

THE FUNCTION OF FOOD IMAGES:

ELIZABETH GASKELL'S CRANFORD

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ABSTRACT

Food images invoke readers' sensory memory which generates sympathetic comprehension, drawing readers into a narrative and engaging their imaginations which embellish visual scenes with personal experiences. Through the use of food images which define her characters and add texture to domestic scenes, Elizabeth Gaskell invokes this sensory memory for her readers. This thesis examines the food images Gaskell employs in Cranford and explores her application of these images to her characters, especially those in secondary roles.

While some of Gaskell's food images are easily understood by the modern reader, many are more viable when viewed from a position contemporary with the original writing. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate Gaskell's approach, background information has been provided on Mrs. Gaskell, her period in history, and Cranford. In addition, details have been included which address the kitchens of the period, the china and silver most likely to have appeared on the tables in Cranford, and recipes for specific foods mentioned in the novel.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It is a curious fact that novelists have a way of making us believe that luncheon parties are invariably memorable for something witty that was said, or for something very wise that was done. But they seldom spare a word for what was eaten. It is part of the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings, as if soup and salmon and ducklings were of no importance whatsoever . . . .  
(*Woolf, A Room of One's Own*)

Various novelists from Walter Scott to Laura Esquivel have used food images to add more than pictorial detail to scenery or to add texture to their characters. Food images engage a reader's imagination. They invoke a reader's sensory memory. That a reader participates in the storytelling process is made clear by Kathleen McCormick and Gary Waller in their work Reading Texts: Reading, Responding, Writing. In referring to the effects of literature on readers they observe that "most of these effects will be brought about by what the individual brings to his or her experience of reading" (11).

If it can be assumed that all readers eat, then it is

reasonable to assume that food images are drawn from experiences common to all readers, male and female alike. It is not wise to assume, however, that one reader's understanding of a food experience will be the same as another's, but it is probable that all readers have been exposed to similar circumstances at some time in their lives. Readers' sensory memories are marked by early experiences with food and a multi-sensory impression is left. A novelist can trigger that memory and the reader can recall it at will. For instance, readers with a background in English or American culture can recall the aroma of bacon frying, popcorn popping, cakes baking. They can hear that same bacon crackling and spitting in the pan, the popcorn exploding and pinging against the pot lid, the ominous silence of a cake in the oven. They can whoop down the stairs to the breakfast table for the bacon, hop about or spin and giggle in anticipation of the popcorn, but tread gently and quietly when a cake is in the oven. Woe be unto the child who is slamming the door which makes the cake fall! That the novelist can provoke common reactions among readers allows that novelist to use food images not just to elicit a reader's emotional reaction but to engage that reader's sympathy and involvement with calculated precision.

Virginia Woolf writing in A Room of One's Own expressed her thoughts on luncheon parties when she proceeded to

describe in great detail the luncheon to which she had been invited, pointing out the sauces for sole and partridge, the coin thin potatoes, the "sprouts, foliated as rosebuds" (11). The reader's eyes, nose and saliva glands were right with her.

Louise Westling, writing in Southern Quarterly in 1992, takes delight in noting "a sacramental connection between our being and the rest of the world. This is the bodily mystery of eating" (Westling 29). She refers to Mrs. Ramsey's dinner party in Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse and considers "her boeuf en daube the triumphal offering which creates peaceful community among her family and guests and which stands for the essence of civilization in the novel" (Westling 29-30): "'Andrew,' she said, 'hold your plate lower, or I shall spill it.' (The Boeuf en Daube was a perfect triumph)" (158).

It is imperative at this point to look carefully at the term "image" for the purposes of this thesis. According to Richard Lanham in his A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, Aristotle dealt only vaguely and fleetingly with the idea of image when he referred to it as "a thing that represents something else" (59). Yet while this description brings to mind the standard definition of a metaphor, it is really Aristotle's description of a metaphor which begins to shed light on the word "image" as it is often used in

contemporary thought. Aristotle defined metaphor in the following way:

Midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace, it is a metaphor which most produces knowledge. (qtd. in Lanham 66)

A contemporary definition of the word "image" as found in volume VII of The Oxford English Dictionary of 1989, definition number five, refines Aristotle's conception:

A mental representation of something (esp. a visible object), not by direct perception, but by memory or imagination; a mental picture or impression; an idea, conception. Also, with qualifying adj.: a mental representation due to any of the senses (not only sight) and to organic sensations. (666)

The Princeton Dictionary of Poetic Terms supports the above definition:

An image is the reproduction in the mind of a sensation produced by a physical perception . . . in literary usage, imagery refers to images produced in the mind by language, where words and statements may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perceptions were the reader actually to have those experiences, or to the sense-impressions themselves (363).

It should be understood that within the discussion in this thesis the word "image" is used to convey not just a visual picture as in a photograph of a scene but in addition to elicit an emotional response from the reader which then triggers a sympathetic reaction as well as a personal understanding.

It should also be made clear that for these purposes

the term "food" refers to the physical substance which physiologically fuels the human body. This work will take great care to avoid the guise of a psychological exploration, especially in the area of sexual overtones which can often and indeed should be used as touchstones for much reading, but will not refrain from exploring those surface emotional reactions to so many eating experiences.

Food is a physiological requirement of the human body. It sustains life, nourishes the organism. The human body dies without food -- solid food, hearty food, consistently supplied food. As human beings we understand this need for food. We understand that it must be hunted or harvested as well as prepared. Food is life and death serious and is regulated and affected by custom, culture, religion, availability, fad, and fancy.

The consumption of food has been ritualized and traditionalized. Though it is only within the last few centuries that "dishes" and "silverware" as we know them have been a common part of our lives, it was the great reign of Victoria Regina during which most of the utensils we use today (and a wonderful group which have fallen into disuse) were introduced or perfected. And it was during Victoria's reign that the pleasures of ritualized dining rose to a sumptuous peak.

Food rituals are so well recognized and so common that

a writer can use references to food itself, food service, food preparation, and food consumption as a form of "short hand." Inferences can be drawn from the simplest food images which quickly shed light on characters and situations. Lengthy explanations are unnecessary. Protracted descriptions become superfluous. For example, In his novel Waverly, Sir Walter Scott took great care to describe a banquet in the hall of Fergus Mac-Ivor (163-64). The description of the food does much to allay the presumption of commonality among the highlanders. As the feast is described the impression of good will and plenty is apparent.

In The Mill on the Floss George Eliot also devotes great care to the description of various household items belonging to the Tulliver's (215-17). Mrs. Tulliver's attachment to these particular belongings imparts a deep sense of despair simply because the readers are capable of imprinting their own impressions on the objects described. In Waverly Sir Walter Scott remarks that a young woman serving tea is "presiding at the female empire of the tea-table" (171). It would seem reasonable to suggest, then, that these novelists have employed food images to describe and clarify their female characters.

And it is the food, its preparation and service, which indeed defines these women because traditionally women's



roles include feeding and nurturing. Women provide food as a necessity and prepare it in women's spaces. Food is presented and consumed in communal rites, representing the traditions of hospitality and the delights of the feast. Food is prepared and presented with grace and skill, tactile demonstrations of female spiritual and emotional values. In Woolf's To the Light House it seems appropriate and immediate that Mrs. Ramsey should ask ". . . what have I done with my life? . . . taking her place at the head of the table, and looking at all the plates making white circles on it" (125), thereby demonstrating Woolf's understanding of these values.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how food images are used in a particular work to provide more than visual detail to scenery or to add texture to characters. Food images invoke a reader's sensory memory which generates a sympathetic response from the reader and draws them into the narrative, engaging the reader's imagination, which then decorates the visual scenes with personal experiences.

Elizabeth Gaskell uses food images in her novel Cranford in just this way. The story is about older ladies in a small town. The reader could have been easily disenfranchised with all the discussion of manners and mores but by including images of food--food being cooked, food being served--Gaskell has gathered her readers under an

umbrella of the familiar. Using this common language of food images, Gaskell invokes readers' sensory memory to draw them into the narrative, to summon emotional decor for visual scenes and to soften the edges of characters fated to be everlastingly one dimensional.

Mrs. Gaskell makes convincing use of food images as shorthand communication. Her characters are knowledgeable and concerned about such things and Mrs. Gaskell knew that her readers would understand and interpret her meanings with little effort. And it is not just her female readers who understand Mrs. Gaskell. All readers understand food images whether the homely views of a working kitchen, the formal views of the evening meal, or the social implications of the tea tray. All readers can interpret because all readers eat.

## CHAPTER II

### Elizabeth Gaskell and Cranford

"Reason always means what  
someone else has got to say"  
(Gaskell, Cranford)

In order to appreciate fully Gaskell's use of food images in Cranford, a certain amount of background information will prove valuable. The contemporary reader looking backward over a period of approximately one hundred and fifty years can find difficulty in interpreting basic realities of that day. It is quite possible, for instance, to misunderstand the persistent presentation of puddings during this time or the fuss made over tea tables and the accompanying accoutrements. In this case, a brief foray into Elizabeth Gaskell's life and times and an equally brief consideration of the novel will be instructive.

Cranford is a compilation of seven stories which were first published in the magazine Household Words. The stories are about the people and happenings in a small town in England in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the stories about Cranford are remarkable because the town is "in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women" (39). Enid L. Duthie notes that these women "are the hereditary guardians of it

(Cranford's) traditions, its manners and its morals. . . . they have an unassailable dignity . . . in any crisis, it is they who take the initiative" (42). Duthie also sees Cranford as "a quiet place, with an autumnal tranquillity," and notes that it is "privileged territory" (44). But while these remarkable women can appear comic and unusual, "the customs of Cranford are not quaint eccentricities divorced from human nature, but habits linked by past experience to present need" (Easson 105). In his work The Literature of Change John Lucas all but dismisses Cranford as a "beautiful idyll . . . (that) minister(s) to the particularly English love for remembrance of things past" (2), and yet he is quick to acknowledge that the "provincial novel in the nineteenth century is not only concerned with the nature of social change but uniquely well placed to record and explore how it happened, note its effects on individual lives, on patterns of living, on communities" (xi).

Though Cranford is "surrounded by meadows and farmsteads, and in summer the fragrant smell of the neighboring hayfields is borne on the breeze through the open windows that look on to the principal street" (Duthie 38), Coral Lansbury finds it "difficult to describe Cranford as a novel of country life, since there is so little that is uniquely rural about it . . . instead, Cranford is deliberately set in the context of fiction, and there is no

reality beyond the card tables, the tea tray underneath the sofa . . ." (93):

Cranford may seem to be a novel about unimportant lives, but, in fact, it is a consideration of fundamental human problems, of money, class, sex, social groupings, and taste. The world of Cranford, however, is much less certain of its own values . . . .  
(Pollard 64)

Angus Easson in Elizabeth Gaskell agrees with Lansbury's assessment by noting that "human nature, feeling, often clashes with custom and gains in the confrontation, the ladies usually being at their best when they 'hypocritically' renege on what they declare are sacred principles" (103). Gaskell makes her ladies clear to us as she describes them as knowing "all each other's proceedings; they are exceedingly indifferent to each other's opinions. Indeed, as each has her own individuality, not to say eccentricity, pretty strongly developed, nothing is so easy as verbal retaliation; but somehow good-will reigns among them to a considerable degree" (40).

Nowhere are these civilities more defined than when Gaskell deals with economics:

'Elegant economy!' How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford! There, economy was always 'elegant,' and money-spending always 'vulgar and ostentatious;' a sort of sour grapeism, which made us very peaceful and satisfied. . . . We had tacitly agreed to ignore that any with whom we associated in terms of visiting equality could ever be prevented by poverty from doing anything that they wished. (42)

In particular, Gaskell notes that "it was considered 'vulgar' . . . to give anything expensive, in the way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments" (42) and refers to the bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits made available by the Honourable Mrs. Jamison. Gaskell makes use of descriptions of food and food service to clarify and yet down-play the poverty of some of the Cranford ladies:

When Mrs. Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world; and talked on about household forms and ceremonies, as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray up-stairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge cakes. (41)

In other words, the ladies would never embarrass one of their own by drawing attention to her obvious lack of means. Gaskell provides background enhancements, therefore, which invite the reader into the scene and assure the reader of a certain level of comfort. Elizabeth Gaskell was indeed a novelist, but she was a housewife first.

Gaskell was forty-one years old when she wrote the first of the stories which would eventually be compiled into

the novel Cranford. She had been married for nineteen years, had four living children, and was busy with the responsibilities befitting the wife of a minister in a large manufacturing town. Arthur Pollard describes her as ". . . the mistress of a busy household. Her letters tell, often amusingly but sometimes in an irritated vein, of her problems as a housewife" (18). The Gaskells lived at 42 Plymouth Grove in Manchester where Mrs. Gaskell "was able to indulge in some gardening and to keep hens and a cow. Hence the problems of butter-making and getting eggs for sitting . . . Indoors there was the problem of staffing, interviewing new cooks who admitted to outbursts of temper and dismissing girls" (18). The vague idea of Mrs. Gaskell as a quiet and straitlaced model of Victorian respectability is repudiated by Pollard's description of her:

She was extremely active as a mother, a minister's wife and a hostess. When she had time to spare from these duties, there were the calls of visiting, of apparently indefatigable letter-writing and the passion for travel. Wherever she went, she made friends. Possessed of a serene beauty, considerable gifts of conversation, a lively personality and a steady sense of humour, she was endowed to succeed socially. To these gifts she added the psychological capacity of a keen observer and student of human nature, the intellectual and cultural ability of a well-stocked mind and a well-formed taste, and the moral courage and seriousness which expressed itself in her firm yet liberal religious convictions, her delicate personal sympathies and her sustained social purpose. (30)

Lest Pollard leave us with the impression that Mrs.

Gaskell was super-human, it is important at this point to remember that for the wife of a Unitarian minister in the middle of the nineteenth century the everyday difficulties of life were faced with the assistance of servants. The lady of the house may have concerned herself with whether or not there were onions in the larder, but she certainly never peeled them. Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell may have been a most energetic gardener, but it is unlikely that she pampered cabbages or rutabagas. In those years there was a distinct difference between the kitchen and the dining room, and very little thought was given to the matter.

Mrs. Gaskell's credentials as a wife and homemaker in this setting are as valid as her memories and observations of life in a small town such as the one where she grew up. She was just a little over a year old after her mother died when her father took her to the town of Knutsford to live with her aunt, Mrs. Lumb. It was "Aunt Lumb," estranged from her husband and living by herself, who saw to young Elizabeth's upbringing and her education:

The Knutsford of Mrs. Gaskell's early years . . . was a world which to the young girl must have seemed to be dominated by what to her were old ladies. Fussy old ladies they were, preoccupied with the niceties of their little lives, controlled by the requirements of genteel trivialities. (Pollard 63).

