

LITTLE CHILDREN : HOW TO FEED THEM.



THE whole of this subject may be summed up in these two brief directions—feed children judiciously, and feed them regularly. Our object will be to show the proper definition in this case of the term “judicious,” and also to say a word or two on the necessity of the regularity of meals. There can be no doubt that a milk diet is the most nutritious, and the very best diet for infants, and it is much to be hoped that a belief

in this fact will become more widely spread and acted upon than it is even at the present time ; for I know that the mistaken idea that milk only is too *thin* a food for nourishment still prevails in the minds of many mothers. In reality milk contains every ingredient and element necessary for sustaining life. But an infant is comparatively a quiescent individual, and therefore, when the infant develops into the child, the conditions of its life are to a certain extent changed, and so an alteration in the plan of feeding it becomes advisable. For now that the limbs are coming into use, and the muscles into action, it is necessary to solidify the bones and to increase and strengthen the muscles. Feel the limbs of an infant, and you will perceive how much there is to be done before those legs and arms will be strong enough to perform their proper functions. You must assist nature in this work of building up. Do not fall into the error of thinking that size is a sign of strength. One often enough meets with children whose bones are deeply imbedded in fat, and yet the little creatures are very weakly and rickety ; their flesh is soft and flabby, not firm ; and their bones bow and bend, and are quite unequal to bear the weight of the body. This state of things is usually the result of unsuitable diet.

One also meets with children who are the reverse ; there are lean and puny children, who have a curiously wizened look on their faces. If there is no actual disease, this melancholy appearance may generally be changed by paying a little thought and attention to the nourishing properties of the food with which they are fed.

Once more, we now and again come across children who are perpetually crying ; fretful and discontented, they whine and moan, miserable, they know not why, and too often it happens that those who rear them know not wherefore. This irritability is not seldom attributed to naughtiness of disposition. Poor little mites ! How can a child be merry and happy when its stomach is suffering wofully from an injudicious

diet ; when it has been overloaded with food, or has partaken of something which it cannot digest, or has been indulged with too rich a diet, or has been fed with food from which it cannot draw sufficient nourishment ?

Now, if you want your children to have clear complexions, bright eyes, and rosy cheeks, to be strong and hardy little plants, to grow into vigorous saplings, and to become sturdy trees, you must be very judicious in your plan of feeding them.

Foods may be divided into three great classes, and each class possesses its special value. Thus : the nitrogenous substances contain the chemical elements necessary for the making and repair of the muscles, the mineral elements are required to solidify and strengthen the bones, and the use of the carbonaceous foods is to generate heat and force, in the same way that fuel is used to get up steam.

I cannot do more here than speak of these classes in general terms. Fish, flesh, and fowl may be said to represent the first division, milk and water the second, and butter, sugar, and what is called farinaceous food, the third.

Plain plenty should be the motto for the nursery table at meal times. No fried bacon or hot rolls, no sausages, kidneys, or coffee, should appear on it at breakfast, but basins of boiled bread and milk, or if it is preferred, bowls of cold milk and thick slices of bread and butter. Better still is the plate of oatmeal porridge sweetened with treacle, a repast such as the hardy Scot is reared upon.

For dinner two courses only : mutton or beef, chicken or fish, accompanied by a wise selection of vegetables. Neither veal nor pork should be given to children. Potatoes do not agree with all children, but in any case they should be crushed or beaten up before the child is allowed to eat them. Turnips and peas also are found to disagree with some. Cabbage and marrow are usually very harmless. Children as a rule are not fond of vegetables, but as “green food” is wholesome, they should be encouraged to eat some kinds of it.

The widest latitude may be allowed in what are termed milk-puddings ; rice, arrowroot, sago, corn-flour—the list of farinaceous foods is a very lengthy one, but there is one amongst the number which I especially recommend, and one which is not much known, and that is the “entire wheat flour.” This preparation makes a most delicious pudding, and is very nutritious indeed. A plain suet dumpling, or a boiled batter pudding, may make a further variety ; but pastry, either boiled or baked, should certainly not be included in the bill of fare for young children. Stewed fruits are very wholesome ; of the different kinds, currants, cherries, and plums are the least so. Plenty of sugar the little ones may be indulged in, although some elderly people do shake their heads and talk about loss of teeth. It is the continued sucking of sugar and

sweets which injures the teeth, not the legitimate use. Dried fruits, especially currants, are not so harmless as they look; indeed, many children are made ill by the latter, as they are very indigestible. Creams, trifles, and all flummeries of that description are not to be sanctioned, except the plain and harmless corn-flour or ground rice blanc-mange.

