

Chapter One

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK IS NOT ALARMIST. IN spite of rationing, there should be no great disturbance in the kitchen. From what I remember of rationing in the last war, the greatest problem was one of adjustment. In this war, when our young wives know a good deal less about the actual business of cooking than their mothers or grandmothers did, the problem may be a little more serious. It will, of course, have its advantages. We shall learn to cook more economically; we shall learn to suit our meals to the market, instead of shopping for meals already arranged—a system that in itself makes for economy (and good eating, too), since we shall be buying and making the most of what is best to be had. Some of us may even learn to cook, instead of opening tins.

I have said that the problem is one of adjustment and, above all, its solution demands every suggestion for making the best of things. We are not suddenly going to be deprived of everything that we have been used to: all we are going to do is to have to exercise our ingenuity in making things go a little farther—which is what millions of people have to do every day in the ordinary course of events. We are going to learn that the kitchen range is as useful as the rifle range, and that a bullock's heart may be as good as a bull's eye! We are going to understand that the Home Front, as it used to be called, is as important and as determined as the Western Front.

COOKING IN WAR TIME

A young friend of mine, when war broke out, said to me in some distress that she simply didn't know what she would do when rationing came into force. She'd been able to rub along all right so far in the kitchen, when she could get just what she wanted, she said, and nobody had complained much; but what on earth was going to happen when she had to think of calories and proteins and Heaven knows what else, she simply couldn't imagine. I told her that she wouldn't have to worry about them, though I doubt whether this gave her much comfort at the moment.

I had been thinking for some time of writing a little book like this, more particularly for women like my young friend. I do not think for a minute that she was really very frightened at the prospect of having to give her mind a little more to the daily business of shopping and cooking, but some kind and thoughtless friend had put into her head all sorts of jargon about rationing, and probably illustrated it by some exaggerated tales of food supplies during the last war, and it was this that had made her nervous. She wouldn't have minded a bit if someone had told her that she wouldn't be able to get a certain commodity at the shops: she would just have got something else to make up for it. She would have minded rather more if John had come home and told her that through the war he'd lost his job, and they'd got to tighten their belts; but she wouldn't have been terrified by it. She would have put a good face on it, and done her utmost to get on

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with things as best she could—as most people would have done.

It is really the unfamiliarity of the idea of rationing that is inclined to upset people, I think; and so in this book I have tried to leave the thought of rationing out of it until the very end, and even then I fear I have not treated it with the respect that my young friend's fear of it deserved. Not because I do not realise the seriousness of it. If there is going to be a shortage, then it is up to us to make do with what we can; and the idea underlying this book is gradually to induce people to get used to 'making do', quite pleasantly and without effort, so that when difficulties of supply arise, they will be less disturbed by them. This may be strange for some people, but I hope they will find some suggestions in the next chapter that will carry them on. There may be unusual things to deal with; unfamiliar fishes, and so on: it may be better to make greater use of the countryside and the good things it offers us: it may be helpful to discover new and economical forms of cooking. The arrangement of the chapters is made to encourage the wise wife to make the most of what she has, and not to frighten her with talk of the difficulties that rationing holds in store for her. But for those who take these things very seriously, a chapter will be found at the end where there is a list of food values of different kinds. With this table, those nervous ones will be able to plan out their meals to the nearest caloric value, and be certain of ranging the vitamins, proteins,

carbohydrates and all the rest of them on their side.

I hope at any rate that the varied contents will not only be of comfort to those in culinary distress, but also provide some contribution, however small, to the fortitude of those who have to hold the Front at home.

Chapter Two

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

§ 1. MEAT

THE WORST IS NEVER IN THE END AS BAD AS IT SEEMS likely to be, and I doubt whether we shall have much difficulty in becoming inured in the end to the terrible deprivations (as some would have us believe) of rationing. We may, however, get used to a rather more stringent kind of economy than circumstances have hitherto compelled us to observe, and take a look round at the various subterfuges which we may exercise to hide from the family the horrid fact that we are economising.

The simplest way of doing this would seem to be the adoption of two systems. The first is to make the most of something which is cheaper: the second is to 'eke out' something which is perhaps more expensive than we think we can afford. The first alternative is, of course, the easier, but it has one drawback. However much we may be encouraged to buy the cheaper cuts of meat, most of them bearing names strangely unfamiliar to us in our daily shop-pings—such as clod, chuck and sticking (how depressing in depressing times to ask for three pounds of clod of beef: there's something almost funeral about it!)—we have to face in the long run the fact that unless we have a heat-storage cooker (or a hay-box: see page 69), we shall spend more on our actual cooking than we should, and quite possibly lose in fuel what we have gained in cheapness of meat. Stews of all kinds of food which we