

FOOD AND MEDICINE FOR CHILDREN.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



STATISTICAL writers tell us, and we are bound to believe them, that considerably more than a quarter of the children born in this country die before they reach the age of five years. Philosophers, on the other hand, hint that the living world has no reason to regret such mortality; for, say they, if the population of the world goes on increasing at the present rate, in somewhat under a thousand years there will hardly be room for the people to live on the face of the earth. We ourselves are not so sure about this, and we seldom trouble to think about it; but of one thing we do *feel* certain, and "feel" is just the right word to express my meaning—namely, that there is something about the very helplessness and innocence of a child that draws us, as with a spell, and compels us gladly to do all we can to protect it from danger, and assist it in living. Philosophers may drive one way, but instinct and nature pull the other, and so in my present paper I prefer leaving philosophers alone, and statistics too, and to obstinately stick to common sense. Well, then, I begin by saying that it is before a child is positively ailing that a mother ought to ask herself a question, which not only concerns her own happiness, but the future fate and welfare of her offspring as well: "Am I feeding my child in a way that is naturally conducive to its health, strength, and increase of body? Am I doing right by wee Johnny, kicking and crowing in his cradle yonder? He *is* so joyous now, it does seem as though he never, never would ail. And little inquisitive Edith here, prattling on my knee, she seems the quintessence of health itself; is it possible that a time may come when her skin will burn and her brow will ache, when heavy lids will droop over languid eyes, and her voice be quiet and spiritless?"

The answer is "Yes." And appearances are deceptive: it is not your plumpest nor even your rosiest children that are the most healthy at heart, and the most unlikely to be struck down by sudden illness. A moderate degree of plumpness and rotundity we like to see in all children, but whenever that rotundity approaches what the Scotch expressively term the "flozy," and when the child is dull and somewhat apathetic, shy, and *too* good-natured, depend upon it there is some error in the diet somewhere, and inflammation, croup, child-crowing, and a whole host of infantile ailments may be hovering near. On the

other hand, an over-pale, thin, and peevish child cannot be a healthy one. Instead of "peevish," I had almost used the word "puling," which is an ill-natured word, and one that ought never to be applied to a child. A child ought naturally to be as good-natured and happy as the lamb that gambols in the field. But then a lamb *lives on its mother's milk*, and this remark permits me to glide gracefully into the subject of infantile feeding. In all cases where it is possible or practicable, the child should be fed by the mother herself; it is the baby's natural food, and not to allow it to have it, is to endanger the life of the child, and the health of the mother as well. It is not my object here to do so, but, if I chose, I think I could tell you of more than one case of painful disease ending fatally, which in my opinion I could trace to the error of giving baby to others to nurse, and driving the natural food away. For Nature, kindly as she may be, is not slow in resenting any infringement of her laws. But strongly as I feel on this subject, I will say no more about it, for a hint will often do more good than vituperative eloquence. When from any cause an infant cannot be reared upon its proper food, then we have to look about for a substitute. I shall not do more than mention what is termed a "wet-nurse." Parents must consult their own physician on this subject, but a word or two about the feeding-bottle and its contents will not, I think, be inopportune.

Away in the open country, where the milk-seller has hardly yet learned any of the vile secrets of his craft as practised by some in towns and cities, cow's milk may be had pure and good, and is greatly relished by young infants. It is more the province of the nurse than the doctor to say how it is to be given, and she will know that the milk should be *warmed*, and raw sugar added to it, and diluted with water, gradually adding less and less of this as the infant grows older. She will know, too, that it should not be boiled or scalded, which would result in a separation of the fatty portion of the milk. Neither need I tell her that when the milk disagrees, and brings on diarrhoea, it is usually caused by its being too strong, and about a table-spoonful of lime-water (the *agua calcis* of the chemist) added to baby's bottle will tend to correct the secretions. Again, I feel it would be almost insulting a respectable nurse to remind her that the india-rubber teat of the bottle should have very fine perforations, so that the milk may not come too quickly into the mouth of her little charge, and that no more milk should be prepared at one time than is absolutely necessary; that the bottle itself and the glass tube should be soaked in water after use, so as to be the perfection of cleanliness and sweetness, or that the bottle should be taken from the infant even before it is quite empty, so as to prevent the child from sucking and swallowing air. A good nurse

knows all this, at the same time I think a mother, be she ever so delicate, cannot hurt by having her baby in its bassinette in the same room with her. She will then see and be sure he is being properly attended to. While strongly urging, then, mothers to suckle their own children, I see no reason why with great care and attention they may not be reared by hand. We have, in addition to cow's milk, goat's milk, which is even better, and need not be diluted; the same may be said of ass's milk, which does in some cases exceedingly well. Then there are the condensed milks of the shops, which may be tried when other milks seem to disagree. There is one thing to be said in their favour, they are far better than the adulterated milks of large cities.