That Elizabeth was comfortable in Knutsford and had a quiet yet pleasant early life can be inferred from her later works



as well as from occasional letters to friends. That she was mindful of the old customs was made plain in a letter sent to her friend Mary Howitt, dated August 18, 1838, in which she spoke of one charming Knutsford tradition in particular:

One is the custom, on any occasion of rejoicing, of strewing the ground before the houses of those who sympathise in the gladness with common red sand, and then taking a funnel filled with white sand, and sprinkling a pattern of flowers upon the red ground. This is always done for a wedding . . . . When I was married, nearly all the houses in the town were sanded . . . . (Sanders 38)

In this same letter to Mary Howitt, Gaskell laments that with the passing of each generation, the community is losing "many poetical beliefs" (Sanders 41). For instance, Gaskell still believes the following:

A shooting star is unlucky to see. . . . The dog-rose, that pretty libertine of the hedges with the floating sprays wooing the summer air . . . is unlucky. Never form any plan while sitting near one . . . the foxglove knows when a spirit passes by and always bows the head. Is not this poetical! . . . I have respected the flower ever since. (Sanders 41)

But the comforts and regularity of life in Knutsford were fast becoming extinct as England moved more solidly into the industrial age. Change was occurring everywhere, tumbling the old social orders and threatening the status quo. The evolution of the steam engine had added efficiency to factory environments, and though work was plentiful, working conditions were appalling. The sanitary situation, which had been easily ignored with a smaller and more wide

spread population, became unspeakable as populations mushroomed in factory towns and large cities. The newly wealthy industrialists and financiers challenged the traditional aristocracy, the landowners, for their position near the top of the social structure, thereby shaking the stability of a centuries' old social pattern in the name of a more open society.

An unending stream of workers had turned to the factories for better pay and hope for the future. These poor and uneducated people, once spread innocuously about the country farms, gathered together in the factory communities, and, as more people arrived, their surroundings became more cramped. Cheap housing was thrown up seemingly overnight to accommodate the new arrivals: "Their warrens-- a most suitable word, with its English countryman's connotations of tight packing and prolific breeding--were long rows and blocks . . . all designed to cram the most people into the least space (Altick 43)." The water supply was the river that was passing, often afloat with whatever human or industrial filth had been shunted into it: "A single communal privy, itself never cleaned, might serve as many as forty multi-family dwellings . . . Open air drains . . . sent the walkways and unpaved streets awash with filth, thus creating monstrous enlargements of the disease breeding conditions which had prevailed in towns ever since

the Middle Ages" (Altick 44).

Diseases and epidemics ran riot among a population severely affected by exhaustion and malnutrition. Cholera struck England in 1846: "But for its ravages, the medical profession, and the public at large, would have continued to remain even longer in ignorance of the intimate connection of Disease and Dirt, particularly human dirt" (Pike 302). Semmelweis demanded cleanliness at childbirth as early as 1847, but it would be 1865 before Lister would use carbolic acid as an antiseptic during surgery and the late 1800's before Pasteur and Koch would demonstrate that invisible germs could cause certain diseases and that whereas dirt did not cause disease, it provided the conditions in which disease could flourish.

It was with an acute sense of this change that Gaskell acknowledged her heritage, a quiet life in a small community where people knew each other and helped when they could. In the July (1849) issue of Sartain's Magazine in an article entitled "The Last Generation in England," Gaskell wrote that she wished to "put upon record some of the details of country town life, either observed by myself, or handed down to me by older relations; for even in small towns, scarcely removed from villages, the phases of society are rapidly changing" (319).

Many of the characters and circumstances which would

later be expanded into the Cranford tales were first developed in this short article. The pecking order in the town was laid out beginning with the daughters of the "large landed proprietors of very old family." There followed "the widows of the cadets of these same families . . . the professional men and their wives . . . a class of single or widow ladies . . . the shopkeepers, who dared to be original" (319-20).

The social regulations so important to the Cranford lifestyle were first offered in this article:

Before a certain hour in the morning calls were never paid, nor yet after a certain hour in the afternoon; . . . A quarter of an hour was the limit of a morning call. . . . The dinner hour was three o'clock in all houses of any pretensions to gentility; and a very late hour it was considered to be. . . . By ten o'clock all -- was in bed and asleep. (321-22)

Card playing after dinner was considered a proper pastime and there were social rules as well as game rules to be observed:

. . . unless in the very height of summer, it was considered a delicate attention to have the shutters closed, the curtains drawn, and the candles lighted. The card tables were set out, each with two new packs of cards, for which it was customary to pay, each person placing a shilling under one of the candlesticks. (322)

It is also in this article that Gaskell first refers to the respectable widows and spinsters as "Amazons" and gives her introduction to the "elegant economies." An often quoted

incident in Cranford occurs in Chapter VIII when Mrs. Forrester describes the adventure of the cat swallowing the lace, but the story is first told in "The Last Generation in England."

The food references used so effectively in Cranford were also introduced in this article:

We had the honour and glory of looking at old plate and delicate china . . . but the slices of bread and butter were like wafers, and the sugar for coffee was rather of the brownest . . . I remember a card party at one of these good ladies' lodgings; where, when tea-time arrived, the ladies sitting on the sofa had to be displaced for a minute, in order that the tea-trays, (plates of cake, bread and butter, and all,) might be extricated from their concealment under the valances of the couch. (323)

Another example of this interest in things related to food service and preparation, appears toward the end of the article as Gaskell is describing one of the "old ladies (who) were living hoards of family tradition and old custom" (324):

At her house there was a little silver basket-strainer, and once remarking on this, she showed me a silver saucer pierced through with holes, and told me it was a relic of the times when teas was first introduced into England; after it had been infused and the beverage drank, the leaves were taken out of the teapot and placed on this strainer, and then eaten by those who liked with sugar and butter, 'and very good they were,' she added. (325)

The author continued:

Another relic which she possessed was an old receipt-book, dating back to the middle of the

sixteenth century. Our grandmothers must have been strong-headed women, for there were numerous receipts for 'ladies beverages' &c., generally beginning with 'Take a gallon of brandy, or any other spirit.' The puddings, too, were no light matters: one receipt, which I copied for the curiosity of the thing, begins with 'Take thirty eggs, two quarts of cream, &c. These brobdignagian [huge] puddings she explained by saying that the afternoon meal, before the introduction of tea, generally consisted of cakes and cold puddings, together with a glass of what we should now call liqueur, but which was then denominated bitters. (325)

It is evident that Gaskell found the preservation of the food traditions of this older generation as important as the preservation of other areas of their lives.

It was at Charles Dickens' urging that she submitted her short story, "Our Society at Cranford," to be published in two episodes in Dickens' magazine Household Words, December 13, 1851. The stories, light and witty and immensely popular, would later become the first two chapters of Cranford, "Our Society" and "The Captain." Dickens encouraged Gaskell to continue the tales and over the course of the next two years seven stories were published. The exact titles and publication dates are as follows:

January 3, 1852, "A Love Affair at Cranford," which in the book became Chapter III, "A Love of Long Ago," and Chapter IV, "A Visit to an Old Bachelor."

March 13, 1852, "Memory at Cranford" in the book, Chapter V, "Old Letters," and Chapter VI, "Poor Peter."

April 3, 1852, "Visiting at Cranford," in the

book, Chapter VII, "Visiting," and Chapter VIII, "Your Ladyship."

January 15, 1853, "The Great Cranford Panic," in the book, Chapter IX, "Signor Brunoni," Chapter X, "The Panic," and Chapter XI, "Samuel Brown."

April 2, 1853, "Stopped Payment at Cranford," in the book, Chapter XII, "Engaged to be Married," and Chapter XIII, "Stopped Payment."

May 7, 1853, "Friends in Need, at Cranford," in the book, Chapter XIV.

May 21, 1853, "A Happy Return to Cranford," in the book, Chapter XV, "A Happy Return," and Chapter XVI, "Peace to Cranford."

When the last of the series was done, Mrs. Gaskell collected the articles, rewrote a few sentences here and there so as to secure a continuity of theme, divided the chapters as indicated above, and sent the work to Chapman & Hall, who published it in 1853. (Sanders 36-37)

While the position of Gerald DeWitt Sanders on this subject is somewhat deprecating, leaving the reader with a picture of Mrs. Gaskell dashing off brief notes and drawing arrows, Peter Keating at least credits the situation with a sense of dignity:

Mrs. Gaskell revised the "Household Words" text for the 1853 edition, changing some of the names of characters (Miss Matey to Miss Matty being the most significant) . . . dividing the original installments into chapters . . . and making a number of minor stylistic changes. (31)

In effect, the stories themselves were unchanged except for minor details. The first edition was published in June, 1853, followed quickly by a second edition the same year. A

third edition was printed in 1855 but it was 1864 before the work was again in print and the 1864 edition had also been illustrated. As Keating has noted, "the immense popularity of Cranford developed only after Mrs. Gaskell's death in 1865" (9). It has been estimated that by the middle of the twentieth century there had been one hundred seventy editions and reprints, many of those in foreign languages.

Nevertheless, Cranford is often discounted as a novel. Many writers, in comparing it to her other works, dismiss Gaskell's efforts as inconsequential. Coral Lansbury, for instance, suggests the following in Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis:

Cranford has always bedeviled Elizabeth Gaskell's reputation, providing an incongruous touchstone for the major works and fully justifying her subsequent status as a minor novelist. It is a slight piece, a series of vignettes written to please the current taste for semi-comic reminiscence method . . . . (81)

In his introductory remarks to Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer, Arthur Pollard injects what can best be read as an apology and at the same time suggests a sense of insignificance:

I hope that I have succeeded in showing that Mrs. Gaskell is far more than merely the author of Cranford. At one level, but, be it said immediately, a superficial one, the tale that is told about them re-creates nostalgically those pleasant, little, leisured lives. (63)

Nina Auerbach sees Gaskell's Cranford as a "rural idyll of a



village inhabited by widows and aging spinsters whose fussy gentility has somehow tucked itself away from the harsh industrial world of her other novels" (79).

Although the Cranford stories may be light and, in the great scheme of social novels and other frenzied charitable activities, inconsequential, they provide a camera-like close-up of a life style all but unknown in the late twentieth century and in so doing allow the modern reader access to the plain realities of the lives of a singular group of people. This access is made especially available through Gaskell's food images. They decorate parlors, round out characters, and in general, give substance and texture to very specific lives while inviting the reader's participation in a common experience.

### CHAPTER III

#### Dinner Table Details: China, Silver, and Cooking in Cranford

"Very delicate was the china,  
very old the plate, very thin  
the bread and butter, and very  
small the lumps of sugar."  
(Gaskell, Cranford)

Gaskell's food images in Cranford invoke sensory memories that draw a reader into the narrative, summoning reader-provided emotional decor for the visual scenes and generating reader sympathy which softens the edges of characters otherwise fated to be one dimensional. Additional information about the popular food of the era, preparation constraints, and serving proprieties can supplement a reader's knowledge of this general topic and add subtlety to Gaskell's descriptions. For instance, to understand that all cooking at this time was done with the aid of wood fires provides an awareness of difficulties perhaps unimagined in an initial reading of a work such as Cranford. The food experiences may be common, but the details are worth exploring.

Mrs. Gaskell makes a point of noting certain items which appear at the tea table at Mrs. Jamieson's: "the very delicate china, the very old plate, the very thin bread and

butter, and the very small lumps of sugar" (124). The aristocratic, genteel and "old blue-blooded" (108) ladies of Cranford were well aware of the worth of their prized possessions and took great pride in displaying them to their friends. Gaskell decorated the ladies' parlors and dining rooms with these accessories of dining which in themselves suggested a certain level of affluence among the ladies.

For instance, the ladies set their tables with their fine china as well as their sterling or Sheffield plate--the silver spoons for stirring the sugar into the tea, the "filigree sugar tongs" (124), the small silver jugs for cream and the larger silver jugs for milk. Sterling silver or Sheffield plate tea pots, sugar bowls, cream pitchers, trays, mugs, porringers, ink stands, spoons, and all manner of decorative and useful articles were common enough in households such as those of the ladies of Cranford:

In the eighteenth century, the practice of tea and coffee drinking moved from the coffeehouse into the home, requiring teapots, sugar bowls, coffeepots, chocolate pots, strainers, tea kettles with spirit lamps and stands, trays and tea caddies--items that are still considered, along with spoons, to be the special province of silver in the house. (McNab 59)

The ladies could have owned lovely tea sets consisting of the tea pot, sugar bowl and milk jug, or the pieces could easily have been of different patterns as the pieces were often purchased singly. Howard Okie in his work on old

silver and Sheffield plate claims that "the idea of making tea kettles to match the tea sets is a Victorian one" (7). The ladies' pieces, older than the time of their use, would not have fit his description.

The ladies' pieces could have been decorated in any number of ways -- engraving, pricking, flat chasing, embossing, cut-card work, acid etching, piercing, bright cutting, wriggle working, or the openwork process called filigree. Another method of decoration which used more silver than the others but which achieves high relief decoration was called casting:

Small cast parts, such as finials, spouts, feet, handles and openwork bands, were long in use, as were silver sculptures. In the seventeenth century, casting was used for silver furnishings such as chandeliers, and in the eighteenth century . . . cast relief additions were soldered onto raised or cast bodies of highly decorated wares. (McNab 19)

It would be presumptuous to guess what the ladies' pieces looked like. Not only were there many methods of decoration but there were many silver workers producing pieces for the home. Indeed, during the single year of 1778 to 1779, articles have been found with marks from fourteen different makers identified within the London guild alone as well as others from makers identified with guilds in Birmingham, Chester, New Castle, Exeter, Norwich, and York.

The ladies' silver pieces could have been made by any

of these silversmiths and decorated in any of the above manners. Gaskell provides only one hint about the appearance of the Cranford silver in the comment by Miss Smith as she attempted to put two sugar cubes into her tea at Mrs. Jamieson's: ". . . the little filigree sugar-tongs, made something like scissors . . ." (124). The size of the sugar-tongs as well as the decorative process of filigree draw one to the conclusion that the sugar-tongs are made of sterling silver. On the other hand, there is a question as to whether Miss Pole owns sterling silver or silver plate when one considers her identification of the contents of the basket thrust into Miss Matty's hands for safe keeping (140). Two arguments can be put forth to suggest that Miss Pole's plate was in fact sterling. First, silver in every shape and size was referred to as "plate" during the nineteenth century. Second, Miss Pole further described the basket's contents when in the course of relating the alarming events which precipitated her perilous escape when she said that she and Betty "got the spoons together" (141). If the "little hand-basket" (140) contained only spoons, and evidently the basket was too small to hold much above the size of a spoon, then the process of producing these small items would negate the use of the sort of silver plate used at the time and indicate that the spoons were made of sterling silver.

