wielded more economic power over servants and tradesmen. So why does there seem to be such a developed complaints culture?

It seems that this was one way for members to enhance or maintain their status, signalling to others that they were used to excellent food at home and would not tolerate any reduction in quality. This would have been especially useful for those who came from less affluent homes or for bachelors who had yet to experience the trials and tribulations of being "Master." One of the main reasons that members were so comfortable offering their comments and complaints was that they were considered part proprietors of the Club. The entrance fee and subscription gave members a vested interest. In Sala's words:

> He has a joint-stock proprietorship in all this splendour; in the lofty halls and vestibules; in the library, coffee-rooms, newspaper and card-rooms; in the secretary's office in the basement, and in the urbane secretary himself; in the kitchen, fitted with every means and appliance, every refinement of culinary splendour, and from whence are supplied to him at cost prices dishes that would make Lucullus wild with envy, and that are cooked for him, besides, by the great chef from Paris, Monsieur Nini Casserole, who has a piano and a picture-gallery in the kitchen – belongs, himself, to a club, a little less aristocratic than his masters', and writes his bills of fare upon lace-edged note-paper. (210)

Monsieur Nini Casserole is clearly Alexis Soyer, whose pictures by his wife Emma adorned the kitchens. It is less surprising that members felt they could and should complain about the food if we understand that, in the minds of the members, Soyer did not only belong to "the Reform Club" but to them as well. Every member, claims Phiz in *London at Dinner*, is a master, without any of the trouble that accompanies that position: "He has the command of regular servants, without having to pay or manage them. He can have whatever meat or refreshment he wants, at all hours, and served up with the cleanliness and comfort of his own house. He orders just what he pleases, having no interest to think of but his own" (15).

Complaining about food or service became a means of competitive display, especially as it seems that the "Coffee Room Complaints Book" was available for anyone to read at any time. Complaining was also an art and we can see from the replies that much effort went into their composition. Members could see who had complained and what they had complained about. It was not only acceptable, but perhaps even necessary, to demonstrate that you knew what high quality meat or fish tasted like, or how a salad should be dressed. It must have given members pleasure and a sense of power to read that their complaint had lead to direct action – to a servant or tradesmen being reprimanded or even dismissed. Where complaints were not upheld, the reason was usually the cost of ingredients and, as this was explained carefully to the member, he would still feel that his complaint was given due consideration and that he was treated as a man who understood the capitalist market-place.

Some members would not have a chance to get involved in the daily running of a home; for married men it was likely that their wives would take on this role. Many would avoid getting involved simply because it was messy and difficult. Dealing face-to-face with servant problems or lower class tradesmen would have been time-consuming and unpleasant. At the Club, all they had to do was compose a letter and they could be assured that the Committee would respond. The Club was a protected environment where complaints were always met with gentlemanly courtesy and the responsibility for acting on the problem was down to the Club committee. At a time of rapid and complex change clubs represented places where one

could bemoan portion sizes and price increases in safety and order. What is interesting is that, despite contemporary narratives setting up a binary opposition between the domestic home and the Club, both functioned according to similar rules. The Committee, it seems, could have done worse than to follow the advice of books like *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* and to model themselves on the "mistress" who was in charge not only the practical, but moral government of her household (8).

To reform is "to make or become better by the removal of faults and errors" and this certainly lies behind this culture of complaints (*OED*). In a Club that names itself after such an activity, it is not surprising that members had a certain zeal for improvement. However, such reform was more popularly understood in this context as the removal of moral, social, and political abuses. Was dining and the judgement of cost, quality, and service a distraction from such concerns, or part of the progressive movement towards liberty, conceived as the freedom to expect good service, quality treatment from tradesmen, and a fair price?

The kitchens themselves were the epitome of industrial progress and were deliberately planned alongside the new Clubhouse; indeed, Brandon notes that it was largely on the account of the kitchens that the Reform Club was considered, at the time, one of the three most technically advanced buildings in Britain with the kitchen department one of the "sights of London" (111–15). Although members had had to pay handsomely for this privilege most felt that their political success "could not be better supported than by a corresponding development of the important department of the kitchen" (Volant and Warren 22).

