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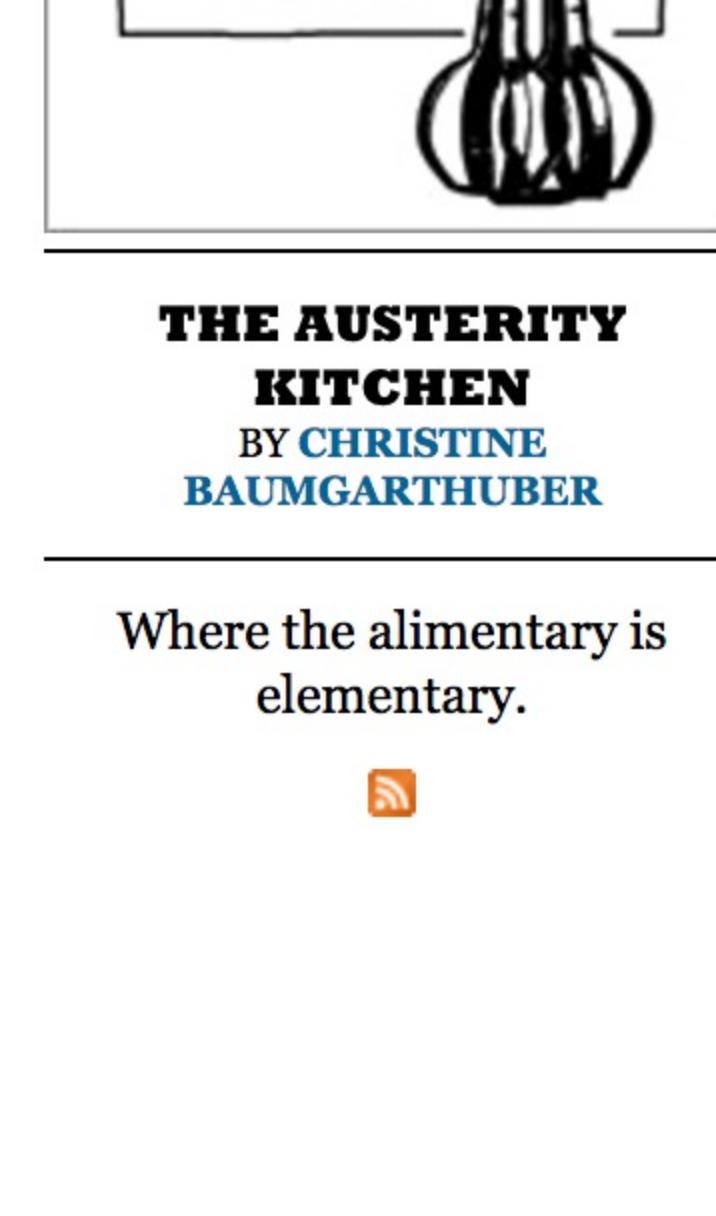
