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its examples at tedious length (the confectionery conceits of the banquet course, for instance), and when it tries too hard to make connections which are at best tenuous.

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Colman Andrews: *The British Table: A New Look at the Traditional Cooking of England, Scotland and Wales*: Abrams, 2016: 328 pp., hardback, £ 30.00.
Anyone who knows much of anything about British food does not need this book for the recipes. For that reason alone it deserves a wide readership, especially in the United States. Andrews covers most of the iconic dishes of British tradition and covers them well, while also throwing in a few surprises. 'Parmo,' 'the culinary pride of Middlesborough,' apparently has been prepared since 1958 when an American chef fried a thin chicken cutlet dusted with breadcrumbs, gave it a smear of béchamel ('known locally as 'besh'), topped it with Cheddar and toasted the assembly in an oven. It is made in Britain and so, barely, qualifies as British, but Andrews' claiming Spaghetti Bolognese even in bastard form for the national canon constitutes more than a stretch.

More traditional dishes that may surprise readers of *The British Table* include saucermeat, which goes back centuries but has not gained much purchase outside the northern isles. Shetland cooks season ground fat beef or lamb in the vigorous early modern British style with a characteristic combination of allspice, cinnamon, clove, ginger, mace, black and white pepper, and salt. Andrews admits to underspicing his version 'to come up with something not too aggressively flavored,' which undercuts the point of the preparation, but at least he has found the dish, something akin to potted meat that could keep a long time with the original dose of spice and salt.

Andrews includes good recipes for potted foods, of rabbit, shrimp and Stilton, in his exemplary chapter on whets (a seventeenth-century term for salty starters) and savouries, along with other traditional after dinner delights; angels on horseback, mushrooms on toast, Welsh rabbit of course which, however, he misspells.

The British Table represents a creature of this aspirational era in which excess is expected of most culinary publications. Considerably less than half the book's bulk consists of the standard 150 recipe format; full page colour photographs from the founders of fashionable Canal House proliferate, personal anecdotes abound. At over a kilo and three quarters in weight and 28 by 24 by 3 centimetres in size it would be difficult to envision this thing spattered with gravy and grease from kitchen use, its spine split by the scrutiny of a serious cook. That would be a shame.

Andrews has not written *The British Table* for a scholarly audience – his prose is too good for that and he does not delve deep in his historical narratives – but even so wields a certain scholarship with a deft touch. His sources in a

word are spectacular. Selections from the work of a pair of exemplary figures lead an array of short sketches that recur along the length of the book.

The fiction of Tobias Smollett is a wonderful source for eighteenth century British foodways, now neglected by the reading public and, unaccountably, by most food historians but not, to his credit, Andrews. He cites an evocative passage from *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* in which a Squire Bramble describes the culinary autarky at his seat in Wales, where he brews beer, ferments cider from the apples in his orchard, raises all manner of free range livestock, hunts, fishes, bakes bread 'with my own wheat in my own mill' and boasts that 'my table is, in a great measure, furnished from my own ground.' The squire quite evidently was, as Andrews describes him, 'an early locavore.'

A passage from William Kitchiner on the attributes of an epicure, along with a thumbnail biography, flanks the one from Smollett. Kitchiner was one of the more accomplished amateur eccentrics of any age; as Andrews explains, an optics inventor and member of the Royal Society, 'an amateur musician, a prolific author, and a serious cook,' this last an unusual attribute in his Regency social class. Andrews might have added that Kitchiner tested every recipe published in his *Cook's Oracle* with a Committee of Taste that met for dinner on a regular basis at his Fitzrovia residence. Few if any of his contemporaries took such pains to ensure that their instructions worked.

Kitchiner styled himself an MD, but in fact was a fraudulent autodidact in terms of qualifications. Also to his credit, Andrews does not take the author at his word and fall into the standard trap of describing Kitchiner as a doctor.

Andrews does amend his recipe for Kitchiner's idiosyncratic wow wow sauce with a lovely note on Terry Pratchett, whose characters take to heart the observation by its creator that his sauce may be rendered more '*piquante*' through the addition of various substances. The characters choose other ones instead, including scumble, sulphur and wahoonie. The Pratchett version is, as Andrews explains, 'highly volatile and capable of dissolving tree roots.'

The required references to Elizabeth David, who did as much as any other force of nature to impair indigenous British foodways during the twentieth century, are mercifully measured, infrequent and appropriate.

Andrews knows about the great culinary Scots, all of them women except for David Hume, whom he quotes to good effect. *The British Table* cites Margaret Stout, whose obscure and indispensable repository of lost Shetland foodways, the 1925 *Cookery for Northern Wives*, is the basis for that saucermeat recipe; F. Marian McNeill; Sue Lawrence, whom he himself knows; and the greatest of them all, Christian Isobel Johnstone.

Under the pseudonym Meg Dods, a character created by her friend Sir Walter Scott, Mrs. Johnstone wrote one of the best social satires, comic novels, nationalist manifestos and cookbooks of any era, all a single book, her *Cook and Housewife's Manual* from 1826. Andrews gives her proper due, and includes

a version of her superb curried rabbit with bacon, although it appears a bit demeaning to call this novelist, historian and only woman to edit an Edinburgh journal during the entire nineteenth century (*Tait's*, rival to the legendary *Maga* [*Blackwood's*]) a mere protégée of Scott.

Richard Bradley is a fascinating eighteenth century figure, author of his own cookery book and first professor of botany at the University of Cambridge. Following his death Bradley was unfairly traduced by a rival and therefore has been nearly forgotten, but he sits with the Scots at *The British Table*. So does William Jerdan, a journalist who knew and liked Kitchiner, and described him as 'a "real" Original.' Andrews understands, as most do not, that Orwell took a lifelong interest in British food and wrote a pair of essays 'defending' it, although it would have been good to have disclosed that the second, longer piece was in fact so derogatory that the British Council, which commissioned the project, declined to publish it.

Despite the breadth of knowledge Andrews displays, three distinguished elephants have infiltrated the dining-room of *The British Table* in the guise of Elisabeth Ayrton, Theodora Fitzgibbon and Jane Grigson, whose writings are too important, and too good, to have been omitted from an intended survey of British cuisine. Andrews can be glib, and is sometimes insufficiently fastidious in ways other than omission. John Farley, for example, did not write the 1811 cookbook that bears his name. A hack plagiarized it from a number of works (also written primarily by women) in an effort to capitalize on the fame of Farley and his London Tavern.

Do any of these flaws matter to the audience for *The British Table*? Probably not; luminaries like Ruth Reichl and Alice Waters are, according to the book's back cover, fulsome with praise, and overall Andrews provides a lively introduction to an underrepresented and misunderstood subject.

Readers may, however, be granted leave to skip a pedestrian introduction that roasts too many chestnuts – Beatles, Mary Quant, Swinging London; Andrews even exhumes the famous, fatuous denigration of British food by Jacques Chirac from 2005. He drops too many names – Andrews is a founder of *Saveur*, still the best of the glossy guilty pleasure cooking magazines, and travels in celebrity circles – but if he incites aspirants to open *Humphry Clinker* or steam a savoury pudding so much the better.

Blake Perkins