would love to focus my mind on one motorbikes or matchboxes, that sort in hushed tones about turies, to come people would speak a book about it. In years, if not cen­

teries, to come people would speak in hushed tones about the food or object long enough to write a book about it. Personally, I would love to focus my mind on one food or object long enough to write a book about it. I love people and books with a fixa­

tion or obsession. Pigeons, Lolitas, motorbikes or matchboxes, that sort of thing, I have already referred to a massive and learned text about the potato in this column. Personally, I would love to focus my mind on one food or object long enough to write a book about it. In years, if not cen­

It seems appropriate. I had just eaten an excellent Jewish/Russian meal and, barely able to walk, still managed to flick through cookbooks. My eye was caught by the red/orange cover of the aforementioned text. In other words, the book is paprika-coloured. Even the pages are somewhat paprikaed, as if Mr Halász, unable to contain his enthusiasm for the blessed condiment, had sprinkled select amounts into the paper during manufacture. Unfortunately, the book does not smell of paprika—at least not until careless use by the reader remedies this lack.

The Little Book of Hungarian Paprika delighted me. Section headings include “A simple history, with complications”, “From magic potion to a source of vitamins” and “Is paprika really hot?” (The answer to the last question is: not necessarily, depend­

ing on the variety.) The illustrations show various happy Hungarians and capsicums performing unusual functions, such as the latter (from which paprika comes) acting as the barrel of a cannon alongside a description of the really hot paprika.

The recipes in this book are not for the faint-hearted, and certainly not for the vegetarian; even the fresh green bean soup is made with beef stock, for example. It may be that a really cold climate is necessary to appreciate fully the passionate beauty of paprika in a meat stew. (I will ignore curry and Asia at this juncture.) However, why not experiment with the following soup, and hopefully discover the reason for Zoltán’s en­

thusiasm. The recipe calls for “noble sweet paprika”, which is one of the milder but flavourome paprikas and can therefore be used in greater quan­

ties.

Gulyás Soup

Ingredients: 500g good quality stewing beef, 100g lard or 8 tablespoons oil, 2 medium onions, 1 clove garlic, 2 teaspoons noble sweet paprika, 2 pinches caraway seed, 3-4 large potatoes, 2 medium green or yellow peppers (ie, capsicums), 2 small tomatoes, salt.

Wipe the beef carefully, then cut into small cubes. Heat the lard or oil in a large pan and fry the finely chopped onions until golden brown. Sprinkle with a little of the paprika, add the meat and fry until slightly browned. Then add crushed garlic, the remaining paprika and the caraway seed. Season to taste with salt. Mix thoroughly together and add a little water. Cover with a lid and simmer, stirring frequently. Add a little more water from time to time if necessary to prevent the meat from sticking. When the meat is tender, add the sliced peppers, the tomatoes cut into quarters and the peeled and cubed potatoes. Finally, pour in enough water to cover well and continue cooking until the potato is done. Serves 4.

When I look at books like The Little Book of Hungarian Paprika my mind dwells more and more on what my Big Banana Book would look like. It will definitely have a yellow cover. The pages will peel off from the spine centripetally. It will have to be read in one day or it will go brown and soggy. A condensed version will be available, to be known as The Little Sugar Banana Book. I will insist that it be hung in bunches above the bookshelves, and the customers will have to clamber up to get it. But enough of this beckoning fruit—for the mo­

ment, anyway. In the meantime, turn your hand to Hungarian Red, and appreciate the little things which out­

last political systems.

Penelope Cottier.