If a child cries much, it is a sign that things are not going well with him. In such cases he will be very sleepless, and the administration of a little diluted spirits may suggest itself. If such a thought does come into a mother's head, let her get rid of it as soon as possible. Give him neither spirits nor opiates, nor soothing syrups, but seek for the cause, and if that cannot be found by either mother or nurse, the doctor had better be consulted. Referring to what I said above, that a baby was naturally as good-natured and joyous as a lamb, I here add, if your infant has had good sweet milk of a proper temperature, if his bed is soft and warm, if the air is pure around him—there is a great deal in that—and if his clothes are neither rough nor damp, he will slumber sweetly and wake with a smile.

When a child begins to show that wonderful weemorsel of ivory called a front tooth, it must be looked upon as a gentle reminder that he would like—he would not object to—something with a little more stay in it than milk alone. Well, there is pap to begin with, and all sorts of ways of preparing it; if it be made from bread, the bread should be somewhat stale without being sour; you cannot be sure that there is no alum in it, or other deleterious substance, so it ought in all cases to be soaked for an hour or two in cold water, the water poured off, and the best of new milk added with a little sugar; the whole should be beaten with a fork, and beaten well too, to make sure that no lumps are left in it. Of this you may give two meals a day, and some children will want three. Still I greatly object to over-feeding infants, and I would much rather give a child less than he would take, remembering that it is not what he eats but what he digests that does him good, and that a distended stomach is, for the time being, a weakened, thin-walled stomach, which has not the power to mix the food. Never force a child to eat quickly, else the food will not get mingled with the salivary juice, and therefore will not assimilate. Always taste the food first to see it is not too warm, and that it is moderately sweet. I need not give receipts for other "paps," which may be made of biscuit, rusks, corn-flour, arrowroot, &c.; a nurse can always manufacture these, but they should be prepared with the greatest care and attention to cleanliness. If they are at all lumpy, or singed even, they will not agree.

When about nine months old, a little nourishing soup may be given with the bread about once a day, instead of the milk. I am not in any great hurry advising this, however. Milk contains all that is required to supply the wants of infant life, therefore I say, milk, milk, *milk*, let milk be the staple of your child's diet till four or five years old. And here let me say parenthetically, that more good is often done by sending city children down to the country for three months than could be effected by a year's residence at the sea-side. Many a child I could tell you of who, having been put under the care of a kindly cottager or small farmer, from the pale and sickly subject it was when sent down, has developed in a very few months into your very beau ideal of happy, rosy, hard-fleshed health. And what wrought the change? Why, the change itself—new sights and new sounds, everything new and everything strange, and above all pure air and *pure milk*. The country has one other advantage over the sea-side as a health-resort for children, it is far less expensive.

It will be time enough when the child is a year old to begin to give him still more solid food; he will now relish puddings and eggs, and broth pap, but not until his teeth are well formed should he have flesh meat, unless indeed the family physician orders it. I know indeed at this moment of a child who, under medical advice, gets raw meat for dinner, finely minced, with an allowance of potato and bread, but she is an invalid. Meat is stimulating, and apt to heat the blood and produce skin eruptions. For children between the ages of two and five, there are a great variety of easily-made and easily-digested dishes. For breakfast nothing, I think, can beat oatmeal porridge made with milk. I challenge the world to give better advice than the following for making this excellent dish:—Let your oatmeal be somewhat fine, it is thus more easily and surely boiled; place your saucepan on a not too hasty fire, and add to the new milk therein a little salt; the very moment it begins to boil, commence to slowly and gently scatter in the meal with the left hand, while you stir it with a wooden spoon in the right, taking care to crush any lumps which may rise to the top. Do not let it boil too quickly, and when you think it is thick enough let it simmer for about five minutes before you take it from the fire; if it boils too long it is spoiled, if too thin it is not fit to eat. It is poured into saucers, and must be permitted to cool before being partaken of. Porridge may, for a change, be made of flour or good barley-meal.