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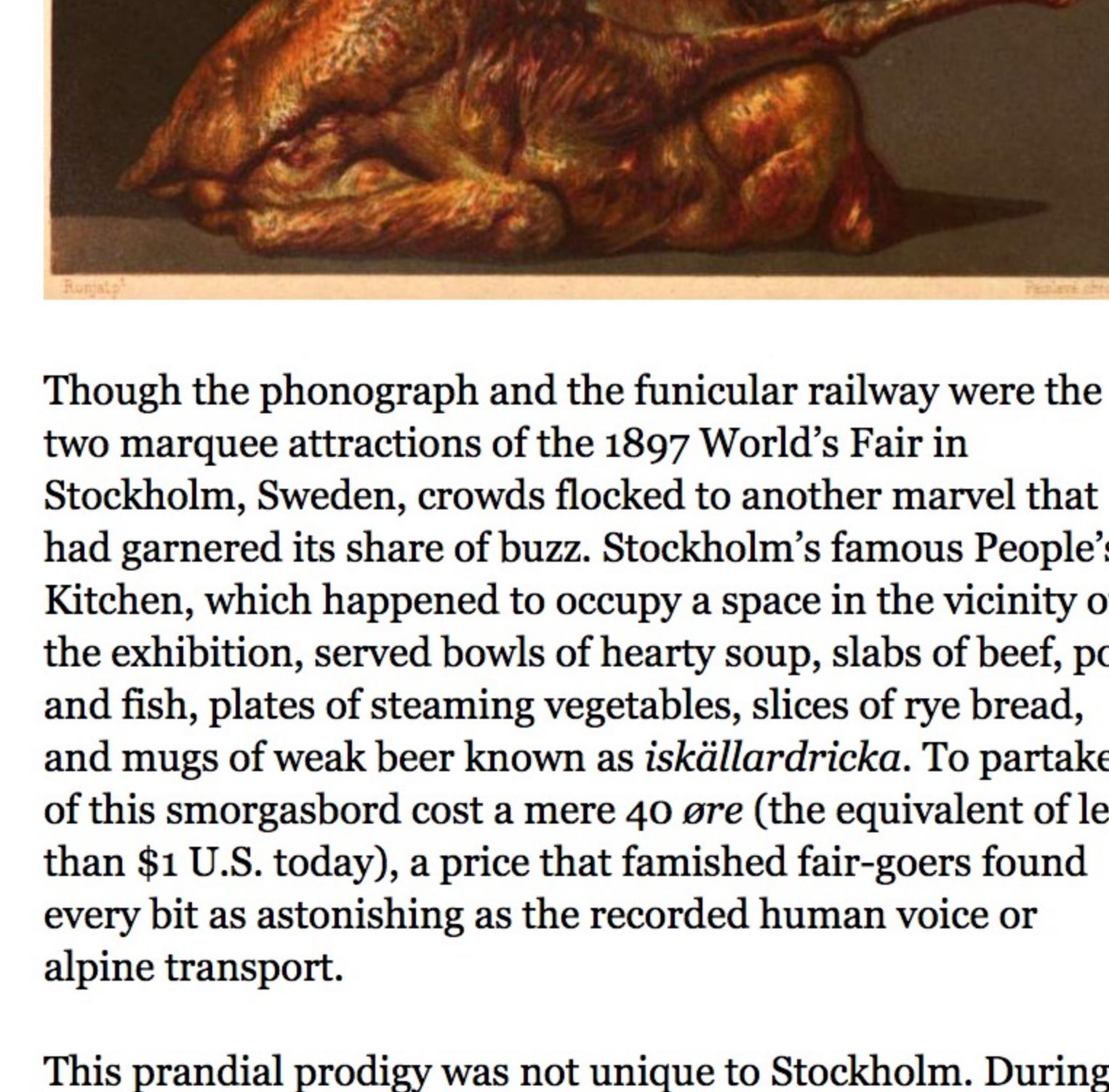