When Elizabeth Gaskell mentions the "very old plate" (123) and "old-fashioned silver" used on Cranford tea tables, it is with full knowledge of the varieties available. She was brought up in an environment where old sterling would have been the norm and yet she was part of an age that unabashedly purchased silver plate and was proud to own it. Though there was a difference in production process as well as price between the two types of silverware, both would have been found in the Cranford parlours and assuredly the ladies would have been able to tell the stories behind the acquisition of each piece. Sterling was the more expensive of the two, but the discovery of the first plating process by one Thomas Boulsover of Sheffield brought the look of solid silver to a wider audience. The Sheffield process differed dramatically from the electroplating process which is responsible for the silver plated objects with which we are familiar today, but electroplating was not developed until the 1830's.

Sterling silver is an alloy of silver and copper. Pure silver by itself is too soft to sustain continual wear:

Copper has proved to be a good strengthener for the silversmith's purposes. . . . The proportion of silver in the alloy is stated in terms of the silver's 'fineness.' Sterling silver is 925 parts fine, or 925 parts silver to 75 parts copper.  
(McNab 12)

The art of silversmithing is ancient and probably

arrived in England with Christianity. There is no source of pure silver in England so until the process for separating silver from the ore galena was discovered, silversmiths were left to find their materials by melting down coins. It was the discovery of pure silver in the Americas which provided an abundance of the ore for silversmiths all over Europe and the silver once the private domain of the church and royalty was available to those who could afford it. The silver guilds in England had marked their sterling since 1300. The leopard's head was used first, then the lion passant and the lion erased (head and shoulders only). Silversmiths were required to identify themselves as well as their metal by 1597 and used symbols at first and then name initials.

Sheffield plate was also marked but the years of its production were few compared to that of sterling. Fine sterling silverware is produced today whereas the process for producing Sheffield plate was replaced by the simpler and therefore less costly process of electroplating. But for the ninety years prior to the advent of electroplating, it was extremely popular. A silversmith could work the rolled sheets as if they were sheet silver and therefore the designs and decorations produced in the Sheffield plate echo those worked in sterling.

Whereas copper was used to strengthen pure silver, Sheffield plate used copper not only for strength but for

substance. The process of creating the sheets of Sheffield plate involved sandwiching a sheet of copper between two sheets of silver and pressing them together under the weight of a large roller. The resulting rolled sheets were then available for the production of large household serving pieces. The only drawback to Sheffield plate occurred when the edge was exposed after a piece was cut from the large sheet. The edge of the silver plate would present a stripe of color -- white, red, white -- thus giving away the content of the article. The solution to this problem was to make the top silver sheet slightly larger than the internal copper one and rolling the silver over the exposed copper but this method could only be applied in specific instances. The definitive solution proved to be silver wire applied to the offending edge, producing what came to be known as "the edge of poverty" (Okie 391). This edge, however, made the silver plate distinguishable from the sterling and great effort went into camouflaging it. But the Cranford ladies would have known who in Cranford owned sterling and who owned Sheffield plate and those who owned each would have known that they knew but not one of them would have dreamed of commenting. Genteel and knowledgeable as they were about the finer pieces of equipment for entertaining, the ladies would have been aware as well of the difference between pottery, which was relegated to kitchen use, and china, the



more appropriate ware which graced the tables of the high born. Moreover, with little effort, they could have distinguished between the newly available, and obviously newly purchased, English bone china and the more delicate porcelain china produced on the continent.

The tea trays in Cranford were certainly silver as were the spoons set out when the ladies were invited to tea. Tea pots made of silver began to appear in their "characteristic squat form" (Oman 148) as early as 1670 so the ladies' tea pots were of a familiar shape. Tea was expensive so the pots in which to brew it were small and, as a consequence, required intermittent refilling. Tea today is made by pouring boiling water from a kettle over tea leaves set inside a tea pot. Whereas the shape and purpose of the tea pot has remained basically unchanged over the years, the tea kettle has waffled in and out of favor. By 1760 it had been "succeeded by the tea-urn fitted with a tap at the bottom of the body and standing on a base with four feet" (Oman, 152). We know that Miss Matty owned a tea urn because its use is specifically referred to as the catalyst for Miss Smith's suggestion that, in her financial misfortune, Miss Matty should consider becoming a tea merchant (187). Gaskell provides no information as to the presence of tea urn or tea kettle in any other Cranford house.

Aside from the tea pots and tea urns, it is possible

that the ladies of Cranford sipped their tea from original Chinese porcelains that had been imported from China along with the tea which they drank. It is also possible that these ladies owned fine porcelain cups and saucers imported years before from Germany or France. Mrs. Gaskell wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century and by that time English bone china had become well known in most households where refined dining occurred. Gaskell, however, was looking backward to a time earlier in the century and to ladies who were more than middle aged. As English bone china was not introduced until the very beginning of the century and as the ladies were certainly not the sort to dash out and buy the latest fad, they would therefore revere the old pieces left to them by late relatives which would more likely have been produced late in the eighteenth century. When Gaskell refers to their "fine china," she was not looking at the modern English bone china but at a variety of porcelain manufactured on the continent.

The term "china" had been adopted because the first tea drinking utensils were made of porcelain and brought from China along with the tea:

It [Chinese porcelain] was introduced in China somewhere about AD 700 . . . about a thousand years before a similar ware was produced in Europe. The earliest Chinese porcelains were not necessarily delicate . . . Nevertheless by the Ming dynasty, between 1368 and 1644, the Chinese porcelains had been refined, the manufacturing

processes perfected and the resulting porcelains are similar to, or even surpass, our present-day conception of this exceptionally fine material. (Godden 11)

The difference between porcelain and pottery is a matter of translucency. Porcelain is translucent: "This property is best shown if you pass your hand between the light and the porcelain. You will see the shadow of your hand like a cloud rolling across the sky" (Godden 12). Bone china is light in weight whereas pottery is not only opaque but heavy; "the addition of bone ash allows the ware to be markedly thin, strong, and white in colour" (Brett 133).

Although there is no one bone china recipe, in essence it is the combination of china-stone and china-clay with the addition of ground animal bones which produced "a fine white body, very workable and capable of being formed and turned to a thin gauge and yet retain its shape in the kiln . . . it is strong and compact and reasonably light in weight . . ." (Godden 180). Josiah Spode established the distinctiveness of British manufacture with his particular variety of bone china, the hybrid porcelain that came to dominate fine china production in Britain. Thomas Minton developed his own recipe for bone china during the same period as Josiah Spode and, indeed, became Spode's greatest rival.

Although the Spode factory was producing bone china in

large quantities by early in the nineteenth century, it is reasonable to assume that the Cranford ladies did not own English bone china. The wares from the Spode factory were sold first in London. It can be assumed that a village as small as Cranford would not have claimed an establishment suitable for the display and sale of bone china. It can also be assumed that the ladies probably were not able to afford the new bone china:

We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic. The Cranfordians had that kindly 'esprit de corps' which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them tried to conceal their poverty. (41)

Knowing the general tone of entertaining in Cranford, we can assume that the tea cups, saucers, and small plates were the very finest that the hostess owned because the simple rules of hospitality demanded it. While it is reasonable to assume that the ladies enjoyed English pottery, no doubt particularly that of Josiah Wedgwood, there is one description in Cranford which begs interpretation as possibly porcelain from the Continent: "the china was delicate egg-shell . . ." (45). Porcelain is known for its white color and its smooth body. The first successful attempt to produce a porcelain close to the Chinese prototype, or "hard-paste porcelain" (Godden 15) occurred in Germany in the early 1700's.

A fine white body was discovered very similar to Chinese porcelain and before long the Courts of Europe were striving to set up rival porcelain factories. In general terms, only the products of the German State Factory at Meissen, near Dresden, and the French National Factory at Sevres were to influence the English manufacturers . . . ." (Godden 14)

Porcelain being produced in England at this time was known as soft-paste and consisted of a combination of "such materials as crushed glass, white clay, soapstone and bone ash, each type varying with the particular factory" (Bedford 18). Both the continental hard-paste porcelains as well as the English soft-paste porcelains were extremely fragile and, more to the point perhaps, extremely expensive. By changing the soft-paste formulas to include more bone ash, the Spode factory was the first of the Staffordshire potters to produce a true hard-paste which, translucent and yet more durable than the continental products but, because it could be fired at a lower temperature like a creamware, was more economical to produce.

Though English bone china would be acclaimed as a splendid discovery, the purchase of this new and highly sought after china was probably outside the financial limits of the Cranford ladies. Furthermore, even if they could have managed the price of a cup and saucer, Cranford prided itself on "elegant economy," and the sudden appearance of a new set of china would have been considered inappropriate

behavior for the ladies. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the china of "delicate egg-shell" used by the Misses Jenkyns at tea to honor their guest Miss Smith (45) was one of the continental porcelains. English bone china is translucent but not quite as fragile as the French and German varieties, one of its more endearing characteristics.

Cranford's tea tables set magnificently with the finest china and the oldest and most beautiful silver also held the offerings most looked forward to -- the food and the tea. The beverage of choice for these occasions, tea, as well as the various cakes and sweet offerings of the tables were all produced in home kitchens under the sharp eye of the mistress of the house with the help of at least one servant. While the modern reader can summon sensory responses to such delights as hot tea, sweet cakes and lump sugar, there is little need to pursue the tastes and smells inherent in these offerings. It is instructive however to explore the conditions and methodology for the production of these delicacies.

Janet Dunbar writing in The Early Victorian Woman: Some Aspects of Her Life (1837-57) provides a vivid picture of the kitchens as they would likely have been in Cranford:

Below stairs the early Victorian house was dark, cold, comfortless. The housewife might well put on an extra shawl as she descended from her living-rooms to the basement to unlock the store-cupboards and see that all was in order. Stone

floors and slate shelves in larders and sculleries were icy to the touch. Only the kitchen was warm, heated by a large kitchen range which ate up coal and needed constant attention. In summer the kitchen was like a furnace, for all the cooking was done on the range. (42-43)

Not all kitchens were in basements, but this pattern lasted well into the latter part of the century. However, service to the dining room was invariably cumbersome regardless of the location of the kitchen, and if the contents of platters and serving bowls were hot, the food almost invariably arrived at the table lukewarm.

Dunbar's reference to "below stairs" could also be applied to those homes in which the drawing rooms or public rooms were on the second floor (or the "first floor" as the English would have it) and therefore the kitchens and servant areas were on the first floor (or "ground floor").

Mrs. Jamieson's home was of this type:

That lady lived in a large house just outside the town. . . . To be sure, the living-rooms were at the back, looking on to a pleasant garden; the front windows only belonged to kitchens and house-keepers' rooms, and pantries . . . . (120)

Mrs. Gaskell then tells us that after the ladies "prepared [themselves] for appearing in company . . . [they] went upstairs" (121). It is possible that the cooking apparatus in Mrs. Jamieson's house could have been laid out according to a description provided by Ralph Dutton in his work The Victorian Home:

There should be a roasting range with a boiler, a roasting screen, stewing stoves heated by charcoal, hot-plate, broiling stove, hot closet, and a hot table. (105)

With the extreme heat of a kitchen so equipped, it is no wonder that one of the most serious complaints regarding the servants was that the cooks drank:

And no wonder. Typically, they worked in a hot kitchen, often in the basement - probably badly ventilated - since holes for ventilation were taxed as windows. And once a roaring fire in the coal stove was built to cook something it heated up the whole kitchen; . . . Not surprisingly, the cook could develop a thirst . . . . (Pool 206)

Unfortunately, while household cooks made the best of uncomfortable arrangements, Alexis Soyer, the French chef at the Reform Club in London, "pioneered cooking with gas, and had an all-gas kitchen installed at the Reform Club in 1837:

Gas, though used for lighting, was not yet provided for cooking; the first gas-cooker was exhibited in 1851, but cookers were not fitted in private houses for a number of years after that date. (Mitchell 307)

According to Mark Girouard in his work Victorians at Home, "domestic technology was unremarkable in the nineteenth century; labour was so cheap that there was comparatively little pressure for change" (23). Mitchell agrees and notes in Victorian Britain that "because the industrial revolution was slow to reach the home, cleaning and cooking were physically demanding; it was perhaps because servants were such cheap labor that improved methods arose only late in



the century" (378). And the economy of the home weighed heavily upon the mind of all proper homemakers.

Certainly, the need for frugality weighed heavily on the ladies of Cranford who found that "economy was always 'elegant' and money-spending always 'vulgar and ostentatious' (42). They were continually aware of the cost of various items, whether they were wearable or eatable:

There had been a rise in the price of sugar, which, as preserving time was near, was a piece of intelligence to all our housekeeping hearts . . . (123)

Mrs. Gaskell would have certainly understood kitchen economies as the wife of a minister and mother of four. She especially would have understood Mary Smith's concern with the price of sugar:

Pestle and mortar for pounding sugar stood on a shelf, together with the sugar-clippers; sugar was sold in cones, and had to be clipped and pounded. The housewife generally did this herself, as sugar was an expensive commodity and had to be kept locked away. (Dunbar 42-43)

This matter of economy, however, was not limited to Mrs. Gaskell and her ladies of Cranford even though their variety of economics tended to mask near poverty. The predilection to prudence was a generally accepted standard as Mrs. Beeton's instructions to the mistress of the house make plain:

Frugality and economy are home virtues, without which no household can prosper. . . . We must always remember that it is a great merit in

housekeeping to manage a little well. (2)

Indeed Mrs. Beeton assumed a militant view of the mistress' responsibilities when she suggested the following:

As with the Commander of an Army, or the leader of any enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment; and just in proportion as she performs her duties intelligently and thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path. (1)

With a militaristic approach to housekeeping, the items required in the Victorian kitchen take on the sense of armaments and battle provisions. Up until the publication of Mrs. Beeton's book on household management the average mistress of a house was left to her own devices. But in 1861 Mrs. Beeton came to the rescue with a list of necessities for the kitchen provided to her by the Messrs. Slack, in whose establishment these items could be found (31). There are thirty-seven items on this list, among them a toasting fork, a pair of brass candlesticks, a meat chopper, three block-tin saucepans along with five iron saucepans, a large boiling pot, four iron stewpans, a dripping-pan and stand, a fish and egg-slice, two frying pans, three jelly molds, a cheese-toaster and a coal-shovel (31). Janet Dunbar provides a more visual description of these kitchen necessities:

Kitchen utensils were solid and good. Pans were made of iron and tinned copper; some saucepans had a china lining for double boiling. On the kitchen wall hung a burnished row of dish-covers,

indispensable in an age when all the food was carried from an underground kitchen to the dining-room upstairs. (42-43)

While the number of various saucepans and stewpots might suggest a vast array of dishes for the evening meal, it is interesting to note that "by comparison with our habits today people seem to have eaten a great deal of meat and plenty of fruit but few vegetables" (Rees 67). Although the inimitable Mrs. Beeton recommended for an average dinner on a Wednesday in February boiled haddock and plain melted butter, rumpsteak pudding with potatoes and greens, and blancmange with jam for dessert one can no doubt assume that while the vegetables were served, they may not have been eaten (917). To the consternation of his guests Mr. Holbrook served peas with the duck. The vegetable would have been acceptable if the utensil provided for its consumption had been up to the task (74-75). It is also interesting to note that for a dinner party for twelve Mrs. Beeton suggested a series of three courses to include three fish, pigeons, sweetbreads, ducks, chickens, lamb, beef, and bacon, flanked by soups and desserts wherein only one vegetable is mentioned: that vegetable was a mushroom (937).