The French gastronome Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin writes that, among men, "No affair of any importance is discussed anywhere but at table . . . the table establishes a kind of tie between the two parties to a discussion: after a meal a man is more apt to receive certain impressions, to submit to certain influences; and this is the origin of political gastronomy. Meals have become a means of government" (55). "How many treaties of peace and commerce" declare Volant and Warren, "have owed their conclusions to the mollifying effects of a series of good dinners! . . . On a judiciously compounded sauce, or a *rôti cuit à point*, or the seasoning of a *salmi*, or the twirl of a *casserole* may depend the fate of a crowned head – the marriage of a prince – the weal or woe of a nation" (52–53). To discuss the finer points of food and drink *was* to discuss trade, price, and quality: it is impossible to distinguish one from the other. As Volant and Warren profess, the very essence of Political Reform was "absorbed in" the invention of the new dish "*les côtelettes à la Réforme*" (*sic*; 23):

No. 698. Cotelettes de Mouton à la Reform

> Chop a quarter of a pound of lean cooked ham very fine, and mix it with the same quantity of bread-crumbs, then have ten very nice cotelettes, lay them flat on your table, season lightly with pepper and salt, egg over with a paste-brush, and throw them into the ham and bread-crumbs, then beat them lightly with a knife, put ten spoonfuls of oil in a sauté-pan, place it over the fire, and when quite hot lay in the cotelettes, fry nearly ten minutes (over a moderate fire) of a light brown colour; to ascertain when done, press your knife upon the thick part, if quite done it will feel rather firm; possibly they may not all be done at one time, so take out those that are ready first and lay them on a cloth till the others are done; as they require to be cooked with the gravy in them, dress upon a thin border of mashed potatoes in a crown, with the bones pointing outwards, sauce over with a pint of the sauce reform (No. 35), and serve. (Soyer, *Gastronomic* 294–95)

NOTES

With thanks to Simon Blundell, Librarian of the Reform Club archives.

1. A text that combines the "servant problem" with the narrative of household mismanagement driving men to their clubs or other eating establishments was "Our Domestic Woes. The Servantgalism of the Period or The Alphabet of Woes." Within a day of the Cook leaving, "there were potatoes in the best China soup tureen, cabbages in the China closet, pickles in the wine glasses. The shelves were covered with sugar, salt and ants. An iron pot stood on one of the best damask table-cloths. The beefsteaks were wrapped in some of the finest napkins." Being "tired of feminine mismanagement," Papa and the eldest son "took meals at a restaurant" (111–14). Valerie Mars points to similar arguments in *Etiquette, Social Ethics and Dinner Table Observances* (London: Houlston & Wright, 1860, 88).
2. Rossi-Wilcox explains that Lady Maria Clutterbuck was a character from the play *Used Up* that Catherine had performed at her husband's behest (202).
3. The dramatist Charles Selby, as his alter ego "Tabitha Tickletooth," responded to a series of letters in the *Times* on "The Dinner Question" with "English Dinners for Snobs." This satirical correspondence is addressed to the aspiring bourgeoisie and advises them that "the mashed potato, with a small sausage on top, will wean many a husband – not from his club, for you have, happily for you, no such temptations – but from the chop-house" (15).
4. Although we should always be wary of conflating recommendations in books with actual practice, we might imagine that the absence of men on a few nights a week would afford relief. It is possible that, although many women may indeed have felt neglected, others did not mind their husbands spending so much time at their Clubs. Mrs Beeton's chapter on "The Mistress" reveals that, as managers of the household, they had to work extremely hard during the day to ensure that all was order and tranquillity when their husbands arrived home from the city. The domestic ideal involved "the elimination of all signs of the hard work that was necessary to maintain it" (Calder 28). Managing a household and dealing with servants was by no means easy and a few visits by the husband to the Club might actually harmonise domestic relations: the wife might "have a picnic dinner – always a joy to a woman – with a book propped up before her, can let herself go and let her cook go out" (Maud Churton Braby, *Modern Marriage and How to Bear it*, 1909 qtd. in Tosh 187).
5. Mrs Beeton provides any number of recipes that utilise the remnants of earlier meals such as rissoles or curried or hashed remains of meat dishes. The need for frugality and economy was a common discourse in *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* and others. Mistresses were urged to avoid waste and consume all left-overs: crusts were browned to make breadcrumbs, peashells were used to flavour and colour soups and meals were designed around leftover meat. Perhaps the notion that husbands were trying to escape from excessive management and order might be closer to reality.
6. Despite the humourous attempts in literature and culinary texts to portray marital disharmony, Tosh challenges the idea that the notion of separate spheres so beloved of critics was necessarily problematic, arguing that "companionate marriage stood at the heart of the Victorian ideal of domesticity" (27). The sharply distinguished roles could be satisfying to both parties, "the husband on account of the emotional support he received from his wife, and to the wife because of the window onto the wider world which his education and experience made available to her" (28). According to Bell, for example, Elizabeth Smith, husband of George Murray Smith, publisher and founder of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, "took a sympathetic interest in her husband's business activities, providing valuable support and encouragement throughout his life."
7. The bourgeois dining-room was used as a means to control behaviour: the round table meant that each diner was always faced by and facing another. Internalised self-regulation went hand-in-hand with the regulating gaze of the other: a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of conduct. It was assumed that, left unregulated, men would quickly become inebriated, especially when the ladies had retired at the end of the meal and alcohol consumption was recorded and noted. Soyer's Mrs B criticises the amount of time the ladies are left alone when they withdraw as it left the men to drink too