The Stockholm kitchen was a pet  
project of Sweden's Prince Karl.

## The People's Kitchen

By CHRISTINE BAUMGARTNER

*Does the modern workplace cafeteria owe its existence one 19th-century activist's effort to feed the laboring multitudes?*

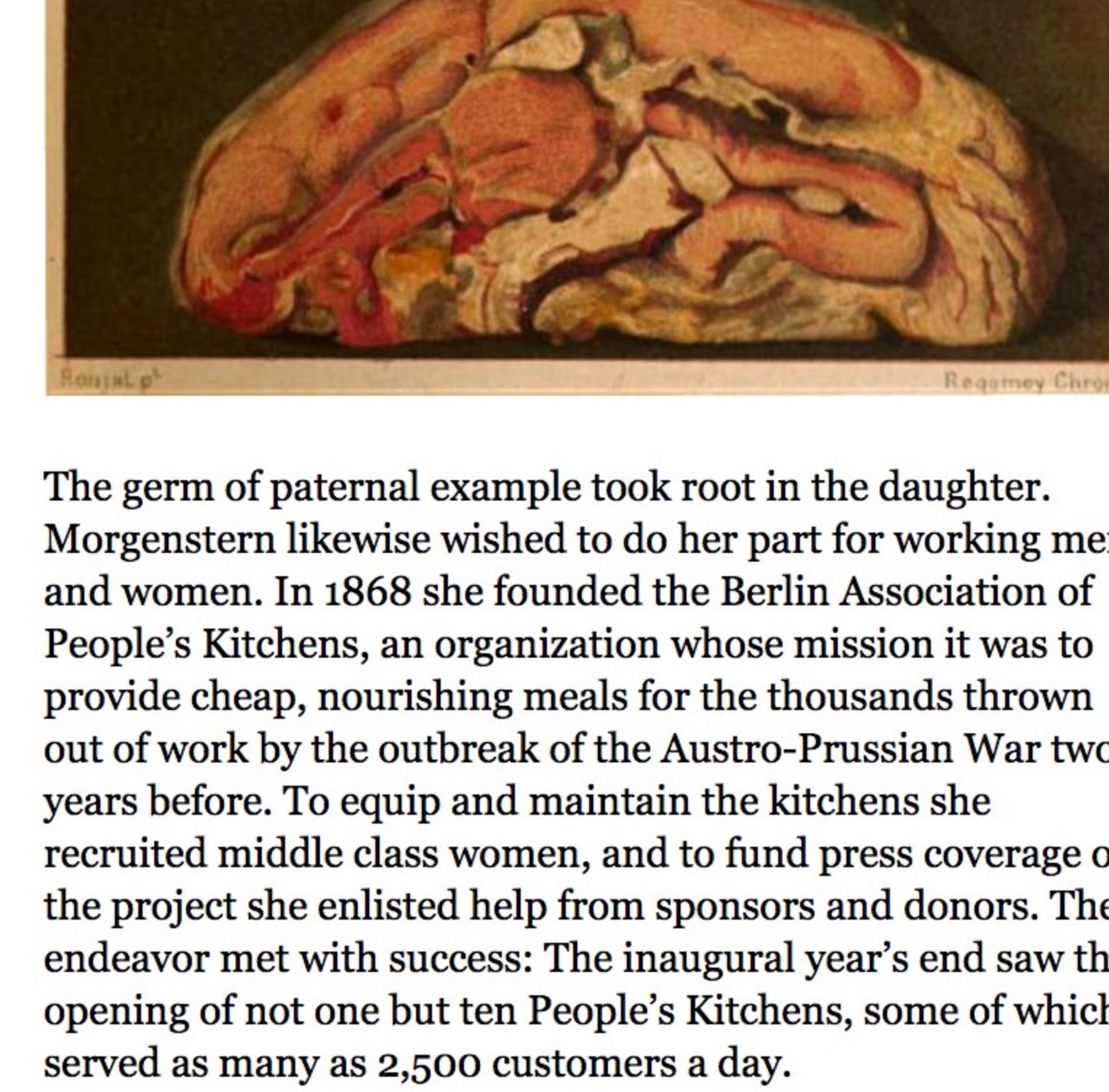


March 7, 2013

Illustrations from *Le Livre de Cuisine* (1867)

