

## VEGETABLES AS HEALTH PRESERVATIVES.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



MOST of us allow our individual tastes or instincts to guide us, in a great measure, in the selection of the vegetables we partake of at table. Not a bad plan either. The lower animals, even the *Carnivora*, seem to know that certain plants and grasses ought to be partaken of periodically, to keep their blood in a state of purity and their whole system in working order. Such knowledge on their part is innate. But men as rational beings ought, I think, to know a little more than they do about the peculiarities and properties of the various vegetables they use as food. The selection of these is generally left to the cook. The cook knows—traditionally, one might say—that certain vegetables go well with certain joints or certain dishes, that it is the time-honoured custom to serve *this* with *that*.

It is no part of my purpose at present to show how far tradition or precedent may sometimes lead the cook astray, nor have I anything save respect for prejudice or peculiarity of individual taste. On the contrary, I would say that if a person's taste leads him to eschew spinach or parsnips, for instance, he is better without them.

Now, although I am no vegetarian, I cannot help taking the present opportunity of making a remark, the truth of which few, I dare say, will gainsay. There is far too much animal food consumed at our tables, and far too little vegetable. Not thousands only, but millions of people in these islands would enjoy a greater share of health and happiness, and would add greatly to their chances of long life, if they were to become strict vegetarians as far as the first and last meals of the day are concerned. I must not say more than this, else there is some chance of this paper becoming a purely dietetic instead of a medical one. Let me get at once into my subject then, and take in review a few of the vegetables which commonly find their way to our tables, considering more particularly their therapeutical effects on the system.

The first great natural family that I think of is the *Solanaceæ*. This family of plants contributes largely to our supply of medicines and luxuries, as well as our food. About the first two named I have nothing now to say, except that it is somewhat strange that such strongly poisonous plants as nightshade and tobacco should be first cousins to the useful egg-plant, the delicious tomato, and that friend to rich as well as poor, the potato, not to mention the capsicum, naturally more used in hot countries than in temperate climes.

The *egg-plant* should, in my opinion, be used to a greater extent than it is. It is not difficult to cultivate; it is ornamental, and a wholesome and useful vegetable.

The *tomato* should also be a greater favourite with us. It contains a cooling acid, a *volatile oil*, some mineral matter and salts, as well as a fragrant resinous matter. It is used in soups, ketchups, sauces, and pickles. But inasmuch as the volatile oil—which words I purposely italicise in the last sentence—is dissipated by heat, the ripe tomato should, in my opinion, be consumed raw if it is considered palatable—*i.e.*, if it suits the individual taste. N.B.—No attempt should be made by any one to acquire particular tastes, whether for tobacco, strange vegetables, olives, or caviare; to do so is simply to turn one's idiosyncrasy "tapsalteerie," to use a most expressive Scotch word. Let, therefore, whosoever is fond of any particular vegetable eat freely thereof; it is a food natural to him, a food that suits his system and cannot injure him; what he does not like he ought to avoid; there is no craving in the system for it, no want in his organism which it can supply. I have often observed that people of the nervous or nervo-sanguineous temperament are more partial to Solanaceous vegetables—potatoes, for instance—than those of the lymphatic are. As an article of diet potatoes suit such people, for in addition to their nutrient qualities they contain a certain amount of a property that is singularly soothing to the nerves.

The *capsicum* belongs also to the *Solanaceæ*. From it we get our cayenne pepper—subject to much adulteration. It may be used as a stimulant in cases of slow digestion, and non-irritative dyspepsia. It is in hot countries, however, where the fruit of the capsicum, freshly gathered, is best relished. It is eaten green in India and Africa, and not only is it a wholesome stimulant, especially counteracting the depressing effects of heat, but it cools the system as well by causing an abundant flow of perspiration. In times of extreme heat in our own country, large chillies ought to find a place on our tables.

From the natural order *Cruciferae*, we have a whole host of delicious and useful table vegetables. Let me bring a few of these forward for inspection.

As roast beef is an Englishman's favourite dish, I naturally think first of *horse-radish* and *mustard*. Both are too well known to need description; the horse-radish is a capital aid to digestion.

*Mustard* is a good stomachic; the ground seeds are used or the tender leaves in salads. Bearing in mind how much mustard suffers at the hands of the unprincipled dealer, I think it is a pity mustard is not more often grown for table consumption in our kitchen gardens. The seeds of home-cultivated mustard, pounded in a mortar with cream and a little salt added, make a sauce fit for an epicure.

*Radishes*, when grown on good, not over-rich soil, and when of medium size and perfectly fresh, are among the most wholesome vegetables we possess. They are stomachic and appetising, and it should not



be forgotten that they also possess demulcent and diuretic properties. They are not so often used boiled as they ought to be. When eaten raw, care should be taken to masticate them properly; if "bolted" they are injurious.

