

Steel's transcription of Mother Jones' erratic spelling, grammar, and punctuation is a marvel of precision. Comparing a few samples from my own collection of xeroxed Mother Jones letters, I found no errors. (Despite the lack of standard English the letters are easy to comprehend.) Further, Steel provides each letter with notes, including short descriptions of persons and events referred to.

The University of Pittsburgh Press is to be commended for a superlative job of design and production. In this age of slipshod book manufacture, *The Correspondence of Mother Jones* stands out for its pleasant and readable design and its notable lack of typographical errors.

Steel's introduction summarizes the main events of Mother Jones' life in so far as they are now known. The biographical essay makes this a complete work on Mother Jones, which stands by itself. Yet his non-interpretive approach leads him to falter, I think, in estimating this organizer's significance. Many of the strikes in which she became embroiled were lost, and she left no "institutional monument." (She became disillusioned with the UMWA at the onset of the John L. Lewis era.) Therefore Steel evaluates her career mainly in terms of its minor achievements, such as her success in bringing about Congressional investigations of two major strikes. Her significance to American history lies elsewhere. Hers was an authentic voice reflecting working-class experience, and it was a female voice at that. As such it is important both in itself and as a window on a still-emerging part of the American past.

This well-accomplished work goes a long way towards bringing to completion a body of work on Mother Jones that will lift this intriguing organizer out of the realm of legend and speculation and into that of history. ■

Priscilla Long San Diego, California

Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century. By Laura Shapiro.

(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986. Pp. 280. Prologue, notes, bibliography, index. \$16.95.)

For the last quarter-century, the United States has been inundated with food awareness. First came French cooking, popularized by Julia Child beginning in 1962, followed by, in more recent years and in

very rapid succession, *nouvelle cuisine*, international ethnic cuisines (the spicier and more authentic the better), and the rediscovery of America's regional styles of cooking. Accompanying these "new" flavors and treatments has come a health awareness, emphasizing freshness of ingredients, the importance of a balanced diet, and a call for the reduction in American diets of fats, sugars, and salt. All of this has been in reaction to the dietary styles and habits designed for the American middle class by the women described in Laura Shapiro's sprightly book.

In an often hilarious, but at the same time always serious manner, Ms. Shapiro describes the invention in the late nineteenth century of "Home Economics" and the development by "scientific cooks" of what actually became the dominant style of American cookery. That style emphasized uniformity: all cooks everywhere should aspire to produce nutritious meals which were predictable, standardized. Proper nutrition, packaged in reliable recipes producible by everyone, would assist in the Americanization process of immigrants, reduce crime and vagrancy, and lead to the further democratization of the country by levelling the classes.

Uniqueness of flavor, in fact, the presence of flavor at all, was less important than nutritional content (as understood at that time) and appearance. The production of the food was to utilize all available conveniences, regardless of the impact those conveniences (pre-packaged, pre-prepared foods; new appliances; standardized measures) might have on flavor. Ms. Shapiro argues that in connection, both inadvertent and quite deliberate, with the rising food industry, the scientific cooks created a distinctively American "cuisine" that was unusually sweet (marshmallows in salads, ever-present desserts of overpowering sweetness), bland (American cheese marvelously did away with the sharpness and variation in European cheeses), and in which foods were almost always devoid of their original flavors and textures (vegetables were usually cooked for a very long time if fresh, or taken out of a can, and foods were masked in that uniquely American invention, white sauce). [Be sure to read the description of that incredible culinary conceit, the all-white meal.]

This revolution in American home cooking was wrought, of course, by women, women who aspired to elevate the status of homemakers to that of scientists, to spread healthy ideas and healthy conditions all over the country. Ms. Shapiro is her most interesting as she analyzes the motivations of the succeeding generations of home economists as they tried to create a professional niche for women while never chal-

lenging the proposition that "it's a man's world." The institutions which they created are still with us, if not in their original form: cooking schools, food magazines, food sections in newspapers, cook-books, measuring cups, and later, home economics education. The realm of their activity was the home; all these were intended to enhance the activities of women in their ordained sphere. They were, despite their successes and their professionalism, in no way feminists. What they wanted was to bring the benefits of modernity and science into their activities. Ms. Shapiro feels that they succeeded only too well, for in the process of creating the new American kitchen and cuisine, they also entrenched the role and identity of American women as housewives and hindered the movement of women into the "legitimate" professions. Nevertheless, despite their negative effects on women's lives and American eating, Ms. Shapiro grudgingly admires them.

What distinguishes them from high-achieving women today and makes them heroines in their own way is their passion. Domestic science was the banner they carried; to change American eating habits was their holy charge. . . . Of course they failed in their crusade, how could they not? They chose domesticity as a way of getting out of the house, and food as a means of transcending the body. But they carved out an identity for women so powerful that we're still trying to clamber out of it, and their influence on American cooking was devastating. They failed, but like only a handful of men and women in any generation, they did their damndest (p. 10).

Shapiro has done a remarkable job of tracing that damned struggle and placing it in cultural and economic context. Her own point of view is decidedly feminist; her insights are frequent and often profound; her humor is pervasive and infectious. This book is fun to read, perhaps especially if you really like to eat, but it will leave you thinking about the role of food and its preparation in culture, the connection of sex roles to food and food preparation, and quite probably, what you are going to have for dinner.

This reviewer has only one notable objection to *Perfection Salad*. The notes, which appear at the back of the book, are not marked in the text. If one wonders about a passage, one flips to the back and looks to see if it has been annotated. While casual readers will not miss the notes, more serious readers will find this an annoyance. ■

Pamela Holcomb Oestreicher *Historical Society of
Western Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*