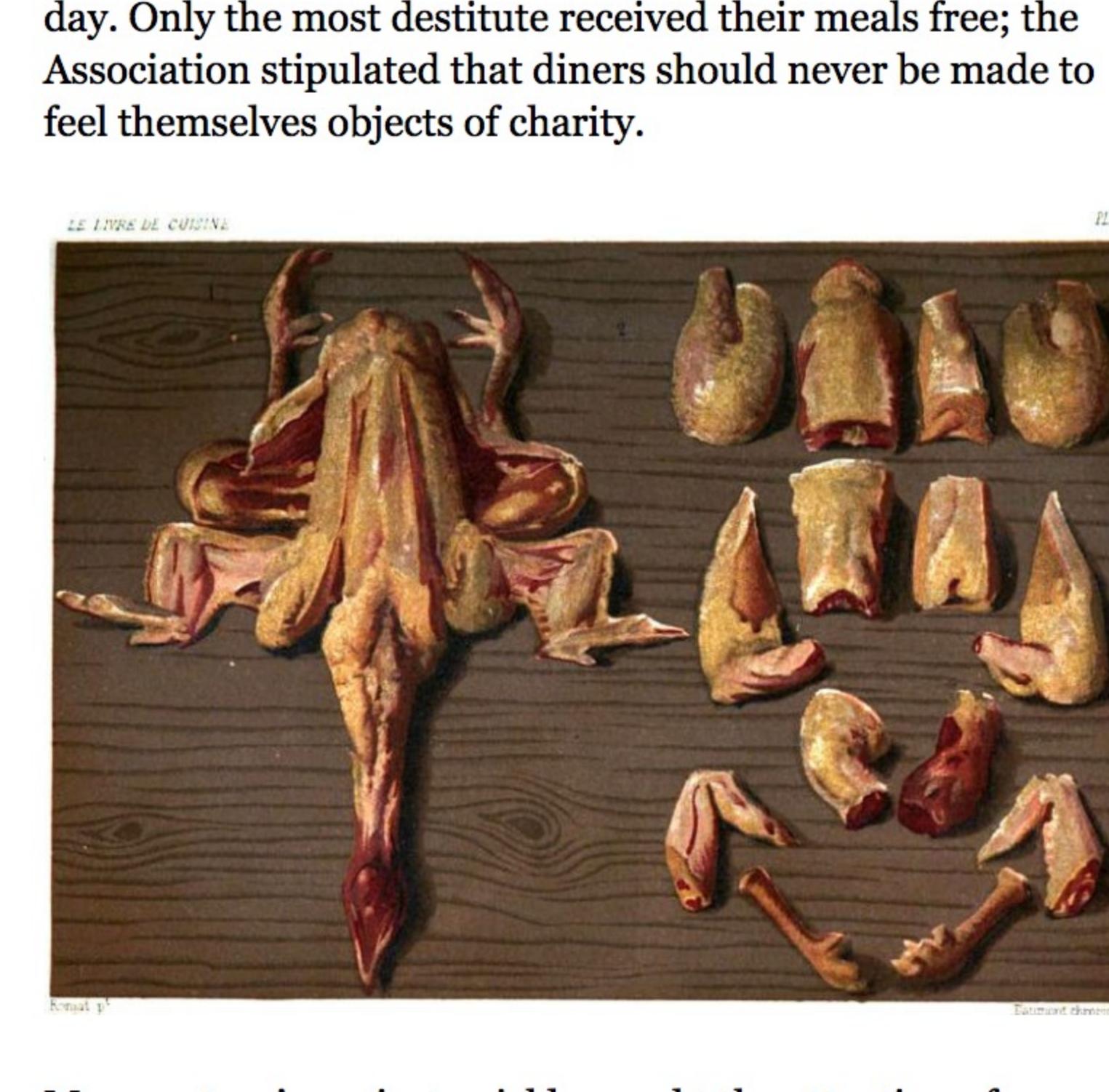
Though the phonograph and the funicular railway were the two marquee attractions of the 1867 World's Fair in Stockholm, Sweden, crowds flocked to another marvel that had garnered its share of buzz: Stockholm's famous People's Kitchen, which happened to occupy a space in the vicinity of the exhibition, served bowls of hearty soup, slabs of beef, pork and fish, plates of steaming vegetables, slices of rye bread, and mugs of weak beer known as *iskällardricka*. To partake of this smorgasbord cost a mere 40 *ore* (the equivalent of less than \$1 U.S. today), a price that famished fair-goers found every bit as astonishing as the recorded human voice or alpine transport.

This prandial prodigy was not unique to Stockholm. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, People's Kitchens were as common in some cities as cafés and restaurants. In Berlin had opened the first, brainchild of Lina Morgenstern, the earnest, dreamy daughter of a wealthy Berlin family. Morgenstern's father, a manager of the Royal Porcelain Factory's Breslau branch, sympathized with the 1848 revolution, and his leanings led him to make the comfort and well-being of his employees a main concern.