But to look down on the Victorians for their lack of vitamins is to do them a disservice. For one thing, vegetables had to be eaten in season or be the sort of root

that would keep in a dark, cool place. Fruit, on the other hand, was more readily available:

Most houses in the country or on the fringes of the towns had orchards or gardens with apple-, pear-, and plum-trees . . . Fruit was cheap to buy; it was grown in market-gardens outside most towns, and brought in on donkey-carts in the early mornings. (Dunbar 69)

Fruit was preserved in a manner much like that used in the following recipe for preserving Damsons taken from The Shilling Kitchiner:

Take the small long damsons, pick off the stalks, and prick them with a pin; then put them into a deep pot, with half their weight of loaf sugar pounded, and set them in a moderate oven till they are soft, then take them off, give the syrup a boil, and pour it upon them; do so two or three times; then take them carefully out, put them into the jars you intend to keep them in, and pour over them rendered mutton suet; tie a bladder over them, and keep them for use in a very cool place. (138)

There were strict rules accompanying the preserving process, not the least of which had to do with enclosing the contents:

Dip writing-paper in brandy, lay it close to the sweetmeats, tie them down with white paper, and two folds of thick cap-paper to keep out the air; for nothing can be a greater fault than bad tying-down, and leaving the pots open. (The Modern Cookery 209)

The preserving process was as much an opportunity for conversation as a culinary experience as such is the case in Cranford:

Miss Jenkyns asked me if I would come and help her

to tie up the preserves in the store-room . . .  
 instead of tying up the preserves in the store-  
 room, however, we went to talk in the dining-room.  
 (60)

Most of the cooking of the day was time consuming and labor intensive as can be determined from recipes from the period. Large quantities of ingredients were not unusual as in the recipe for Savoy Cake taken from Francatelli's Modern Cook which requires fourteen eggs, separated and beaten, and Mrs. Beeton's recipe for boiled beef which requires "part of a round of beef weighing 12 lbs," which cooks in "about 3 hours after the water boils" (234). Considering the difficulties inherent in the production, it would seem reasonable to produce as much as possible at one time, and then sit down for a cup of tea.

Though tea was the beverage of choice for the ladies' gatherings, tea itself was a common experience in Cranford. Miss Matty eventually sells tea in order to support herself; the ladies of Cranford take great pleasure in inviting each other to tea; and all manner of sweets and delectables are prepared to accompany the tea when it is served.

Mrs. Beeton in her classic Book of Household Management provides a thorough explanation of the cultivation, harvest and marketing of tea:

Teas of the finest flavour consist of the youngest leaves. . . . The various names by which teas are sold in the British market . . . the principal are Bohea, Congou, and Souchong, and signify,

respectively, inferior, middling, and superior.  
(872)

The process of making tea appears simple (pour boiling water over tea leaves and steep), yet those in a position to offer culinary advice such as Henry Southgate writing in Things a Lady Would Like to Know are adamant about certain aspects of the procedure insisting that "in preparing the tea, a good economist will be careful to have the best water" (427).

Mr. Southgate also quotes Alexis Soyer on the process of making tea:

In order to make a good cup of tea, M. Soyer recommends that before pouring in any water, the teapot, with the tea in it, shall be placed in the oven till hot, or heated by means of a spirit-lamp, or in front of the fire (not too close, of course), and the pot then filled with boiling water. The result, he says, will be in about a minute a delicious cup of tea, much superior to that drawn in the ordinary way. (428)

While Mr. Soyer's explanation as it occurs in The Modern Housewife is lengthier than Mr. Southgate's summary and charming, it would have been an extravagant addition to this work.

The sweets to accompany the tea were not in themselves time consuming but they required great skill and on some occasions strength and endurance on the part of the cook. For instance, one recipe for Sponge Cake taken from The Modern Cookery requires the cook to beat eight eggs for one hour (159). A recipe for Calf's-Foot Jelly, the basic

gelatin for all purposes, taken from Francatelli's Modern Cook, commands the reader to "throw the jelly into a jelly-bag," a process no doubt requiring an adept hand.

Francatelli also admonishes the cook to understand her oven as "it is impossible to determine on the exact length of time that this, or, indeed, any other cake should remain in the oven before it is done; this will mainly depend upon the construction of the oven . . . " (434).

While Mrs. Gaskell decorated the ladies' tea tables with Savoy bisquits and seed cakes and their dinner tables with mutton chops and puddings, her interests in cooking often took on humorous proportions as when she described a wonderful "old receipt-book, dating back to the middle of the sixteenth century" (325) in "The Last Generation in England":

Our grandmothers must have been strong-headed women, for there were numerous receipts for 'ladies beverages' &c., generally beginning with "Take a gallon of brandy, or any other spirit." The puddings, too, were no light matters: one receipt, which I copied for the curiosity of the thing, begins with 'Take thirty eggs, two quarts of cream, &c. These brobdignagian puddings she explained by saying that the afternoon meal, before the introduction of tea, generally consisted of cakes and cold puddings, together with a glass of what we should now call liqueur . . . . (325)

Though the Cranford ladies did not openly admit to being acquainted with spirits as they demonstrated "by coughing terribly" (113) after tasting Miss Barker's cherry-brandy,

the spirits of their grandmothers rose up in queer circumstances nonetheless for, as Miss Barker explained, "we put brandy-paper over preserves to make them keep" (113).

The china that Mrs. Gaskell includes in her descriptions and the silver as well as the arrowroot, the puddings, and the bread-and-butter sandwiches, all contribute a physical presence within the Cranford homes and affect the characters in the Cranford stories. Without her filigree sugar tongs Mrs. Jamieson's standing in the community is lessened. Without the egg-shell china, Miss Jenkyn's facade suffers. Without the scalloped oysters, potted lobsters and jelly, Miss Barker's largesse is reduced. For the reader, Mrs. Gaskell summons the tastes and smells and memories of grand and plain occasions, and it is these memories which effectively decorate her scenes and soften her characters' edges.



## CHAPTER IV

### Cranford Characters Defined by Food

I had more thankfulness at my heart for their kind thoughts than I cared to put into words; . . . and here I broke down utterly, and had to be refreshed with a glass of cowslip wine.

(Gaskell, Cranford)

With an understanding of Elizabeth Gaskell's life and the novel Cranford as well as information about kitchens and food service in the mid-nineteenth century, it is possible to begin the investigation of how Elizabeth Gaskell uses the food images in Cranford to invoke the reader's sensory memory thus drawing that reader into the narrative, summoning whatever emotional decor the reader might provide for the visual scenes and generating a sympathy which will soften the edges of characters otherwise fated to be one dimensional.

There are sixteen chapters in Cranford, and of these sixteen every one has reference in some way to food except Chapter XII, "Engaged to be Married," in which there is no mention of food whatsoever, and Chapter XIII, "Stopped Payment," although in the latter there is mention of the purchase of tea and eventually a disinterest in dinner on a

particular day. In every other chapter in the book however, Gaskell has made use of food images. These images seem almost to be scattered carelessly, suggesting the homely and commonplace just when the reader's attention might focus elsewhere. In every situation Gaskell's food images invite readers to embellish the scenes according to their own understanding as well as to flesh out the characters according to the readers' own instincts.

It is certainly not my intent to suggest that the significance of Cranford rests on the food images. To the contrary, the food images are secondary and supportive, and Gaskell's critics had viewed the novel in other ways:

The delight of the novel is that a group of middle-aged and old women can order a society to their own pleasure. Men are accepted as unavoidable but hardly respected, eccentricity is indulged and condoned and every accepted social prejudice is turned on its head. Old women live joyfully without children or husbands, friends are a better source of security than families, and old age need have no fear of loneliness. (Lansbury 93-94)

Lansbury's approach is modern and reflects the concerns of women writing about women in the twentieth century. Gerald DeWitt Sanders on the other hand reflects more closely the attitudes of many of Gaskell's contemporary readers as he finds as much amusement in Cranford as sympathy:

If the author saw the foibles and failings of the Cranford ladies, she saw as well the warm hearts beneath the somewhat forbidding exterior, and the kindly understanding when sympathy was called for. They may have been peculiar and narrow, with unjust prejudices, but they were also staunch friends, swift to do good when real need demanded it. (44)

Cranford is funny. Indeed, as Sanders points out, "Mrs. Gaskell's humor reaches its height"(44), but he also sees its melancholy side:

It is true that the humor is blended throughout with pathos; but after all there is a very thin line of demarcation between true humor and pathos, and the humor becomes all the more resplendent by being shown against a background tinged with sadness. (44)

Peter Keating finds that Cranford can be "an extraordinarily sensitive and at times painfully moving work" (10). Arthur Pollard inclines toward a somewhat more insensitive view:

Cranford is a quiet backwater, its separation from the main stream of life emphasized by the occasional reminders of the noise of that great world which is represented by Drumble. . . Cranford is not only quiet; it has also seen better days. The county families are no longer present . . . they are only talked about. Cranford is now left to a group of old ladies living empty lives on limited means. (69)

Pollard's position suggests that being separated from "the main stream of life" which in the book is represented by Drumble is a negative circumstance and that, compared perhaps to Gaskell's more socially conscious works, Cranford is hardly worth investigating as "the social code is not adequate for the human responses (64)." Pollard goes on to

say, however, that "the fear of vulgarity time and again inhibits the display of kindness, but it is never able to suppress it (64)" and with this last statement he identifies the heart of the novel: that in Cranford, kindness surfaces in spite of the best efforts of the ladies who, for all appearances, seem bent on repressing it.

Perhaps the most widely recognized eccentricity of the Cranford social scene centers on economics:

There, economy was always 'elegant,' and money-spending always 'vulgar and ostentatious;' a sort of sour grapeism, which made us very peaceful and satisfied. . . . We had tacitly agreed to ignore that any with whom we associated on terms of visiting equality could ever be prevented by poverty from doing anything that they wished. (42)

This attitude is in itself a kindness to those of the group whose means are limited:

When Mrs. Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world; and talked on about household forms and ceremonies, as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servant's hall . . . instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray up-stairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew we knew, she had been busy all morning making tea-bread and sponge cakes. (41)

The town of Cranford can be most easily explained by

acknowledging that the ladies are in charge:

In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women. . . . For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers without a weed to speck them; for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments; for obtaining clear and correct knowledge of everybody's affairs in the parish; . . . for kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress, the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient. (39)

Naturally there is a pecking order among these ladies of Cranford, beginning with the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson and working down from there, but the most constant of the ladies in Cranford is Miss Mary Smith, the narrator. Miss Smith does not make her home in Cranford at all, but only visits on occasion and the reader is not even told her name until Chapter XIV. Her role in Cranford is that of story teller, observer, and historian, and through her observations she reveals herself as a warm hearted, genteel, generous, thoughtful, a bit rebellious, and extremely funny young woman.

Another notable Cranford lady is Miss Matilda Jenkyns (Miss Matty). All of the Cranford stories involve her in some way. She is Mary Smith's constant hostess, except on the occasion when Miss Smith stayed with Miss Pole, but that was a rare exception. She communicates to this young woman all the rules and regulations, manners and mores,

superstitions and assumptions which make Cranford society operate as smoothly as it does.

Of all the ladies and gentlemen who adorn the Cranford stories, Miss Smith and Miss Matty are the only ones who are rarely involved with food images and this deficiency strengthens my position that the food images are used when lengthy descriptions are impractical. Miss Smith and Miss Matty are in constant view and Gaskell has ample opportunity to express their views, thereby elaborating on their characters. There is no need for a "shorthand" to give the reader insight into their qualities as people. Their exposure to the very womanly business of food is, however, consistent with their characters. Miss Smith, for instance, is a thrifty and frugal homemaker who understands that most people undertake their own "individual small economies" such as saving string or paper:

Small pieces of butter grieve others. They cannot attend to conversation, because of the annoyance occasioned by the habit which some people have of invariably taking more butter than they want. Have you not seen the anxious look (almost mesmeric) which such persons fix on the article? They would feel it a relief if they might bury it out of their sight by popping it into their own mouths, and swallowing it down; and they are really made happy if the person on whose plate it lies unused, suddenly breaks off a piece of toast (which he does not want at all) and eats up his butter. They think that this is not waste. (84)

The reader comes to accept Mary Smith as an accurate reporter who is fully capable of interpreting actions as

well as reporting on them. The communal understanding of "butter" as a recognizable addition to a meal is the vehicle through which Gaskell informs the reader that Mary Smith can be trusted to interpret situations in a manner, if not universal, acceptable to the majority. Another example of this social commentary which serves to connect the reader to Miss Smith occurs when she is a guest for tea at Mrs.

Jamieson's:

Sugar was evidently Mrs. Jamieson's favorite economy. I question if the little filigree sugar-tongs, made something like scissors, could have opened themselves wide enough to take an honest, vulgar, good-sized piece; and when I tried to seize two little minnikin pieces at once, so as not to be detected in too many returns to the sugar-basin, they absolutely dropped one, with a little sharp clatter, quite in a malicious and unnatural manner. (124)

The contest over the sugar lumps has gained the reader's sympathy for Miss Smith and suggested that Mrs. Jamieson is perhaps stepping outside the bounds of Cranford elegant economies and pushing the possibility of being miserly. Sugar is once again the topic under consideration when Miss Smith relates the problem of making conversation with Lady Glenmire, Mrs. Jamieson's sister-in-law:

We were thinking what we could talk about, that should be high enough to interest My Lady. There had been a rise in the price of sugar, which, as preserving-time was near, was a piece of intelligence to all our housekeeping hearts, and would have been the natural topic if Lady Glenmire had not been by. But we were not sure if the Peerage ate preserves - much less knew how they

were made. (123)

Gaskell again places Miss Smith among the majority of readers by focusing their concern upon a subject which has broad enough appeal to be generally understood. She has gathered her fellow guests and her reader into a quorum although, unlike Mrs. Jamieson and the sugar lumps, Lady Glenmire's position is still in question.

Miss Matty's brushes with food, on the other hand, occur primarily in situations where she is unsure of procedure. As the younger daughter of a rector she certainly understands housekeeping, but her domineering and dictatorial older sister, Miss Deborah Jenkyns, is responsible for all of the household decisions and it is not until after her death that Miss Matty is answerable for the domestic decision making. And Miss Matty takes her obligations seriously: "Miss Jenkyns' rules were made more stringent than ever, because the framer of them was gone where there could be no appeal" (66).