much "which caused them to receive sundry angry looks from their wives" (*Modern* 397). An 1814 lithograph, *L'Après-dinée des Anglais*, shows men who are considerably drunk. Round the table, one man has his arm around another, an invasion that the place settings were supposed to protect diners from, while another lounges with his feet straight out in front of him. The gentleman in the middle of the picture has collapsed on the floor and one is urinating on the floor holding a soup tureen. Free from the feminine gaze, the men could relax their body posture, physically indulge their bodily functions, and no longer guard their mouths or their manners (Glanville and Young 74). Interestingly, it seems as if the surveillance itself created this behaviour since men seldom behaved in this way at their Club. It seems that when there are no such limits on the consumption of alcohol, there was no need to challenge them: "when people can freely please themselves" writes Phiz, "excess is seldom committed" (15).

8. Club life, insists Sala in *Twice Around the Clock* was not only relaxing, consisting of members "smoking, and reading, and dawdling, and dozing, and refreshing themselves," but also precarious. The "Club-man," he argues, is "full of club matters, club gossip," and "dabbles in club intrigues, belongs to certain club cliques, and takes part in club quarrels" (203, 211).
9. By 1837 there were twenty-five clubs in Pall Mall and St James's Street.
10. Although L. B. C. Seaman's argument that one of the reasons for the popularity of clubs was that, for many, the pattern of communal, all-male living established in public boarding schools was hard to break, many Reform Club members had not been to the great schools of Eton, Rugby, and Harrow (25).
11. This information was found by searching for the term "Reform Club" in the database (which resulted in 127 entries), and then identifying those referred to as members and founders, their marital status, and any references to money and status.
12. The "Coffee Room Complaints Book" is a bound book of blank pages in which the replies of the Committee have been hand written. There are no page numbers and, as the writing is quite difficult to decipher, it is not always possible to identify the addressees.
13. A variety of different types of food are mentioned in the letters: meat is the most common (twelve times), followed by fish (ten). Types of meat include: beef (three), ham, fowl, and veal cutlets: Mutton is cooked in a number of ways including mutton broth and leg of mutton. Fish mentioned include salmon, trout, and oysters. Accompanying vegetable dishes include: Potatoes (five), new potatoes, vegetables (two), French beans, peas, salad. Soup, bread and butter, melted butter, muffins, and oranges are also referred to. Tea and coffee are mentioned, along with claret (three), port (two), wine (two), champagne, and beer.
14. Soyer offers a number of fillings, from the sweet Poires, Cerises, and Apricots, to the *Vol-au-Vents de Palates de Boeuf* containing beef, mushrooms, white sauce, stock, butter, parsley, lemon-juice, egg yolks, salt, and pepper and illustrating just how many ingredients went into its composition (*Gastronomic* 484–86, 278–79).
15. This "Provision Accounts, Report of Secretary, Nov 1841," which contains Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 appears on a separate sheet of paper and is not part of the "Coffee Room Complaints Book."
16. Of course, we only have the replies to these complaints from the Committee and, although it seems unlikely, the Chairperson or secretary of the Committee may have chosen to categorise many complaints under "quality" rather than repeat specific comments and complaints. In those cases where the reply quotes from the original letter i.e., see "raw and unfit to eat," we get a little more information.
17. Passing oral judgement upon the food was an almost exclusively masculine pursuit, not least because it was mainly men who were dining publicly. In domestic settings bourgeois women were warned against discussing food at the dinner table. In *Home and Its Associations* (c1860) young ladies are warned not to be "bold and talkative at table" and avoid making "remarks respecting the food" or "expressing your likes and dislikes of particular articles" (Newcomb 71–72). The fact that the dinner table was seen as a place of "great improvement," a "*school of good manners*" (Newcomb 70) goes a long way to explain the popularity of club dining. In his *Modern Housewife* (1849) Soyer tries to