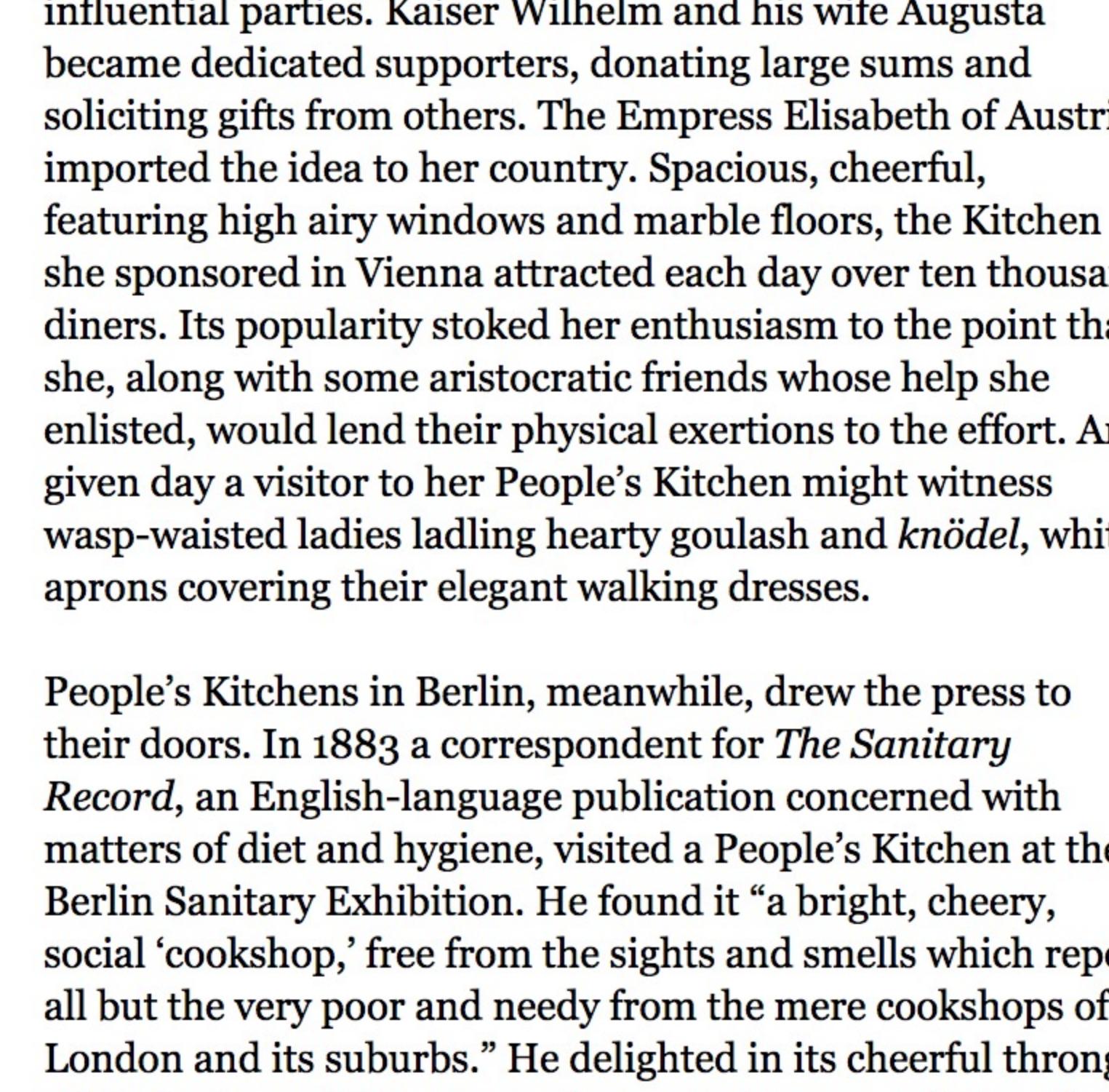
Illustrations from *Le Livre de Cuisine* (1867)

