

BRILLAT-SAVARIN'S  
THE PHYSIOLOGY  
OF TASTE

*Translated and Annotated by*  
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APHORISMS  
OF THE PROFESSOR

TO SERVE AS A PREAMBLE TO HIS WORK  
AND AS A LASTING FOUNDATION FOR  
THE SCIENCE OF GASTRONOMY



i. The Universe is nothing without the things that live in it, and everything that lives, eats.

ii: Animals feed themselves; men eat; but only wise men know the art of eating.

iii: The destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves.<sup>1</sup>

iv: Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are.<sup>2, 3</sup>

v: The Creator, while forcing men to eat in order to live, tempts him to do so with appetite and then rewards him with pleasure.

vi: Good living is an act of intelligence, by which we choose things which have an agreeable taste rather than those which do not.

vii: The pleasures of the table are for every man, of every land, and no matter of what place in history or society; they can be a part of all his other pleasures, and they last the longest, to console him when he has outlived the rest.

viii: The table is the only place where a man is never bored for the first hour.



ix: The discovery of a new dish does more for human happiness than the discovery of a star.<sup>4</sup>

x: Men who stuff themselves and grow tipsy know neither how to eat nor how to drink.

xi: The proper progression of courses in a dinner is from the most substantial to the lightest.

xii: The proper progression of wines or spirits is from the mildest to the headiest and most aromatic.

xiii: It is heresy to insist that we must not mix wines: a man's palate can grow numb and react dully to even the best bottle, after the third glass from it.

xiv: A dinner which ends without cheese is like a beautiful woman with only one eye.

xv: We can learn to be cooks, but we must be born knowing how to roast.

xvi: The most indispensable quality of a cook is promptness, and it should be that of the diner as well.

xvii: A host who makes all his guests wait for one late-comer is careless of their well-being.<sup>5</sup>

xviii: He who plays host without giving his personal care to the repast is unworthy of having friends to invite to it.

xix: The mistress of the house should always make sure that the coffee is good, and the master that the wines are of the best.

xx: To invite people to dine with us is to make ourselves responsible for their well-being for as long as they are under our roofs.



THE TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSES

1. Here it is hard not to quote almost anyone in the world who has thought more than three thoughts, since one of them is bound to be about his nourishment. To tease myself I like to remember what a man said who has perhaps most puzzled and astonished the other thinkers. It was Albert Einstein. "An empty stomach is not a good political adviser," he decided quite early

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in his life, as simply as if he were chalking one more equation on the world's blackboard.

2. More than two decades after these Aphorisms first appeared, the German philosopher of materialism, Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, stated with an air of belligerent discovery, *Der Mensch ist was er isst* . . . "Potato blood can make no revolution," he said disgustedly, and he recommended that the hungry weaklings who had failed to bring off the 1848 Revolution in his country change their diet to one of beans! His theory, though not original with him as he believed, was kept alive in the Teutonic mind long enough to have Hitler's humanitarians apply it to many a nation made hungry so systematically that not even potato blood flowed through its veins. It would be difficult for the Professor, I think, to preserve his philosophical calm in the face of such murderous application of his Aphorism . . .

3. See page 154 and my note on page 158.

4. This most quoted of the Professor's rules of conduct came, he writes with such candor that it cannot be a confession ("Varieties," XXV, page 411), from his old friend Henrion de Pansey, a well-known French lawyer whose first names were Pierre-Paul and whose four-line eulogy was not needed until four years after Brillat-Savarin published it in 1825. They seem to have been without mutual jealousy or suspicion, unusual in any old men but especially those who must weave their way together through the courts of law.

5. One of the great English gourmets of the nineteenth century set his dinner hour at five in the afternoon, which was the proper time in those days, and at five minutes past five he locked his door and firmly hid the key. Latecomers were not only turned away, but were never asked again.