This dependence on an older sister is made evident on the occasion of a visit from a cousin, Major Jenkyns, who has been in India for many years. With helpless questioning of Miss Smith as to how to go about entertaining this gentleman, Miss Matty brings the discussion to the dinner table: "And after dinner, how am I to know when to get up, and leave him to his wine? Deborah would have done it so



well . . ." (67). It is the matters of food and drink that weigh most heavily on the heart of the hostess and that badly jar the comfort of a guest. Miss Matty is aware that her trepidation might cause discomfort and goes to Miss Smith for advice. Gaskell indicates Miss Matty's reliance on her older sister through the image of after dinner amenities. However, to Miss Matty's credit, while she is unsure of herself in situations where her sister had once taken control, on the occasion of her brother's disappearance she is certainly capable enough to see to "getting the parlour fire lighted" and having one of the servants prepare tea when the family is out looking for Peter. "I wanted them to have something to eat and drink and warm them," she said, in a distinctly concerned manner (99). Miss Matty may dither in the face of decisions which her sister normally made, but she is rock solid in her consideration of the comfort of others, particularly with what they are eating. For instance, her anxiety for Thomas Holbrook's welfare was palpable when he left for Paris:

'I wish he would not go to Paris,' said Miss Matilda, anxiously. 'I don't believe frogs will agree with him; he used to have to be very careful what he ate, which was curious in so strong-looking a young man.' (78)

Not long after his return to England, Mr. Holbrook loses his interest in life. Miss Pole reported to Mary Smith that the situation was grave:

[He] just sits with his hands on his knees in the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying, what a wonderful city Paris was! Paris has much to answer for, it it's killed by cousin Thomas . . . . (80)

Miss Matty obviously knew her food! But the food images associated with Mary Smith and Miss Matty are few and isolated as Cranford is devoted to their observations and reactions, allowing the reader ample information with which to understand these characters. It is the secondary group of characters, those in the supporting roles, to whom the food images contribute lavishly to the totality of the characters. The women are brought sharply into focus as they are identified by their tea cakes, their puddings and their preserves while the men are softened and made approachable through their associations with food in general.

In a novel devoted to the lives of women, it would appear strange to begin a series of character studies via food images with a duo of male characters, but these men are a curiously compact group, deliciously likeable and sympathetic in their own ways and worthy of even brief notice before the ladies appear. Gaskell introduces Captain Brown in the first story in Cranford as a person who offends the ladies who "did not know what to make of a man who could speak of poverty as if it was not a disgrace" (42). He is a generous soul and a particularly loving father, well read

and willing to share his opinions. That Captain Brown eventually comes to be respected among the ladies happens because he can "immediately and quietly assume the man's place in the room (46)" and in the house. Among other things, he is known to wait "on empty cups and bread-and-butterless ladies" (46). The reader can see the Captain as a personable sort, interested in the company of the Cranford ladies and perfectly willing to see to the mundanities, including assisting the serving maids, without feeling that his position has in any way been compromised. Captain Brown's democratic outlook and generosity is highlighted without magnification through a description of a circumstance that involved damp, slippery weather and a poor old woman:

He had met her returning from the bakehouse as he came from church, and noticed her precarious footing; and, with the grave dignity with which he did everything, he relieved her of her burden, and steered along the street by her side carrying her baked mutton and potatoes safely home. (49)

Where the use of such words as "generous" or "charitable" in describing the Captain might raise a question of less than pristine motives, the simple description of his actions allows the reader to interpret those actions as generous and charitable and they become the reader's discovery rather than the author's authority. The fact that Gaskell takes the time to describe the poor woman's supper cleverly adds

to the feeling of poverty and need because readers have no difficulty in judging the worth of this meal and drawing their own conclusions. The result of this brief encounter, aside from the fact that the ladies of Cranford are scandalized by his actions, is to endow the poor old woman with a level of dignity while adding to the Captain's reputation as a generally good--hearted fellow.

Unlike the good--natured Captain Brown, Mr. Thomas Holbrook represents more of a threat to the peace of Cranford. After a chance meeting with Mr. Holbrook, whom Miss Matty has not seen in thirty or forty years, Miss Matty, Miss Pole and Mary Smith are invited to spend a day at Mr. Holbrook's home in the country. Though Mr. Holbrook had once sought Miss Matty's hand in marriage, her sister and father, The Rector, felt he was not enough of a gentleman to aspire to marriage into their lofty social position. As a result, Mr. Holbrook has never married, contenting himself with the care of his gardens and his mind. While this gentle person has named his cows for the letters of the alphabet and can quote Lord Byron and Lord Tennyson at will and at length, it is the description of the meal for his guests that tells the reader about his life.

At the Holbrook house, the party is served dinner in a room called the kitchen, though the actual cooking had taken place at a distance:

There were oak dressers and cupboards all round, all over by the side of the fireplace and only a small Turkey carpet in the middle of the flag floor . . . The room might have been easily made into a handsome dark-oak dining-parlour, by removing the oven, and a few other appurtenances of a kitchen . . . (73).

The meal begins with an apology from Mr. Holbrook for an old-fashioned meal and gains strong approval from Miss Matty who is never truly comfortable with new ideas:

We had pudding before meat . . . to keep strictly to my father's rule, "No broth, no ball; no ball, no beef;" and always began dinner with broth. Then we had suet puddings, boiled in the broth with the beef; and then the meat itself. If we did not sup our broth, we had no ball, which we liked a deal better; and the beef came last of all, and only those had it who had done justice to the broth and the ball. (74)

Here is a man who finds comfort in the old ways, even to providing his guests with two-pronged forks, old family pieces certainly as by the nineteenth century three-pronged and four-pronged forks had made their appearance. That he chooses not to replace these utensils with more modern equipment suggests one of two things: either Mr. Holbrook takes no notice of the tools of his table and thinks nothing of the dinner service provided for the ladies or, and the more likely considering his feelings toward Miss Matty, that he is proud of his family's belongings and honestly feels them appropriate for the occasion. Evidently the two-pronged forks made from steel with black handles are common enough in each woman's background to cause no more than

quiet consternation when the green peas are served. At least in this setting Mary Smith happily displays her youth and exuberance:

I looked at my host: the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shovelled up by his large round-ended knife. I saw, I imitated, I survived! (75)

Gaskell presents Thomas Holbrook as a rough and somewhat unrefined man, not gentleman enough to suit either the Rector or Miss Deborah Jenkyns but certainly capable of intriguing Miss Matty. He is self taught and knowledgeable and happy to provide his guests with pleasure and sustenance. That he has definite and reasoned preferences as to the proper sequence of dinner dishes identifies Holbrook as stable, reliable, and comfortable. The adventure of the green peas demonstrates his understanding of expedience. These same green peas, while confirming Mr. Holbrook's solidity, also highlight Miss Matty's timidity as she "picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs"(75), unwilling as always to bring notice to herself or disturb the pleasure of others.

The ladies of Cranford are strongly influenced by their own rules and regulations and therefore are more succinctly outlined by the food images. For instance, in the above circumstance with Mr. Holbrook, his cousin Miss Pole chooses to leave her peas untouched, thus avoiding making any kind a

decision which she could not support in the retelling. Miss Pole--good natured (117) though opinionated (145) confidant and friend of both Miss Matty and Mary Smith--is involved in most of the Cranford adventures (129), and it is to her credit that she is slightly skeptical in her observations, looking to science as holding answers to most questions (131). However, when overtaken with a case of the jitters such as engulfed the entire community in Chapter X, "The Panic," Miss Pole and the ladies of Cranford prepare to defend themselves and their properties against hoodlums of unknown and increasingly complex description:

One afternoon . . . we were startled by a hasty knock at the door. Miss Matty bade me run and tell Martha on no account to open the door till she (Miss Matty) had reconnoitred through the window; and she armed herself with a footstool to drop down on the head of the visitor, in case he should show a face covered with black crape, as he looked up in answer to her inquiry of who was there. But it was nobody but Miss Pole . . . .  
(140)

Out of fear of robbery, Miss Pole, carrying her most prized possession--the silverware, flees to Miss Matty for comfort and protection:

'Take care of that,' she said to me, and I offered to relieve her of her basket. 'It's my plate. I am sure there is a plan to rob my house to-night.'  
(140)

Miss Pole explained that when three strange characters had come to her door asking for food, she and her maid had become frightened, and "we got the spoons together, and sat

in the parlour-window watching, till we saw Thomas Jones going from his work, when we called to him and asked him to take care of us into town" (141). It is quite possible to assume that Miss Pole is interested in saving the family silver in order to maintain her social position among the Cranford ladies, but it is equally viable to suggest that among Miss Pole's jewelry and keepsakes, none has the ultimate market value of silver which after all can be sold as is or melted down for other purposes. That same market value applies to Miss Pole as well as to a potential thief and is indeed a valued possession.

Miss Pole, who appears somewhat hysterical under the threat of robbery, is for the most part comfortably certain of her opinions. For instance, under the guise of borrowing a "cookery book" (166) she finds that Lady Glenmire is indeed going to marry Mr. Hoggins and feels sure that her ladyship will find it difficult to enjoy those niceties to which she is accustomed: "I have reason to believe Mr. Hoggins sups on bread-and-cheese and beer every night" (166). In other words, Mr. Hoggins is just a common man, unused to fine dining and therefore unused to the finer things which Lady Glenmire would know and understand.

Lady Glenmire, on the other hand, is bright and kind (168), generally making a good impression on the ladies when they are introduced to her over tea at the home of the



Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, her sister-in-law (126). While the ladies try desperately to think of a way to begin conversation, wondering if "the Peerage ate preserves (123)," it is Miss Pole, the courageous, who finally enquires of Lady Glenmire, 'Has your ladyship been to Court lately?' (123). Lady Glenmire is pleased to report that 'I never was there in my life,' and then softens her response with more information and a general easing of the company. And it is Lady Glenmire on this occasion who finally suggests that the tea bell be rung and rings it.

The tea table at Mrs. Jamieson's is a sight to behold and the ladies of Cranford know they are looking at a very fine table setting: "Very delicate was the china, very old the plate, very thin the bread and butter, and very small the lumps of sugar" (124). Mrs. Jamieson had provided nothing out of the ordinary in the way of food for this gathering. Indeed, the guest of honor at one point was forced to ask for additional bread and butter. One can assume that Mrs. Jamieson is all pretense and no substance as she can flaunt the old plate but must husband the day's loaf by slicing it thinly. On the other hand, "delicacy" and "daintiness" are bywords of this era and grasping a large sandwich is simply out of the question in a proper social gathering. So regardless of Mary Smith's lamentations over the size of the sugar lumps, the small

pieces of sugar are perhaps not a matter of frugality so much as a matter of daintiness and proper behavior.

In direct contrast to the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson's spartan fare, Miss Betty Barker, retired owner of a milliner's shop (105), is the epitome of munificence. Perhaps by wooing the Cranford ladies with obvious excess, she can be accepted as one of them. Mary Smith is actually appreciative of this largesse when the Cranford ladies have been invited to tea at Miss Barker's:

The tea-tray was abundantly loaded. I was pleased to see it, I was so hungry; but I was afraid the ladies present might think it vulgarly heaped up. I know they would have done at their own houses; but somehow the heaps disappeared here. (111)

Since Cranford is known for "elegant economy" and while the ladies make it a practice to "overlook all deficiencies" (41) in the matter of money: they would not dream of insulting a hostess by refusing to eat the food she has had prepared.

Miss Smith cannot resist making fun of the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, who eats at someone else's house what she would not even serve at her own:

I saw Mrs. Jamieson eating seed-cake, slowly and considerately, as she did everything; and I was rather surprised, for I knew she had told us, on the occasion of her last party, that she never had it in her house, it reminded her so much of scented soap. She always gave us Savoy biscuits. However, Mrs. Jamieson was kindly indulgent to Miss Barker's want of knowledge of the custom's of high life; and, to spare her feelings, ate three

large pieces of seed-cake, with a placid,  
ruminating expression of countenance, not unlike a  
cow's. (111)

In this situation, Mrs. Jamieson can either be seen as a poverty stricken aristocrat who must rely on the generosity of others to live or as a genuinely polite guest who, though she never offered seed cake when it was her turn to hostess, nevertheless was not above enjoying this fare in the home of another. Mrs. Jamieson's interest in the seed cake is no doubt attributable to superior baking, since she claimed "that she never had it in her house, it reminded her so much of scented soap (111)." While the process of baking a seed cake is time consuming but not complicated, the Savoy biscuit that Mrs. Jamieson favored is far more likely to prove a feat to challenge the abilities of even the best cooks. The production of Savoy biscuits requires a complicated procedure with eggs, involving a great deal of whisking to get the whole eggs to the consistency of white cream and the additional egg whites to a solid froth. Mrs. Jamieson's cook was obviously extraordinary and presumably precious to the household.

Since the rule in Cranford is one pass of the tea tray, the group is surprised when, after a time of card playing, Miss Barker has another tea tray brought to them, laden with a variety of "good things for supper - scalloped oysters, potted lobsters, jelly, a dish call 'Little Cupids'. . . .

In short, we were evidently to be feasted with all that was sweetest and best" (113). Miss Barker has obviously put forth her best efforts for this occasion of entertaining the Cranford ladies in her home. That these ladies enjoy her efforts thoroughly is made clear in Mary Smith's observations of this largesse:

We thought it better to submit graciously, even at the cost of our gentility - which never ate suppers in general - but which, like most non-supper-eaters, was particularly hungry on all special occasions. (113)

Miss Betty Barker, though ingenious enough to have dressed her favorite Aldernay cow in dark gray "flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers" (43) after a mishap in a lime-pit, is generous enough of her own nature to want to decorate with a lavish hand her offerings to the ladies of Cranford when the opportunity arises for her to entertain them. Ulterior motives may be ascribed to Miss Barker's methods but her generosity appears sincere and the ladies comfortably accept her gestures.

While Miss Barker's generosity overflows and Mrs. Jamieson's appears to lie fallow along with her large, inert (64), sleepy self (112), it is deaf and gullible Mrs. Forrester who rises to various occasions, largely ignoring the possible responses of her peers and being rewarded in turn by their benevolence. Mrs. Forrester entertains the ladies at tea, providing them with "tea-bread and sponge

cake" (41) made with her own hands. And, as it is Mrs. Forrester's cat who swallowed the lace which was soaking in a bowl of milk prior to being pinned straight, her understanding of the more elaborate housekeeping procedures is apparent. Mrs. Forrester is also known for a very special recipe for a concoction known as "bread-jelly," a present of which was "the highest mark of favour dear Mrs. Forrester could confer" (155). This recipe is particularly special to Mrs. Forrester, so much so that she will not share it with her friends:

Miss Pole had once asked her for the receipt, but she had met with a very decided rebuff; that lady told her that she could not part with it to any one during her life, and that after her death it was bequeathed, as her executors would find, to Miss Matty. What Miss Matty . . . might chose to do with the receipt when it came into her possession - whether to make it public, or to hand it down as an heirloom - she did not know, nor would she dictate. (155)

It is not known what Miss Matty might have done had she indeed been willed the famous recipe, Mrs. Forrester's attitude is indicative of how very special a recipe could be to certain women, for such possessiveness can identify a woman's character and enhance her status in the community. Mrs. Forrester may indeed have used this means to achieve self-esteem and social status as when her generosity of spirit is so forthcoming in preparing this dish for her neighbors. On the other hand, Mrs. Forrester is never

portrayed as unduly concerned about her friends' reactions and therefore, as she was one of the Cranford ladies for whose feelings the others practiced their "elegant economies," it is equally possible that her secret recipe was the only way in which she could present a truly unique gift to her friends and neighbors and she therefore guarded it carefully. Peter Keating defines "bread-jelly" in the notes to Cranford:

a mixture of bread crumbs, gelatine, and cinnamon or lemon rind, set in a mould. It was sometimes reheated and served as a drink. (352)

Oddly enough, not a single recipe for this delicacy has surfaced in the numerous cookbooks reviewed for this study, so Mrs. Forrester's recipe remains a secret.