Morgenstern was also an ardent admirer of Friedrich Fröbel, who posited that the future of humankind lay in the hands of women, since theirs was the major formative influence during the first six years of a child's life. The germ of paternal example took root in the daughter. Morgenstern likewise wished to do her part for working men and women. In 1868 she founded the Berlin Association of People's Kitchens, an organization whose mission it was to provide cheap, nourishing meals for the thousands thrown out of work by the outbreak of the Austro-Prussian War two years before. To equip and maintain the kitchens she recruited middle class women, and to fund press coverage of the project she enlisted help from sponsors and donors. The endeavor met with success: The inaugural year's end saw the opening of not one but ten People's Kitchens, some of which served as many as 2,500 customers a day.



"The greatest dishes are very simple." — Auguste Escoffier

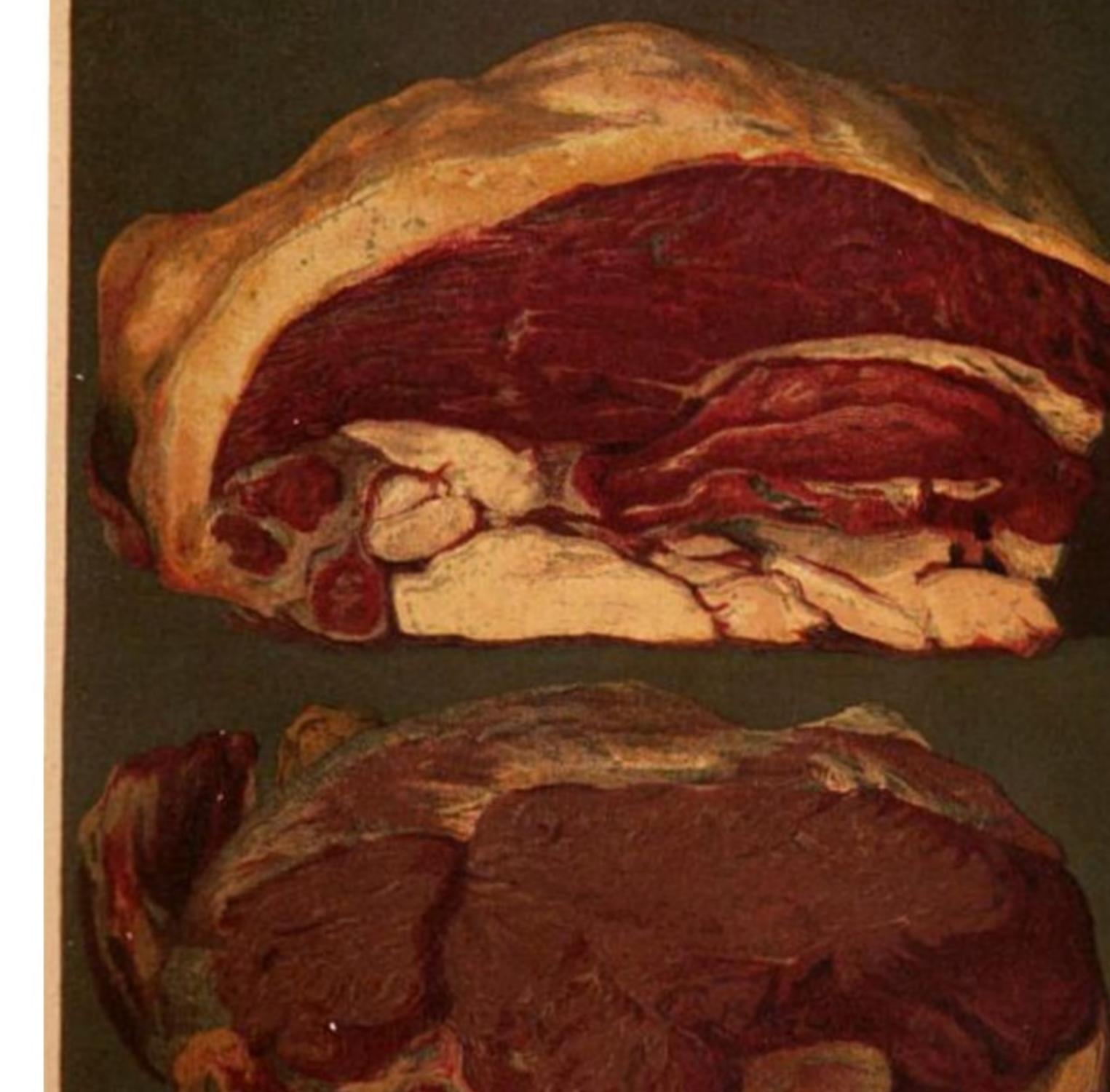
The philosophy behind the People's Kitchen rested on the conviction that the well-being of humanity depends on satisfying three primal needs: food, clothing and shelter. Any of these needs going unmet meant moral sickness, and from this, sooner or later, criminality. The most important of the three, food gave a man energy required to secure the remaining two. It must be made abundantly available, therefore, and it must be prepared according to strict scientific and aesthetic principles. The ideal meal consisted of two food groups — "blood and muscle formers" (eggs, meat, milk, cheese and beans) and "fat-forming and heat-giving foods" (starches and sugar) — and supplied enough nourishment that poor men and women need eat but once a day. Only the most destitute received their meals free; the Association stipulated that diners should never be made to feel themselves objects of charity.



