

Historical Changes in the Victorian Housewife in Mrs. Beeton's Works

From the Abridged Versions of *The Book of Household Management* (1861) (presented in Japanese)

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Introduction

Isabella Mary Beeton (1836-65) is best known as the editor of a household management book for middle-class women, *The Book of Household Management* (1861). After her short life ended at the age of 28, several cookery and domestic books were published under the name 'Mrs. Beeton'. In recent years, although some studies were focused on Isabella and her relationship with her husband, Samuel Orchard Beeton (1831-77), few detailed studies have examined the works in which Isabella was directly involved. Therefore, this study investigates the changes in the image of the ideal Victorian housewife in *The Book of Household Management* and its abridged editions, which Isabella is thought to have written and edited.

Abridged Editions of *The Book of Household Management*

Following the success of *The Book of Household Management*, at least three abridged editions were published: *The Englishwoman's Cookery Book* (1863), *Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery* (1865), and *Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book* (1872). *The Englishwoman's Cookery Book* is a compilation of extracts from *The Book of Household Management* and was sold for one shilling. *Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery* was a cookbook with recipes listed alphabetically, as in a dictionary. Although Isabella was involved in editing this book, she passed away before it was published. *Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book* included the same preface and recipes as *Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery*, with an added chapter, The Philosophy of Housekeeping. These three books reflect a strategy to expand the readership by adjusting the price, content, and structure of the text in response to contemporary trends and readers' needs.

The Volume of Each Work

As shown in Table 1, the number of pages and recipes varied greatly depending on the purpose of the publication. *The Book of Household Management* has the most pages, while *Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery* and *Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book* contain the most recipes, which are written more concisely than those in *The Book of Household Management*. *The Englishwoman's Cookery Book* has the least amount of description including content similar to that of *The Book of Household Management*.

	<i>The Book of Household Management</i>	<i>The Englishwoman's Cookery Book</i>	<i>Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery</i>	<i>Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book</i>
Pages	1,112	208	371	404
Recipes	over 1,100	477	over 1,300	over 1,300

Table 1. Comparison of Number of Pages and Recipes (Created by Author)

Purpose of Publication

The Book of Household Management provides detailed guidance on the mindset of the mistress of a middle-class family and how to manage servants and household chores such as cooking, washing, and cleaning. It represents the image of the ideal mistress who takes full responsibility for household management. The book's wage table suggests it was aimed at middle-class families capable of employing a relatively large number of servants. Previous comparative studies of cookery books have described Isabella as presenting her readers with an image of a housewife who was both innovative and representative of Victorian domestic ideology. In the preface, she critiques how mistresses cooked to inspire women to be fully responsible for managing their homes: 'What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the discomfort and suffering which I had seen brought upon men and women

by household mismanagement. I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife's badly-cooked dinners and untidy ways' (*The Book of Household Management*, iii).

In contrast, *The Englishwoman's Cookery Book* evidently targeted women in lower-income families who had to cook: 'To help Plain Cooks and Maids-of-all Work to a knowledge of some of their duties, and to assist them in the important task of dressing and serving daily food... I have sought to make all the directions plain and practical, eschewing everything that was not likely to be useful and was not to the point' (*The Englishwoman's Cookery Book*, Preface). 'Plain' and 'practical' were the key terms in this period when time saving, frugality, and the shortening of time for household chores were required.

This trend has also been passed down to *Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery*: 'Mrs. Beeton has brought to her new offering to the Public a most anxious care to describe plainly and fully all the more difficult and recondite portions of Cookery...' (*Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery*, viii). Moreover, the aim of the book's publication is evidently depicted at the beginning of the Preface: 'MANY wishes have been expressed to the Authoress of the "Book of Household Management" that a volume of Recipes in Cookery should be written which could be sold at a price somewhere between the seven-and sixpenny "Household Management" and the Shilling Cookery Book' (*Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery*, vii). 'The Shilling Cookery Book' here refers to *The Englishwoman's Cookery Book*. *Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery* was sold for 3 pounds 6 shillings to meet the readers' demand.

The price was the same as that of *Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book*, including an added chapter titled 'Philosophy of Housekeeping.' This chapter introduces a 'WEEKLY PAGE OF HOUSEKEEPING BOOK' illustrating how the amount 'paid to domestics, with the various members of the household placed in the order in which they are usually ranked, will serve as a guide to regulate the expenditure of an establishment' (*Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book*, vii). The most notable part of the book is the detailed instructions on how to manage household finances.

Conclusion

Isabella and Samuel changed the contents of *The Book of Household Management* and published several less expensive versions in response to social changes of the mid-Victorian period. With the growth of the middle class, some women experienced a significant revolution in terms of their role in the home. The Beeton's reused and revised existing content, added new elements to meet readers' demands, and modified the structure of their publications. This strategic approach reflected their awareness of the ever-expanding readership facilitated by the rapid growth of the publishing industry. The wide circulation of these editions and their revisions demonstrates the success of Isabella and Samuel's publishing strategy.

Primary Sources

The Book of Household Management: Comprising Information for the Mistress, Housekeeper, Cook, Kitchen-Maid, Butler, Footman, Coachman, Valet, Upper and under House-Maids, Lady's-Maid, Maid-of-All-Work, Laundry-Maid, Nurse and Nurse-Maid, Monthly, Wet, and Sick Nurses, etc. etc. Also, Sanitary, Medical, & Legal Memoranda; with a History of the Origin, Properties, and Uses of All Things Connected with Home Life and Comfort (1861)

The Englishwoman's Cookery Book: Being a Collection of Economical Receipts Taken from Her 'Book of Household Management'. Amply Illustrated by a Large Number of Appropriate and Useful Engravings (1863).

The 'All About It' BOOKS. Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-Day Cookery (1865).

Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book: Comprising Instructions for Mistress and Servants, and a Collection of Over Fifteen Hundred Practical Receipts. With 104 Coloured Plates, Showing the Proper Mode of Sending Dishes to Table (1872).

Secondary Sources

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Driver, Elizabeth. *Bibliography of Cookery Books Published in Britain, 1875-1914*. Prospect Books, 1989.

Freeman, Sarah. *Isabella and Sam: The Story of Mrs. Beeton*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1977.

Hughes, Kathryn. *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs Beeton*. Fourth Estate Ltd., 2005.