Mrs. Gaskell has used food images to illustrate the middle-class Victorian concern for distinctions in social class or social position in the community. The reader has been allowed the privilege of rounding out her secondary characters through the use of these same food images, picturing them vividly in their generosity or kindness or confusion. But beyond the compassionate gestures, Gaskell uses food images to elicit a sense of virtue, particularly in the characters of Miss Deborah Jenkyns and Martha.

Miss Deborah Jenkyns plays a sizable role in the first two stories. Her position in the Cranford community is unassailable. She is the late Rector's oldest daughter and,

as such, responsible for the tone of the community:

Miss Jenkyns . . . had the appearance of a strong-minded woman; although she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! she knew they were superior. (51)

It was Miss Jenkyns who set the rules for entertaining the ladies:

Parties in Cranford were solemn festivities, making the ladies feel gravely elevated, as they sat together in their best dresses. . . . the tea trays . . . were placed each on the middle of a card-table. The china was delicate egg-shell; the old-fashioned silver glittered with polishing. (45)

She is also the arbiter of good literature for the Cranford ladies. She is especially fond of her father's books, and "on the strength of a number of manuscript sermons, and a pretty good library of divinity, considered herself literary, and looked upon any conversation about books as a challenge to her" (47). She claims Dr. Johnson as "a model for young beginners" (48). Captain Brown puts forth his favorite as Mr. Boz. The estrangement which results over this disagreement leaves the reader seeing Captain Brown as a jolly sort, interested in new things, and Miss Jenkyns as a hide-bound prig, determined to take all the light and pleasantness out of the day. It is at the death of Captain Brown, however, that Miss Jenkyns' kindness is brought out in a very subtle manner when she responds angrily to a distraught Miss Jessie Brown with not only advice but food:

She brought Miss Jessie up a basin of delicately-made arrowroot, and stood over her like a dragoon until the last spoonful was finished. (59)

Peter Keating in his notes to the novel explains arrowroot in the following manner:

A starch taken from the tuberous roots of West Indian and south American plants. Widely used in Victorian cooking to thicken sauces, or as here, as a kind of gruel for invalids. (324)

From cookbooks of the era one can surmise also that the arrowroot was often made into a pudding and as such was more like what we know today as tapioca pudding. Whether Miss Jenkyns feeds Miss Brown plain arrowroot gruel or a pudding made from the powder is not clear, but in either case the preparation of the dish required a steady hand and solid knowledge. Arrowroot ferments easily and will not thicken unless handled with care. It is interesting to note, however, that Miss Jenkyns acts from kindness and not a little guilt when she rushes to Miss Brown's aid and she presents unspoken apologies with a universally acknowledged gift of self--food.

Martha becomes a center of attention in the later stories of Cranford. When Miss Matty encounters financial disaster, her friends flock to her aid with a variety of offers of assistance. None stands out as solidly as the gesture of Martha -- Miss Matty's girl. It is Martha who announces that in spite of Miss Matty's inability to pay



her, she will never leave (183). And as is so often the case, dire need is described with food images:

At last she put her apron down, and looking me earnestly in the face, asked, "Was that the reason Miss Matty wouldn't order a pudding today? She said she had no fancy for sweet things, and you and she would just have a mutton chop. But I'll be up to her. Never you tell, but I'll make her a pudding and a pudding she'll like, too, and I'll pay for it myself; so mind you see she eats it. Many a one has been comforted in their sorrow by seeing a good dish come upon the table. (184)

It is Martha's grasp of the grim realities as well as her solution to the present problem that lightens the feeling of disaster. As Martha collects herself to go out for the eggs and butter (because she will not touch a single provision already in the house) she reaches into that time-honored hiding place for extra money -- the old teapot -- and sets out to provide a special treat for her dear Miss Matty (184).

Martha's continued care of Miss Matty makes itself felt particularly at the dining table:

The bread was cut to the imaginary pattern of excellence that existed in Miss Matty's mind, as being the way which her mother preferred. . . . I had forgotten to tell Miss Matty about the pudding, and I was afraid she might not do justice to it . . . so I seized the opportunity of letting her into the secret while Martha took away the meat. Miss Matty's eyes filled with tears, and she could not speak, either to express surprise or delight, when Martha returned, bearing it aloft, made in the most wonderful representation of a lion couchant that ever was moulded. Martha's face gleamed with triumph, as she set it down before Miss Matty with an exultant 'There!' (186-

87)

Gaskell builds Martha into a three-dimensional human being by using the great symbols of nurturance and care taking. Martha has bought the food with a woman's stashed coin. She has prepared the food in a woman's space. She has presented the pudding as a gift of nurturance and as a symbol of her loyalty, all within the great traditions of hospitality and the delights of the feast.

Martha is literally defined by her kitchen and the food she provides for Miss Matty. Whether she is providing a "hot savoury mutton-chop" (196), or husband (188) and children (104), Martha's concern for Miss Matty is centered at the hearth. And as with the other characters in the Cranford stories, Gaskell adds depth to Martha with food images, invoking the reader's sensory memory and drawing that reader into the narrative, summoning whatever emotional embellishment the reader might provide for the visual scenes and generating a sympathy which will soften the edges of characters otherwise fated to be one dimensional.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

As a married woman, responsible for house and family, Elizabeth Gaskell understood kitchens, dining rooms and tea tables. The food images she uses in her descriptive process with the characters in Cranford flow naturally from her day-to-day experiences as well as her early training. Her readers can bring with them a common understanding of these images to her work.

Leona Toker suggests that "parallel experience can turn into a direct means of conveying to us the specific emotional climate of the novel's world, without the mediation of overt didactics, fictional brainstorm, or 'vicarious' emotions (get page number)." Food images, more than other experiences, carry that universality so practical in Gaskell's conveyance of character.

That the reader can bring information to a description allows an author to use the equivalent of "short hand" in communicating sensory memories. It is this "shorthand" which provides a leisurely yet dexterous description, shortening the travail while making the point. As Michael Irwin points out in his work Picturing: Description and Illusion in the Nineteenth Century Novel: "It is so much

easier for the novelist to begin a description . . . than to know when to stop" (111).

Mrs. Gaskell, unlike others, makes deft use of the food images to fill out her characters while decorating her scenes. R.C. Terry notes that "Mrs Gaskell was applauded for the quiet, sensible kind of story, with no extravagant characters, no improbable incidents, but where the kind of people we meet in real life do the kind of things which they would do in real life" (64). The simplicity of her food images adds to this premise.

It is important to recognize also that Mrs. Gaskell was one woman of many, that her observations and interpretations were not unlike those of her peers. Linda C. Hunt notes this coincidence in her following remarks:

Mrs. Gaskell . . . encourages us to laugh at eccentricities, but in her books female society has its own dignity. Mrs. Gaskell does not view such women as another species from herself. (get page number)

It is Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell who honors the traditions of hospitality, the delight of the feast, and even the sacramental connection between our being and the rest of the world when she uses food images in Cranford to invokes the reader's sensory memory to draw him/her into the narrative, to provide more than visual detail to scenery or to add texture to characters. Gaskell's food images invoke a reader's sensory memory which generates a sympathetic

response from the reader and draws him/her into the narrative, engaging the reader's imagination which then decorates the visual scenes with personal experiences. Laurel Esquivel observes in Like Water for Chocolate that "when talk turns to eating, a subject of the greatest importance, only fools and sick men don't give it the attention it deserves" (153).

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APPENDIX  
Recipes from Cranford

## INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Gaskell refers to many foods in Cranford. Some are immediately obvious to the modern reader, such as the cherry-brandy or the mutton chops, but others might represent a degree of labor or skill unrecognized by the reader due to lack of knowledge of the dish mentioned. I have chosen a variety of recipes for the dishes served in Cranford. My own curiosity prompted this exploration and the results have supplied depths to my reading of Cranford that only those readers who read Mrs. Gaskell as she was first published could appreciate. I am grateful for the illumination and dumbstruck by the comparisons with modern cooking.

The first of the Cranford stories was published in 1851. Each cook book quoted in this appendix was published after that date. Far from being irrelevant, the recipes in these books suggest their common use and that they were recognized, served, and even improved well before they were included in any publication. Recipes from these books are representative, if not identical, to those produced in the Cranford kitchens.

## 1. TEA

And expensive tea is a very favourite luxury with well-to-do tradespeople and rich farmers' wives, who turn up their noses at the Congou and Souchong prevalent at many tables of gentility, and will have nothing else than Gunpowder and Pekoe for themselves. (Cranford, 201)

## TEA

The Modern Housewife

TEA is, without doubt, one of the most useful herbs ever introduced into England, which was in the year of the fire of London, 1666: it has replaced an unwholesome and heavy drink (ale) which used to be partaken of previously, and has created habits of sobriety. It is indigenous to China, Japan, and Siam, and consists of many varieties, the proper mixing of which constitutes the great art of a tea-dealer. It is exceedingly useful in many cases of sickness, and particularly after having partaken of any liquor to excess, or after extraordinary fatigue. When new, it is a narcotic; but when old it has a different effect,\* and in its native country is never partaken of until a year old, and not then, unless exceedingly desiccated. I cannot recommend you any one in particular, as that depends on taste; but this I advise, that when you have a kind to your liking, to keep to it.

. . . But to tell you the truth respecting tea, I have a little secret of my own, being a discovery which I made a short time ago by accident. Whilst in the act of making tea, I had just put the dry tea in the pot

. . . twenty minutes at least had elapsed before I returned to my tea (which, being alone, I was in no particular hurry for), when I found that the servant, thinking there was water in the pot, and fearing the tea would be spoiled, put it into the oven, which was rather hot; when she brought it to me, I was rather annoyed, when all at once it struck me that the leaves being hot through, the tea would not require so long to draw; I then filled the teapot with boiling water, and in a minute afterwards had a most delicious cup of tea, since which I have adopted the system upon all occasions, and am now having made a small spirit-lamp to warm the pot and leaves, as the oven is not always hot: it may, however, be made hot in front of the fire, but not too

close of course. . . . Put your tea in the pot a quarter of an hour before ready for it, warming both tea and pot, fill with boiling water, and leave it from three to five minutes to draw, when it is quite ready. (24-25)

\* Some few years since, having a great deal of writing to do within a certain time, and which could not be done without employing the night as well as the day, I partook of weak green tea, with a little brandy, sugar, and lemon-juice in it, as a beverage, and, with light food, I was enabled to do with but eighteen hours' sleep from 8 o'clock on Monday morning to 5 o'clock on the following Sunday morning. (24)

The following argument would have appealed to Mrs. Gaskell's "grandmothers [who] must have been strong headed women" (The Last Generation in England, 325).

#### IN SUPPORT OF BEER DRINKING Cottage Economy

The drink, which has come to supply the place of beer has, in general been tea. It is notorious, that tea has no useful strength in it; that it contains nothing nutritious; that it, besides being good for nothing, has badness in it, because it is well known to produce want of sleep in many cases, and, in all cases, to shake and weaken the nerves. It is, in fact, a weaker kind of laudanum, which enlivens for the moment and deadens afterwards. At any rate it communicates no strength to the body; it does not, in any degree, assist in affording what labour demands. It is, then, of no use. And, now, as to its cost, compared with that of beer, I shall make my comparison applicable to a year, or three hundred and sixty five days. . . . Then comes the great article of all, the time employed in this tea making affair. It is impossible to make a fire, boil water, make the tea, drink it, wash up the things, sweep up the fire place and put all to rights again in a less space of time, upon an average, than two hours. However, let us allow one hour; and here we have a woman occupied no less than three hundred and sixty five hours in the year, or, thirty whole days, at twelve hours in the day; that is to say, one month out of the twelve in the year, besides the waste of the man's time in hanging about waiting for the

tea! (13-14)

## 2. ARROWROOT

Miss Jenkyns . . . brought Miss Jessie up a basin of delicately-made arrowroot, and stood over her like a dragon until the last spoonful was finished: then she disappeared. (Cranford, 59)

### ARROWROOT The Modern Housewife

Put two teaspoonfuls of arrow-root, which mix gradually with enough water or milk, stirring it with a spoon, let it boil a few minutes, and if made with milk, add only a little butter, sugar, and salt, or serve plain; but if made with water, add the eighth part of the rind of a fresh lemon to boil with it; when done add a glass of port or sherry, sugar, a little salt, and a small piece of butter, unless prohibited.

### ARROW ROOT The Modern Cookery

Mix a dessert-spoonful of arrow root very smooth with two spoonfuls of cold water; then add half a pint more water, a glass of white wine, or a spoonful of brandy, with sugar and a little nutmeg grated; put it into a tin saucepan and boil it one minute; it may be made of milk, which to suit some cases is better than wine.

### ARROWROOT PUDDING The New Cookery Book

Mix two ounces of West Indian arrowroot into a smooth paste; boil a pint of milk with a small stick of cinnamon and two ounces of sugar; strain it, and pour it hot over the arrowroot, stirring it till it is perfectly blended and cool; then add three well-beaten eggs; pour it into a buttered dish, and bake immediately for three-quarters of an hour. Sift sugar over it, and serve with custard or preserved fruit.



ARROWROOT PUDDING  
The Shilling Kitchiner

Take two table-spoonfuls of arrowroot, one ditto of common or patent flour, four eggs, and one mutchkin of sweet milk; season with sugar, and with or without essence of lemon, according to taste. Beat the yolks and whites separately - the whites to a snow, and the yolks with the sugar, adding the seasoning. Mix the flour with a little cold milk, boil the mutchkin of sweet milk, and pour over it, stirring constantly, then mix well with the other ingredients. Boil a little sugar to candy height, line the pan well with it, turning the pan till the sugar is quite cold, then pour in the pudding, and let it steam half an hour. Served with custard or wine sauce.

ARROWROOT BLANCMANGE  
The New Cookery Book

Infuse two ounces of arrow-root in cold water for twenty minutes; then pour off the water, and blend the arrow-root with a tablespoon of cream or orange-flower water. Boil a quart of new milk with four ounces of sugar, half a lemon-peel, a stick of cinnamon, and a teaspoonful of ratafia or pudding-flavour. Pour the milk over the arrow-root, stirring it continually till cool; then pour into a mould and leave it to set.

