

The English Housewife



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*Containing
the inward and outward virtues
which ought to be
in a complete woman ...*

GERVASE MARKHAM • EDITED BY MICHAEL R. BEST

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In 1615 Englishman Gervase Markham published a handbook for housewives containing "all the virtuous knowledges and actions both of the mind and body, which ought to be in any complete housewife." Markham reveals the "pretty and curious secrets" of preparing everything from simple foods to such elaborate meals as a "humble feast" - an undertaking which entails preparing "no less than two and thirty dishes, which is as much as can stand on one table." He instructs the housewife on brewing beer and caring for wine, growing flax and hemp for thread, and spinning and dyeing. As a housewife was also responsible for the health and "soundness of body" of her family, he includes advice on the prevention of everything from the plague to baldness and bad breath. No other source from this period provides the same richness of information in such a readable style. Michael Best's introduction and his abundant notes make "The English Housewife" readily accessible to the contemporary reader. Michael R. Best is Professor of English, University of Victoria.

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目录:

[The English Housewife 下载链接1](#)

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