Milk should again take its place on the tea-table. Now and then honey, treacle, or jam may be substituted for, but not allowed as an accompaniment to butter. A constant indulgence in sweets begets a bad habit, and encourages the idea that it is impossible to make a good tea without the addition of one or more of these luxuries. What shall I say about cakes? This—that muffins and crumpets, and plum-cakes, are always liable to disorder the stomach of a young child, and will never do it any good whatever. Sponge-cakes are the only cakes which can be said to be harmless.

For supper, boiled bread and milk is better than cold milk, as the latter is too heavy to be taken at night by some children.

It may be thought that I have allowed but little variety of food, but enough has been enumerated to show of what the diet should consist. All highly seasoned, strongly flavoured dishes, all condiments and rich concoctions, should be kept out of the way of young folk. If adults become dyspeptic and martyrs to indigestion and its sister-evils, let them only have themselves to blame, and do not give them reason to censure those who allowed them, when children, to eat whatever they fancied or whenever they liked; the consequence of which indiscretion will surely be that the internal machinery will be injured, and will not be able without considerable difficulty to grind the grist which is now brought to the mill.

Some parents are much disturbed if their children evince a dislike to meat, but this fear that the little one will not thrive unless it eats meat is a groundless disquiet. Children do not require meat until nature has provided them with teeth wherewith to masticate it, and this provision is supplied at different ages. Even when the teeth have come, it is better to give for a time the juice of meat in the form of beef-tea or broth than the meat itself, which would in all probability descend into the stomach but half masticated. Then let it be remembered that fish and eggs are valuable substitutes for meat when the latter is disliked.

I have met with people who have a fixed notion that

it is bad for children to drink much; and acting on this belief, they will not allow the thirsty little plants to imbibe as much as they wish. Now, growing children are continually thirsty; and as both milk and water contain mineral elements which are of service to their health, pray let them take draughts long and deep of either one or the other, and whenever they feel the desire. I quite believe that the custom of giving children wine and beer is one which does them more harm than good—that is to say, if the child is in an ordinary state of health. Wine stimulates rather than strengthens, and this kind of help the young child rarely needs, whatever the adult may require.

Amongst the poorer orders, children are almost entirely fed upon a diet of bread; it forms the staple of every meal. This plan saves the trouble of cooking, for a few slices are soon cut off the baker's loaf and overlaid with butter or treacle. It is true that corn contains the three essential ingredients which have been mentioned—*i.e.*, the nitrogenous, carbonaceous, and mineral; but then, unfortunately, the two former, which may be said to be the most valuable, are contained in the outer husk of corn, which forms the bran; thus, when this is removed, most of the valuable constituents are lost. Brown bread is much more satisfactory as food than the fine white loaf; but as the coarse particles of bran in the former are indigestible, it is not wise to give much to little children. Therefore, on all accounts, it is a mistake to make bread the sole article of food.

And now a few words as to the regularity of meals. Children are early birds, and they should have their breakfasts directly they are dressed. Eight o'clock is quite late enough for them to begin the matutinal repast; a one o'clock dinner, a four or five o'clock tea, and a seven or eight o'clock supper should mark out those several hours of the day.

Long fasts are injurious to growing children, and, on the other hand, continual feeding is as injurious; therefore, regular hours and regular meals should be arranged and kept. The only intermediate meal allowable is that of luncheon. When children are hungry, and willing to eat plain food, it is well to let them have some in the interval between breakfast and dinner, but on no account allow them to slip into that dreadful habit of perpetually munching and crunching—an indulgence which destroys the natural healthy appetite, and soon spreads a sickly hue over their faces.

E. C.