Dinner for children should always be early, and about this let me remark that if beef or mutton be given, both of which, whether boiled or roasted, are highly nutritious, it should be cut up very finely or even minced, and the child should be taught to eat very slowly, and to masticate the food well. Children's food, like that of grown-up people, ought to be varied; change is always agreeable and conducive to good digestion. I like to see children sit down to a good dinner, and I delight to see them enjoy it, but hurrying over meals—and they are greatly prone to this—

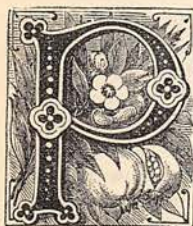
should always be discouraged, while on the other hand nothing indigestible should be placed before them. Game of various kinds, as well as fowl, pigeon, and rabbit, make a very nice change, and so does white fish, with the exception of herrings and mackerel, or any other strong-tasted and oily fish. Although a little salt should always be sprinkled over a child's food, he should not be permitted to eat salted provisions of any kind, nor any such indigestible food as pork, goose, or even duck, and turkey should be given but sparingly. The stuffing generally used with these latter is very likely to produce a fit of indigestion, if given to a child. There are vegetables that a child may eat, and others that he ought not to partake of; potatoes, for example, turnips, and roots generally are very wholesome, but cabbage and greens are provocative of internal disturbance. Even potatoes, turnips, and parsnips, however, should be mashed; and here let me give a word of warning: they ought not to be mashed on the plate with the back of a fork; they will be lumpy if they are; the mashing ought to be complete and thorough. Puddings of sago, rice, or semolina, or even corn-flour, should always form part of the child's dinner, and suet dumpling, if eaten with syrup, makes a very nice change.

What should a child drink? Milk or water, or milk and water, with meals, or a very little tea or coffee well diluted with milk. Cocoa is most nourishing, I cannot indeed speak too highly in its praise. As to beer or wines, I should say never under any circumstances allow a child to partake of them, except under the orders or sanction of a medical man. The supper should be early, say six o'clock, and may be light

pudding of any kind, porridge and milk, or bread and butter with milk-diluted tea. Children live fast, and be it remembered that they require more food in comparison to their size than grown-up people do, for they have not only to repair the waste of tissue, but to build and feed bone, and nerve, and muscle. Even between meals, therefore, if occasion demands it, do not deny them a crust of bread.

But lo! here I am almost at the end of my chapter, and, despite my title, medicines have been mainly conspicuous by their absence. And so, reader, I would very willingly let them be in the nursery; there is little need of physic where children are well cared for, well clothed, and fed in the way I have tried to indicate. If a laxative be needed, either a tea-spoonful of magnesia may be mixed in the pap, or a little fluid magnesia administered, but remember that magnesia too often given is apt to form concretions of a dangerous kind. A little grey powder may be given sometimes, if the child seem to need it. Castor oil warmed, so as to make it run easy, is a good laxative, the only objection to its administration being that force is required, and I know by experience that a child will sometimes struggle so against swallowing medicine as to cause itself mischief. Dill-water is a useful remedy to have in the nursery, and a tea-spoonful or two may be given when the child seems to be griped. Syrup of rhubarb is another harmless aperient, and one which will not weaken the child; but after all the less medicine you give the better, unless the child be actually fevered, and then it is time to send for the doctor.

GARDENING IN JANUARY.



PERHAPS some facetious merry-maker who has come down to spend Christmas with our readers may be tempted to exclaim, as his eye falls on the heading of this paper, "Gardening in January! What an incongruous pastime! As soon might we conceive of directions for snowballing in July!" A glance, however, round the gaily-decked room in which he may chance to find himself—the old oak dining-room, perhaps, all floral with its evergreens, holly, Christmas roses, and greenhouse delights—or it may be a second but more furtive glance, *merely*, of course, at the ruddy *camellia* which is hiding its petals to such advantage in the raven tresses of some bright-eyed cousin who is laughing away so accidentally near the mistletoe—these two glances, we think, may possibly awaken an after-thought that he has made rather a donkey of himself for quizzing us about our "going a-gardening in January." We shall, nevertheless, take his piece of pleasantry in the utmost good humour. Neither Christmas nor New Year's Eve is a time even for a

little quarrel; for those scarlet holly-berry letters on the wall spell out so distinctly, "Peace on earth." All the best wishes of the season, then, and "every happiness" to our joker and the gentle girl by his side.

No, we will tell them that nothing is going to put us out of conceit of this gardening hobby of ours. May we not indeed say that a quasi-divinity hedges about our handicraft? We are engrossed by the study of flowers, nor do we forget that the great Flower-Maker Himself was once "supposed to be the gardener."

To begin, then, forthwith. Camellias are an inviting subject on this cold and bleak January day; their colour is so bright and decided. Let us see what there is to be said about them this month. Those early sorts that may be about now coming into flower will require constant attention and watering. We have often said that the watering-pot, in so far as our *general* greenhouse stock of plants and cuttings is concerned, may be at this time of the year, except at rare intervals, almost discarded. Not so, however, must we treat these camellias as they begin to show for flowering. If we then neglect to water them, the buds will in all probability fall off. To encourage their early blossom—and naturally we are impatient to see