convince his female readers that males should be encouraged to dine together. "I can well imagine," writes Eloise, "that some men enjoy the science of eating better when ladies are not present" (419).

18. It is not clear how educated the Steward and Butler were about wine and how often members asked for wine to be recommended to match individual dishes.
19. One such dinner was the banquet for Ibraham Pasha, the Ottoman general given on 3rd July 1846. *Crème d'Egypte à I'Ibrahim Pasha*, a pyramid of meringue cake, filled with pineapple cream, surrounded by fruit, and topped by a portrait of Ibrahim's father was invented by Soyer for this banquet and reported in the *London Illustrated News* (Brandon 127).
20. A tour of the model kitchen became all the rage in London and both men and women of social standing could join Soyer as, "red velvet cap and spoon in hand," he performed to elegantly dressed ladies, plunging his finger "diamond ring and all, into what appeared to be a boiling cauldron of glue, pass it across his tongue, wink his eye, and add either a little more salt, pepper, or some mysterious dust" (Volant 69–70).
21. Brandon notes that the chef's "practical experience is everywhere evident" especially in the general layout and the arrangement of departments and encompassed an entire world of service:

> There were store cellars, ale cellars, bottle cellars, knife cellars, a still room, a scullery, a brushing room, a steward's dining room, . . . a butler's pantry and plate-room, a servants' hall, a cleaning room, a maids' room, a clerk's office, a housekeeper's room, and a cook's room. There were stoves for stewing, steaming and broiling, and, the ultimate modernity, gas stoves (gas having been piped to Pall Mall for lighting since 1807). Previously gas had been used for roasting but this was the first time this new fuel had ever been employed for stove-top cookery. (111)

22. The Steward was the most senior member of servant staff and it was his job to ensure that all was running smoothly in the dining room. He was also in charge of household accounts in large houses and may well have provided the same function at the Club. He may have been expected to hire and discipline other staff and check the supplies and do the marketing to ensure good quality. It was the role of the Butler, Head Waiter, and Bar staff to provide service during dinner and look after the wine cellar. The House-keeper served under the Steward and ruled the other house-servants.
23. Thackeray's satirical Captain Shindy in "Club Snobs" (1845–46) epitomises those who constantly complained about club food yet also implies that such men were petty and over-exercising their right to good food and service.

> "Look at it, Sir! Is it cooked, Sir? Smell it, Sir! Is it meat fit for a gentleman?" he roars out to the steward, who stands trembling before him, and who in vain tells him that the Bishop of Bullocksmithy has just had three from the same loin. All the waiters in the Club are huddled round the Captain's mutton-chop. He roars out the most horrible curses at John for not bringing the pickles; he utters the most dreadful oaths because Thomas has not arrived with the Harvey sauce; Peter comes tumbling with the water-jug over Jeames, who is bringing "the glittering canisters with bread." (315)

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