In 1898 an anarchist stabbed the empress to death in Geneva, Switzerland.

Morgenstern's project quickly caught the attention of more influential parties. Kaiser Wilhelm and his wife Augusta became dedicated supporters, donating large sums and soliciting gifts from others. The Empress Elisabeth of Austria imported the idea to her country. Spacious, cheerful, featuring high airy windows and marble floors, the Kitchen she sponsored in Vienna attracted each day over ten thousand diners. Its popularity stoked her enthusiasm to the point that she, along with some aristocratic friends whose help she enlisted, would lend their physical exertions to the effort. Any given day a visitor to her People's Kitchen might witness wasp-waisted ladies ladling hearty goulash and *knödel*, white aprons covering their elegant walking dresses.

People's Kitchens in Berlin, meanwhile, drew the press to their doors. In 1883 a correspondent for *The Sanitary Record*, an English-language publication concerned with matters of diet and hygiene, visited a People's Kitchen at the Berlin Sanitary Exhibition. He found it "bright, cheery, social 'cookshop,' free from the sights and smells which repel all but the very poor and needy from the mere cookshops of London and its suburbs." He delighted in its cheerful throng of students, working men and women, tramps, artists and others, all there for the "plenteous, wholesome, nutritious noonday meal," and treated himself to a "toothsome and satisfying" lunch of boiled beef and vegetarian Irish stew.



Recipe for Green Beans with Potatoes from Lina Morgenstern's *Volksküche* (1883): "Boil 1 kg green beans, 75 kg flour, 1 kg salt, onions, fat, stock, herbs, one bunch parsley. Directions: Cut the ends from the beans, break them into 2 or 3 pieces, blanch them in boiling water, drain them, then put them beans out and boil until soft, then beat out (or bouquet) thicken (the leaf or bouquet) with the onions, add the parsley, and once it has cooked with the onions, add the chopped parsley. Serve with meat or salted pork."

Between the opening of its first kitchen in 1868, and the correspondent's visit in 1883, the Berlin Association of People's Kitchens reportedly served over 28 million meals. By

the 1890s, when Germany engaged in extensive rearmament, Morgenstern promoted peace. She was a delegate to the International League for General Disarmament, French League for Peace and the German Peace Society, and she served as vice president of the Women's Alliance for Peace.

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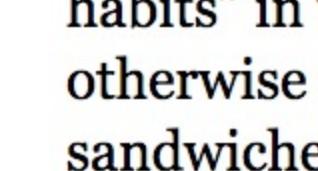
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