### 3. MUTTON AND POTATOES

We therefore discussed the circumstance of the captain taking a poor old woman's dinner out of her hands, one very slippery Sunday. He had met her returning from the bakehouse as he came from church, and noticed her precarious footing; and, with the grave dignity with which he did everything, he relieved her of her burden, and steered along the street by her side, carrying her baked mutton and potatoes safely home. (Cranford, 49)

TO ROAST A SADDLE OF MUTTON  
The Modern Cookery

Let the skin be raised, and then skewered on again; this will prevent it from scorching and make it eat mellow; a quarter of an hour before you take it up, take off the skin, dust on some flour, baste it with butter, and sprinkle on a little salt.

It is very likely that the poor old woman simply included her potatoes in the same roasting pan that held her mutton and let them bake along with the meat. But as potatoes were generally disregarded as worthy of a discerning table, the following recipes are curious.

TO MASH POTATOES  
The Modern Cookery

Boil the potatoes well, it is very disagreeable to find lumps when you eat them; rub them in a wooden bowl, with a wooden mallet or spoon, put a little butter and milk, with salt to the taste, some put cream instead of butter; when thoroughly mashed, make them up in rolls either round or long, brush them over with the yolk of an egg, and put them into the oven to brown, and be made hot, as the mashing makes them nearly cold; mashed potatoes browned a light colour, make a pretty edge for any made dishes, the wall to be three or four inches high.

SCALLOPED POTATOES  
The Shilling Kitchiner

Boil the potatoes; then beat them fine in a bowl with good cream, a lump of butter and salt, put them into scollop-shells [sic], make them smooth on the top, score them with a knife, and lay thin slices of butter on the top of them; then put them into a dutch oven. to brown before the fire. Three shells are enough for a dish.

It would have been unlikely for a poor old woman to have access to "scollop-shells" but as potatoes were not well thought of as vegetables.

#### 4. MUTTON CHOPS

The lunch - a hot savory mutton-chop  
 . . . was now brought in. (Cranford, 196)

##### TO BROIL MUTTON CHOPS The Modern Cookery

Cut the chops an inch thick; when the grid-iron is hot rub it with fresh suet, lay on the chops, keep turning them as quick as possible; if you do not take great care the fat that drops from the meat will smoke them; when they are enough put them into a hot dish, rub them well with butter, slice a shallot very thin into a spoonful of water, pour it on them with a spoonful of mushroom catsup and salt; serve them up hot, and in small quantities fresh every time. For invalids they should be done quite plain.

#### 5. BAKED PUDDING

At last she put her apron down, and looking me earnestly in the face, asked, 'Was that the reason Miss Matty wouldn't order a pudding today? She said she had no fancy for sweet things . . . Never you tell, but I'll make her a pudding, and a pudding she'll like, too, and I'll pay for it myself; so mind you see she eats it . . . She began to tie on a clean apron, and otherwise prepare herself for going to the shop for the butter, eggs, and what else she might require . . . . (Cranford, 184) Martha returned, bearing it aloft, made in the most wonderful representation of a lion couchant that ever was moulded. (Cranford, 187)

##### BAKED BATTER PUDDING Beeton's Book of Household Management

Ingredients. -- 1 1/2 pint of milk, 4 tablespoons of flour, 2 oz. of butter, 4 eggs, a little salt.  
 Mode. -- Mix the flour with a small quantity of cold milk; make the remainder hot, and pour it on to the

flour, keeping the mixture well stirred; add the butter, eggs, and salt; beat the whole well, and put the pudding into a buttered pie-dish; bake for 3/4 hour, and serve with sweet sauce, wine sauce, or stewed fruit. Baked in small cups, this makes very pretty little puddings, and should be eaten with the same accompaniments as above.

## 6. BEEF WITH PUDDING

When I was a young man, we used to keep strictly to my father's rule, "No broth, no ball; no ball, no beef;" and always began dinner with the broth. Then we had suet puddings, boiled in the broth with the beef; and then the meat. (Cranford, 74)

### TO BOIL A ROUND OF BEEF The Modern Cookery

Take a round of beef, salt it well with common salt, let it lay ten days, turning it over and rubbing it with the brine every other day; then wash it in soft water, tie it up as round as you can, and put it into cold soft water; boil it very gently; if it weighs thirty pounds it will take five hours. If you stuff it, do it thus: take half a pound of beef suet, some green beet, parsley, pot-marjoram, thyme, and leeks; chop all these very fine, put to them a handful of stale bread crumbs, pepper and salt, mix them well together, make holes in the beef and put it in, tie it up in a cloth.

### A BOILED SUET PUDDING The Modern Cookery

Take a quart of milk, eight spoonfuls of flour, a pound of suet shred small, four eggs, one spoonful of beaten ginger, and a tea-spoonful of salt; mix the eggs and flour with a pint of the milk very thick. and with the seasoning mix in the rest of the milk and suet. Let the batter be pretty thick, and boil it two hours; this makes a very large pudding.

### BATTER PUDDING The Shilling Kitchen

Batter Pudding. -- In making a batter pudding, first mix the flour well with a little milk, then put in the ingredients by degrees, and it will be smooth and free from lumps; but, for a plain batter pudding, the best was is to strain it through a coarse hair sieve; and for all other puddings strain the eggs when they are beat. In boiling a pudding, great care should be taken that the cloth is very clean; dip the cloth in boiling water, flour it well, and give it a shake. If you boil the pudding in a basin, butter the inside of it, turn it often and do not cover the pan; when you take it up, let it stand a few minutes to cool; then untie the string, wrap the cloth round the basin, lay the dish over it, turn the pudding out, and take the basin and cloth off very carefully. When baked, bread and custard puddings require time and a moderate overn, that will raise and not burn them; batter and rice puddins should have a quick oven. Be careful always to butter the pan or dish before you pour in the pudding.

## 7. SCALLOPED OYSTERS, POTTED LOBSTERS

Peggy came in once more, red with importance. Another tray! 'Oh, gentility!' thought I, 'can you endure this last shock?' For Miss Barker had ordered . . . all sorts of good things for supper - scalloped oysters, potted lobsters . . . (Cranford, 113)

### SCALLOPED OYSTERS Beetons Book of Household Management

Ingredients. - Oysters, say 1 pint, 1 oz. butter, flour, 2 tablespoonfuls of white stock, 2 tablespoonfuls of cream; pepper and salt to taste; bread crumbs, oiled butter.

Mode. - Scald the oysters in their own liquor, take them out, beard them, and strain the liquor free from grit. Put 1 oz. of butter into a stewpan; when melted, dredge in sufficient flour to dry it up; add the stock, cream, and strained liquor, and give one boil. Put in the oysters and seasoning; let them gradually heat through, but not boil. Have ready the scallop-shells buttered; lay in the oysters, and as much of the liquid as they will hold; cover them over with bread crumbs, over which drop a little oiled butter. Brown them in the oven, or before, the fire, and serve quickly, and very hot.

TO POT LOBSTERS  
The Modern Cookery

Take the meat out of the claws and belly of a boiled lobster, put it into a marble mortar, with mace, pepper, salt, and a piece of butter half the size of an egg; beat them all together till they come to a paste, and put one half of it into the pot; take the meat out of the tail part and lay it in the middle of the pot; put on it the other part of the paste, press it close down, and pour over it clarified butter, a quarter of an inch thick.

ADVICE ON POTTING  
The Shilling Kitchiner

In potting, be careful to cover the meat well with butter, tie over it strong paper, and bake it well; then pick out all the skins, and drain the meat from the gravy; beat the seasoning well before it is put to the meat, which should be put in by degrees as you are beating; when you put it into the pots, press it well, and let it be quite cold before you pour the clarified butter over it.

8. SAVOY BISCUITS

I saw Mrs. Jamieson eating seed-cake . . . She always gave us Savoy biscuits. However, Mrs. Jamieson was kindly indulgent to Miss Barker's want of knowledge of the customs of high life; and, to spare her feelings, ate three large pieces of seed-cake, with a placid runimating expression of countenance, not unlike a cow's. (Cranford, 111)

SAVOY BISCUITS  
The New Cookery Book

Beat up the yolks of twelve eggs very well, then strew in as you continue to beat, one pound of fine sifted sugar. and a tablespoonful or rose-water, and beat or whisk the whole to a white cream; then add the whites of six eggs whisked to solid froth, and by degrees, one pound and a half of fine dry flour. Then, if you have not the fluted baking tins, fold a sheet of buttered writing-paper to

form narrow trenches about five inches long, and drop two spoonfuls of the mixture into each trench. Put them into a mild oven, with sugar strewn over them at the last minute, and bake eight minutes in a hot oven. Then lay by the biscuits back to back.

The "term biscuit (from the French 'bis cuit,' or twice cooked) was originally applied to those cakes which were first baked, then sliced and returned to the oven for drying" (Sass 28).

#### SAVOY CAKE Francatelli's Modern Cook

Ingredients: - One pound of the finest quality of sugar (pounded), fourteen eggs, four ounces and a half of the finest flour, and four ounces and a half of potato flour.

First, separate the yolks from the whites of the eggs, taking care not to drop the least portion of the yolks into the whites, as any mixture of these renders it impossible to whisk the whites firm. The yolks must be put into a kitchen basin, and the whites into an egg bowl, to be kept in a cool place until used. Add the sugar to the yolks, throw in as much salt as will stand on a sixpence, and either some vanilla, lemon, or orange sugar, or else a few drops of any kind of essence, such as orange, lemon, orange-flowers, vanilla, or bitter almonds. Work these together with a wooden spoon, until the whole presents the appearance of a thick creamy batter. The whites must now be whisked into a firm substantial snowy froth; while this is going on, let both the wheaten and potato flour be well mixed with the batter. As soon as the whites are satisfactorily whisked,\* proceed to mix them also in with the batter: they must be added in small quantities at first, until it has become smoothly diluted; the whole of what remains should be added, and gently yet thoroughly mixed. The batter thus prepared, must now be gently poured into a mould previously prepared for the purpose in the following manner: -

About one pound of beef or veal suet would be first chopped very fine, then melted down in a stewpan; after it has been strained through a napkin, pour this into the mould, turn it round in all directions so that the fat



may touch all the angles and recesses; it must then be poured out, and the mould should be turned upside down on a plate, and allowed to stand in a warm place, for a few minutes, that the fat may be entirely drained off. About one pound of the finest sifted sugar should now be immediately put into the mould, and shaken about in it, in order that it may effectually cover the whole of the inside of the mold with a perfectly smooth white surface. Care must be taken to avoid leaving a greater quantity of fat adhering to the sides of the mould that is positively necessary; for if there be too thick a coating of sugar in the mould, the Savoy cake will be more difficult to bake of a light color; the heat of the oven being liable to partially calcine the sugar, and thus darken its hue.

When the Savoy cake is ready to be baked, tie a broad band of paper (folded in three) round the base, and put a few wood-ashes on the baking-sheet, previously to placing the cake on the latter, before putting it in the oven, which must be of a very moderate heat; particular care must be taken to keep it closed as much as possible while the cake is baking, and also not to increase its temperature afterwards: This may be easily avoided, if the oven be substantially built, by its being properly heated at first, it will then retain for some time an even temperature.

It is impossible to determine on the exact length of time that this or, indeed, any other cake should remain in the oven before it is done; this will mainly depend upon the construction of the oven, and partly on the necessity there may be for occasionally opening it during the process of baking the cake.

The best way to ascertain whether the cake be done is to run a wooden skewer down the centre, and if, when withdrawn, the skewer is dry, and free from any portion of the cake in an unbaked state, it will be safe to turn it out of the mould; it should then be of a light color and smooth surface.

Note. - Savoy cakes may also be made by using twelve, sixteen, or even twenty eggs to one pound of sugar; but when a cake of large size is required, the proportions must be at the rate of twelve, fourteen, or at the utmost sixteen eggs to one pound of sugar; even in the latter case, such batter would not prove successful where four pounds are required to fill one mould. Savoy-cake batter made in the proportion of sixteen or twenty eggs to one pound of sugar, is best adapted for small sponge cakes, finger biscuits, drops, etc.

\* The whites must be whisked slowly at first, increasing



the motion of the hand gradually until it reaches the greatest possible speed: the motion of the whisk must be kept up at this rate, until the whites are become sufficiently firm, when they must be instantly mixed in with the batter, - otherwise they are liable, by partial decomposition, to lose their consistence.

## 9. HOUSEHOLD BREAD

He [Captain Brown] immediately assumed the man's place in the room; attended to every one's wants, lessened the pretty maid-servant's labour by waiting on empty cups, and bread-and-butterless ladies. (Cranford, 46)

### HOUSEHOLD BREAD Modern Cookery

Put half a bushel (more or less, according to the consumption of the family) of flour into the kneading tub or trough, and hollow it well in the middle; dilute a pint of yeast as it is brought from the brewery, or half the quantity if it has been washed and rendered solid, with four quarts or more of lukewarm milk or water, or a mixture of the two; stir into it, from the surrounding part, with a wooden spoon, as much flour as will make a thick batter; throw a handful or two over it, and leave this, which is called the leaven, to rise before proceeding further. In about an hour it will have swollen considerably, and have burst through the coating of flour on the top; then pour in as much more warm liquid as will convert the whole, with good kneading, and this should not be spared, into a firm dough, of which the surface should be entirely free from lumps or crumbs. Throw a cloth over, and let it remain until it has risen very much a second time, which will be in an hour, or something more, if the batch be large. Then work it lightly up, and mould it into loaves of from two to three pounds weight; send them directly to a well heated oven, and bake them from an hour and a half to an hour and three-quarters.

Flour, 1/2 bushel; salt (when it is liked), 4 to 6 oz.; yeast, 1 pint unwashed, or 1/2 pint if purified; milk, or water, 2 quarts: 1 to 1 1/2 hour. Additional liquid as needed.

Obs. - Brown bread can be made exactly as above, either with half meal and half flour, or with meal only. This will absorb more moisture than fine flour, and will retain it rather longer. Brown bread should always be thoroughly baked.

Remark. - We have seen it very erroneously asserted in one or two works, that bread made with milk speedily becomes sour. This is never the case when it is properly baked and kept, and when the milk used for it is perfectly sweet. The experience of many years enables us to speak positively on this point.

#### 10. LITTLE CUPIDS

. . . a dish called 'little Cupids' (which was in great favour with the Cranford ladies, although too expensive to be given, except on solemn and state occasions - maccaroons sopped in brandy, I should have called it, if I had not known its more refined and classical name). (Cranford, 113)

#### MACAROONS The New Cookery Book

Blanch eight ounces of fine Jordan almonds, and pound in a mortar to a smooth paste, with two tablespoonfuls of rose or orange-flower water; whisk up the whites of eight eggs to a solid froth, and add to it one pound of finely-sifted sugar, then beat in by degrees the almond paste till thoroughly mixed. Have ready confectioners' wafer-paper, and drop the mixture upon it in small rounds. Bake in a moderate oven from fifteen to twenty minutes, till lightly coloured.

