

JEAN-PAUL ARON. — *Le Mangeur du XIX^e siècle*. Paris, Éditions Robert Laffont, 1973.

Until recently, historians have tended to take little interest in "alimentary history" — the history of food, nutrition, cooking, gastronomy, and eating habits. Consequently, few serious studies of this important aspect of social history have been made available either to the historian or the general reading public. Recently, however, two noteworthy books have appeared to help bridge this historical gap: Reay Tannahill's general survey of food in history, and Jean-Paul Aron's intriguing work on nineteenth century French gastronomy and eating habits. Aron's book especially could prove to be a landmark study on alimentary history, opening up new vistas to historians and blazing a path for future historical research to follow.

Jean-Paul Aron is a historian of biology with an orientation toward historical anthropology and sociology; trained in the sciences, he has become increasingly interested in history, and has also written plays and novels. The author's diversified background and multiplicity of interests immediately become apparent to the reader of this book. Aron's style is spirited, highly structured, and non-academic. Written in an intensely personal and impressionistic manner, Aron's work at times tends to irritate the professional historian because of its lack of academic trappings (paucity of footnotes), its frequent personal interjections (use of the first person singular), and its unveiled subjectivity (attempts to relive history *à la* Michelet). The author's efforts to provide a historical background to his study by making vast generalizations about nineteenth century French history which are oftentimes exaggerated and occasionally incorrect also offend the historical scholar. It is difficult enough to accept Aron's vague statements about the rising French bourgeoisie; it is impossible to accept his false assertion that Guizot was a "banker." Furthermore, it is unfortunate that Aron tends to confound Paris with France and make generalizations about French cooking as a whole which only really apply to Parisian cuisine. Still, despite its drawbacks, this very readable, well-researched, and extremely perceptive study should prove to be of much interest to historians of Modern France. Not only does Aron's work trace the development and mutations of French alimentary history from the end of the *Ancien Régime* until the eve of World War I, it also provides considerable insight into nineteenth century French life and society.

Basing his research upon both literary and archival sources, Aron devotes the first third of his book to an analysis of Parisian restaurants and cuisine from the 1780s to the early 1900s. In examining Paris' *industrie alimentaire* the author develops the theme that the French Revolution liberated French gastronomy by bringing *haute cuisine* from the kitchens of the princes to the tables of Parisian restaurants. Outstanding chefs, such as the legendary Robert who had developed his talents over the ovens of the Prince de Condé, opened restaurants in Paris after the emigration of their aristocratic employers in 1789 and set the stage for the flourishing of great culinary establishments in the French capital between 1789 and 1830, France's "*âge d'or de la gastronomie*." The democratization of the art of cooking, however, also had its disadvantages. By 1830, Aron argues, a period of decline and decadence was setting in as French cuisine began to suffer the effects of bourgeois values. Accepting the thesis that the French middle class emerged victorious with the establishment of the July Monarchy, Aron attributes this decadence to the bourgeois penchant both for economy and ostentation, which brought ruin to the great but expensive restaurants and glory to snobish and chic eating places where superior cuisine was ignored. Aron concludes that, despite slight revivals of the culinary art in the 1860s and 1880s, for most of the rest of the century "*on ne savoure plus, on mange*." The fact that Aron refers

to the nineteenth century "eater" rather than the "gourmet" is indicative of his disdain for the bourgeois values which, he believes, brought French cuisine to its nadir in the mid-nineteenth century after its glorious achievements of the eighteenth century and before its revival in our present century.

Having presented his major theme in the first section of his study, the latter two thirds of Aron's book are somewhat of an anticlimax. Still, this latter, less controversial section is undoubtedly the most serious part of the work and the part most useful to historians. Using the approach of a sociologist, in his later chapters Aron delves in much detail into the eating habits, food, and diet of nineteenth century Parisians. The author employs such diverse sources as restaurant menus, market statistics, and purchasing records for *lycées*, hospitals, and charitable institutions, as well as literary references, in describing the evolution of French culinary taste and attitudes throughout the nineteenth century. For example, the historian as well as the gourmet might be interested in knowing that Frenchmen developed a taste for macaroni during the Italian wars of the Directory and Empire; that roast beef was at the height of its popularity in 1814 when it was fashionable for snobbish French Anglophiles to imitate the English; that after the debacle of 1870 the popularity of German wines declined markedly and French taste as a whole became less cosmopolitan in nature. More important still, in the latter part of his book Aron makes a concerted effort to delineate the eating habits of the different strata of nineteenth century French society. The author takes apparent pleasure in describing the Gargantuan day-long feasts of the affluent members of the Grands Estomacs club and in contrasting these repasts with the victuals offered the poor in the Victorian equivalent of the soup kitchen, or worse yet, by the "bijoutiers" and "houilleurs" who specialized in peddling in poor districts discarded leftovers from luxury restaurants. By continually contrasting the diet of the different layers of French society, Aron shows nineteenth century French gastronomy to be definitely a "phénomène de classe" which saw wealthy Parisians spending as much for one meal at the elegant Café Anglais as a poor family would devote to its entire food budget for several months. Aron's study confirms and corroborates with numerous examples what historians have already asserted, that the French upper classes were extremely well nourished throughout the nineteenth century, while the poor or indigent were reduced to a bare subsistence diet. Students of nineteenth century social history should find the mass of information which Aron has accumulated most useful, for he demonstrates clearly how the alimentary history of a society reflects its values, ideals, and *mentalité*.

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EDWIN WELCH. — *The Peripatetic University: Cambridge Local Lectures, 1873-1973*. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1973.

Dr. Welch, now archivist of the city of Ottawa, has produced an absorbing centenary study on the development of adult education, or extra-mural studies, at Cambridge University. He has enlivened the documentary account with interesting anecdotes, and has managed to convey something of the atmosphere of this pioneering venture in university affairs.

In concentrating on the origins and early development of extra-mural studies, the author makes a useful contribution to Victorian social history. He commences with a cursory look at the development of adult education in Britain from the