#### MACAROONES The Modern Cookery

Beat half a pound of sweet and a quarter of a pound of bitter almonds as finely as possible, with the whites of two eggs; beat the whites of five eggs to a strong froth, shake in lightly one pound and a half of fine loaf sugar beaten and sifted very fine, drop them in drops the size of a nutmeg on cap-paper, and bake them in a slack oven.

## 11. SEED CAKE

I saw Mrs. Jamieson eating seed-cake, slowly and considerately, as she did everything; and I was rather surprised, for I knew she had told us, one the occasion of her last party, that she never had it in her house, it reminded her so much of scented soap. (Cranford, 111)

PLAIN SEED CAKE  
Francatelli's Modern Cook

Ingredients: - One quartern of dough, six eggs, eight ounces of sugar, eight ounces of butter, half an ounce of caraway seeds, and a teaspoonful of salt.

Spread the dough out on the pastry-slab, then add the whole of the above-named ingredients, work them well together with the hands, so as thoroughly to incorporate them with the dough: the eggs should be added two at a time.

When the paste is ready, put it into a plain mould (previously spread with butter), and set it to rise in a warm place. As soon as the fermentation has taken place in a satisfactory manner, the cake should be immediately put into the oven and baked of a light color. When done, serve it cold for luncheon, or otherwise.

This kind of cake may be varied by introducing raisins, currants, or candied orange or lemon peel.

## 12. DAMSON TART AND CHERRY BRANDY

[Miss Barker served the ladies glasses of cherry-brandy.]

'It's very strong,' said Miss Pole, as she put down her empty glass; 'I do believe there's spirit in it.'

'Only a little drop - just necessary to make it keep,' said Miss Barker. 'You know we put brandy-paper over preserves to make them keep. I often feel topsy myself from eating damson tart.'

I question whether damson tart would

have opened Mrs. Jamieson's heart as the cherry-brandy did; but she told us of a coming event, respecting which she had been quite silent till that moment. (Cranford, 113-14)

DAMSON TART  
Beetons Book of Household Management

Ingredients. - 1 1/2 pint of damsons, 1/4 lb. of moist sugar, 1/2 lb. of short or puff crust.

Mode. - Put the damsons, with the sugar between them, into a deep pie-dish, in the midst of which, place a small cup or jar turned upside down; pile the fruit high in the middle, line the edges of the dish with short or puff crust, whichever may be preferred; put on the cover, ornament the edges, and bake from 1/2 to 3/4 hour in a good oven. If puff-crust is used, about 10 minutes before the pie is done, take it out of the oven, brush it over with the white of an egg beaten to a froth with the blade of a knife; strew some sifted sugar over, and a few drops of water, and put the tart back to finish baking: with short crust, a little plain sifted sugar, sprinkled over, is all that will be required.

\*Damsons. - Whether for jam, jelly, pie, pudding, water, ice, wine, dried fruit or preserved, the damson, or damascene (for it was originally brought from Damascus, when its name), is invaluable. It combines sugary and acid qualities in happy proportions, when full ripe. It is a fruit easily cultivated; and if budded nine inches from the ground on vigorous stocks, it will grow several feet high in the first year, and make fine standards the year following. Amongst the list of the best sorts of baking plums, the damson stands first, not only on account of the abundance of its juice, but also on account of its soon softening. Because of the roughness of its flavour, it requires a large quantity of sugar.

TO MAKE CHERRY BRANDY  
Beeton's Book of Household Management

Ingredients. -- Morella cherries, good brandy; to every lb. of cherries allow 3 oz. of pounded sugar.

Mode. -- Have ready some glass bottles, which must be perfectly dry. Ascertain that the cherries are not too ripe and are freshly gathered and cut off about half of the stalks. Put them into the bottles, with the above proportion of sugar to every lb. of fruit; strew this in between the cherries and, when the bottles are nearly full, pour in sufficient brandy to reach just below the cork. A few peach or apricot kernels will add much to their flavour, or a few blanched bitter almonds. Put corks or bungs into the bottles, tie over them a piece of bladders, and store away in a dry place.

OBSERVATIONS ON PRESERVING  
The Modern Cookery

When you make any kind of jelly, take care you do not let any of the seeds from the fruit fall into the jelly, nor squeeze it too near, for that will prevent the jelly from being so clear: pound the sugar, and let it dissolve in the syrup before you set it on the fire, it makes the scum rise will and the jelly a better colour: it is a great fault to boil any kind of jellies too high, it makes them a dark colour; you must never keep green sweetmeats in the first syrup longer than the receipt directs, lest you spoil their colour: the same care must be taken with oranges and lemons; as to cherries, damsons, and most sorts of stone-fruit, put over them either mutton suet rendered, or a board to keep them down, or they will rise out of the syrup, and spoil the whole jar by giving them a sour bad taste: observe to keep all wet sweetmeats in a dry cool place, for a wet damp place will make them mould, and a hot place will dry up the virtue, and make them candy: dip writing-paper in brandy, lay it close to the sweetmeats, tie them down with white paper, and two folds of thick cap-paper to keep out the air; for nothing can be a greater fault than bad tying-down, and leaving the pots open.

## 13. TEA CAKES AND SPONGE CAKES

When Mrs. Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world; and talked on about household forms and ceremonies, as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall . . . though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge cakes. (Cranford, 41)

## TEA CAKES AND SPONGE CAKES

The Shilling Kitchiner

Though much care has been taken in specifying the quantity of each article necessary in making the following cakes, &c., yet the management of the oven must be left to the baker's charge; it is therefore only necessary to observe that every cake should be baked in a good oven, according to the size of it. Plum, seed, or rice cakes are better if baked in wooden garths; for it put into either pot or tin, the heat is prevented from reaching the middle of the cakes and the outsides will be burnt. Be careful to beat the eggs well: they should not be left till the cake is finished, otherwise it will not be light. And when butter is put in cakes, it should be beat to a fine cream before the sugar is put in.

Tea Cakes. - Quarter of a pound of fresh butter, quarter of a pound of sifted sugar, half a pound of flour, one egg, and a little milk.

Sponge Cake. - Three-quarters of a pound of lump sugar, pounded and dissolved in a tea-cupful of cold water; the whites of four eggs, and the yolks of eight, beaten a little. Boil the sugar and water, and pour them quite boiling to the eggs; then which till nearly cold, and stir in by degrees half a pound of flour and a little essence of lemon; butter the mould, and sprinkle with flour and sugar.

SPONGE CAKE  
The Modern Cookery

Weigh ten eggs, and their weight in very fine sugar, and that of six in flour; beat the yolks with the flour, and the whites alone to a very stiff froth; mix by degrees the whites and the flour with the other ingredients, and beat them well half an hour. Bake it an hour in a quick oven.

ANOTHER WAY

Boil three quarters of a pound of lump sugar in a quarter of a pint of water: have ready the yolks of eight eggs and the whites of two, beat the eggs a little, pour the sugar and water boiling hot on the eggs, stirring them all the time with a whisk, with which you must beat it an hour; strew and mix in gradually half a pound of fine flour, but do not beat it. Add the peel of a lemon grated, butter the pans, and bake it one hour. Lay a piece of paper over the cake, and put it in the oven.

TEA-CAKES  
Beeton's Book of Household Management

Ingredients. -- 2 lbs. of flour, 1/2 teaspoonful of salt, 1/4 lb. of butter or lard, 1 egg, a piece of German yeast the size of a walnut, warm milk.

Mode. -- Put the flour (which should be perfectly dry) into a basin mix with it the salt, and rub in the butter or lard; then beat the egg well, stir to it the yeast, and add these to the flour with as much warm milk as will make the whole into a smooth paste, and knead it well. Let it rise near the fire, and, when well risen, form it into cakes; place them on tins, let them rise again for a few minutes before putting them into the oven, and bake from 1/4 to 1/2 hour in a moderate oven. These are very nice with a few currants and a little sugar added to the other ingredients: they should be put in after the butter is rubbed in. These cakes should be buttered, and eaten hot as soon as baked; but, when stale, they are very nice split and toasted; or, if dipped in milk, or even water, and covered with a basin in the oven till hot, they will be almost equal to new.

14. SPONGE BISCUITS

Moreover, it was considered 'vulgar' (a

tremendous word in Cranford) to give anything expensive, in the way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments. Wafer bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits were all that the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave; and she was sister-in-law to the late Earl of Glenmire, although she did practise such 'elegant economy.' (42)

SPONGE BISCUITS  
The Shilling Kitchiner

Sponge Biscuits. - Beat the yolks of twelve eggs half an hour; put in a pound and a half of sugar beat and sifted; whisk it well till you see it rise in bubbles; beat the whites to a strong froth, and whisk them well with the sugar and yolks; beat in fourteen ounces of flour, with the tinds of two lemons grated; bake them in tin moulds buttered; they require a hot oven, the mouth must not be stopped; when you put them into the oven, dust them with sugar. They will take half an hour baking.

15. BREAD JELLY

Mrs. Forrester made some of the bread-jelly, for which she was so famous . . . and a mould of this admirable, digestible, unique bread-jelly was sent . . . (Cranford, 155)

Mrs. Forrester's recipe for bread-jelly remains a secret but it is possible to investigate recipes which would have been similar to it. For instance, Peter Keating's description of bread-jelly calls for "gelatine," but even as late as 1851 when the first Cranford stories were published, gelatine or "jelly" had to be made at home. The fact that Mrs. Forrester's recipe is unavailable makes the pursuit of it all



the more interesting so I have included not only general gelatine recipes but tips on its processing as well.

CALF'S FOOT JELLY  
The New Cookery Book

In all classes of society it is desirable that some one of the family should be able to make jelly properly, as, if not needed for the table, it is often required in the sick-room; and we would recommend every young lady, though her station may not call on her to be usually in the kitchen, to acquire the useful art of making the preparations necessary for the sick.

The set, or gang, as the butchers name them, of calfs'-feet must be scalded, the hair scraped off, the feet carefully split, and all the fat removed; put into a pan with five quarts of cold water, and allow it to boil slowly till reduced to two quarts; then take out the feet; pour out the jelly, and let it cool, when you can remove the scum and fat, as well as the sediment; then beat up the whites of eight eggs to a froth, and add to it a bottle of good sherry, the juice of six lemons, and the peel of three, with two pounds of sugar; put the stock again over the fire, and when hot mix a little with the wine and eggs, stirring it to prevent it curdling; then add a little more, and put all into the pan with the shells of the eggs crushed, and let it simmer twenty minutes, never stirring it when over the fire; take it off, and let it stand to settle a few minutes.

Have the thick flannel jelly-bag, of a conical form, dipped in hot water, squeezed dry and suspended near the fire, with a bowl beneath to receive the jelly, and let it run through the bag; if not clear the first time, pour it back gently into the bag till it runs clear: when cleared and cool, pour it into earthenware moulds or into glasses.

CLARIFICATION OF CALF'S-FOOT JELLY,  
FOR GENERAL PURPOSES  
Francatelli's Modern Cook

Put the prepared stock of four calf's feet into a stewpan with two pounds of sugar, the rind of four lemons, and the juice of eight; whip six whites and two whole eggs together, with half a pint of spring-water; throw this in with the stock, and whisk the whole together over the

stove-fire, until it is on the point of boiling, then add the juice of another lemon and a little spring-water; withdraw the jelly from the stove, and set it down by the side, to continue gently simmering for about ten minutes longer, covered with the stewpan lid containing some live embers of charcoal. The jelly may then be passed through the bag in the usual way, and when it has run through perfectly bright, let it be kept in a cool place to be used as occasion may require.

This kind of foundation or stock-jelly, prepared without any decided flavor, may be used for making all kinds of jellies; it will then only be necessary to add, to the quantity required to fill a mould, a gill and a half of any kind of liqueur, and if the jelly be too stiff, a little thin syrup may also be added. It may be used likewise for making fruit jellies, with the addition of a pint of the filtered juice of currants, raspberries, cherries, or strawberries, or half a pint of the clarified infusion syrup of peaches, apricots, or pine-apples.

#### BONE JELLY The Modern Cookery

Take a quantity of bones that have been stewed for soup, till they are as clean and as white as possible; break them into small pieces, put them into a digester or large kettle, cover them with water, and let them boil slowly forty-eight hours, strain, and when cold, take off the fat. This is a fine pure jelly, and has been known to be of great use in strengthening delicate persons; may be prepared according to taste, either as a savory jelly, or as a calf's feet jelly.

#### 16. CURRANT JELLY

. . . we gave [the cat] a teaspoonful of currant-jelly, in which I had mixed some tartar emetic . . . I could have kissed her when she returned the lace to sight, very much as it had gone down. (Cranford, 126)

#### RED CURRANT JELLY Beeton's Book of Household Management

INGREDIENTS. -- Red currants; to every pint of juice allow  $3/4$  lb. of loaf sugar.

Mode. -- Have the fruit gathered in fine weather; pick it from the stalks, put it into a jar, and let it simmer gently until the juice is well drawn from the currants; then strain them through a jelly-bag or fine cloth, and, if the jelly is wished very clear, do not squeeze them too much, as the skin and pulp from the fruit will be pressed through with the juice, and so make the jelly muddy. Measure the juice, and to each pint allow  $3/4$  lb. of loaf sugar; put these into a preserving-pan, set it over the fire, and keep stirring the jelly until it is done, carefully removing every particle of scum as it rises, using a wooden or silver spoon for the purpose, as metal or iron ones would spoil the colour of the jelly. When it has boiled from 20 minutes to  $1/2$  hour, put a little of the jelly on a plate, and if firm when cool, it is done. Take it off the fire, pour it into small gallipots, cover each of the pots with an oiled paper, and then with a piece of tissue-paper brushed over on both sides with the white of an egg. Label the pots, adding the year when the jelly was made, and store it away in a dry place.

## 17. COWSLIP WINE

I had more thankfulness at my heart for their kind thoughts than I cared to put into words; . . . and here I broke down utterly, and had to be refreshed with a glass of cowslip wine . . . . (Cranford, 192)

### COWSLIP WINE Beeton's Book of Household Management

Ingredients. -- To every gallon of water allow 3 lbs. of lump sugar, the rind of 2 lemons, the juice of 1, the rind and juice of 1 Seville orange, 1 gallon of cowslip pips. To every  $4\ 1/2$  gallons of wine allow 1 bottle of brandy.

Mode. -- Boil the sugar and water together for  $1/2$  hour, carefully removing all the scum as it rises. Pour this boiling liquor on the orange and lemon-rinds, and the juice, which should be strained; when milk-warm, add the cowslip pips or flowers, picked from the stalks and

seeds; and to 9 gallons of wine 3 tablespoons of good fresh brewers' yeast. Let it ferment 3 or 4 days; then put all together in a cask with the brandy, and let it remain for 2 months, when bottle it off for use.