*Cress*, generally called American Cress, is a mild stomachic; it forms a valuable adjunct to a salad. *Water-cress* is a still more important vegetable, possessing, as I believe it does, tonic properties. It is usually eaten with cheese, but ought to be used with beef and mutton.

The vegetables we usually designate by the name of greens, such as *cabbage*, *kale*, *brocoli* or *cauliflower*, *sprouting brocoli*, *Brussels sprouts*, &c., are all more or less nourishing, although they contain a large proportion of water. As medicinal articles of diet they are invaluable, possessing blood-purifying properties, for they are antiscorbutic, mildly laxative and diuretic, in some degree tonic, and they have moreover an indirect action on the liver itself. In spring and summer they are especially to be recommended, with this reservation, however—they must not be eaten too freely, or by persons the mucous membranes of whose alimentary canals are too easily irritated. Boiled rice goes excellently well with cabbages or greens of any kind, so does barley.

*Sea-kale* is a most delicious and healthful vegetable, unfortunately as a rule beyond reach of the poor, yet it is by no means difficult to cultivate. Although they do not belong to the same natural family, I cannot forbear here mentioning the young shoots of the nettle-plant, or nettle-tops, as they are usually called; when well cooked and served like spinach they are extremely wholesome, and help to keep the blood sweet and pure.

*Spinach*, it should be remembered by those fond of it, is laxative in its properties and also highly diuretic. It makes an excellent breakfast vegetable for hot weather, although few people in this country think of cooking vegetables for morning consumption.

The *turnip*, another of the *Cruciferae*, is far more valuable as an article of diet or adjunct to other food than most people think. It is also more nutrient than is generally supposed, and is valuable as a demulcent. Swedish turnips are usually ignored by the cook; this is a pity; they are better in every way than any other kind. Turnips ought to be well chosen, not too big nor too small; they ought to be gathered fresh, well boiled and well mashed. The green tops of the young turnips are also very healthful and in some degree tonic.

*Parsnips* and *carrots* belong to the *Umbelliferae* family, and probably possess in some slight degree the medicinal properties of that family. In addition therefore to being highly nutritious, owing to the large quantity of starch they contain, they are, we may presume, alterative and resolvent. They make, at all events, an excellent change in our vegetable scale of diet.

This is probably the proper place to mention that constant change, in the articles of a vegetable nature

which we consume, is as much to be recommended as in those procured from the animal kingdom.

*Parsley* is another of the umbelliferous vegetables used at table, chiefly for garnishing or stuffing. It is an excellent blood-purifying herb, and deserves to be used far more than it is. It ought to be put in soups and in sauces, eaten raw and eaten cooked. It is well known that parsley chewed sweetens the breath.

*Beetroot*—natural family *Chenopodiaceae*—is one of the most nutrient vegetables we have. It is likewise cooling and slightly laxative; it should not, however, be partaken too freely of, even in summer, or it may produce painful flatulence and diarrhoea.

*Beans* of all kinds are nutritious, but people whose digestive organs are not strong should take care how they indulge in them. French beans require to be very tender indeed, and very well cooked, to be safe.

*Celery* is another vegetable which, though wholesome enough when cooked and mixed in soups, &c., should be partaken of with caution in the raw state, especially by delicate people or those who lead a sedentary life.

*Rhubarb* is most wholesome; it helps to purify and cool the blood, and to a great extent aids digestion, while at the same time it is healthfully laxative.

*Garden lettuces*. These vegetables are well known to possess anodyne and narcotic properties. Hence they are best for supper. They should, however, be eaten sparingly, and the younger and fresher they are the better. The older leaves should be rejected as apt to irritate instead of cooling the system.

*Asparagus* belongs to the *Liliaceae*, which gives us the medicinal squill. It is a delicious and very wholesome vegetable, and contains cooling diuretic properties; indeed it seems to soothe the mucous membranes of both lungs and kidneys, while it acts sedately at the same time.

*Onions*, *shalots*, *chives*, and *leeks* are all members of the family *Liliaceae*, and are not only highly nutritious when properly cooked, but are possessed in a greater or less degree of cooling and diuretic properties. They are also valuable stomachics and demulcents, but are apt to disagree and should therefore be partaken of but sparingly. They have an effect for good on common colds and slight congestions of the air-passages.

From the natural family *Cucurbitaceae* we get many valuable vegetables, some of which, as the *cucumber*, are eaten raw. This latter is, if eaten with pepper and vinegar, a stomachic stimulant, and it also purifies the blood by acting on the secreting organs. It should never be partaken of too freely, even by those whose digestive organs are strong, and by dyspeptics not at all.

There are many other vegetables which I might mention, but space warns me to stay my hand. Let me just say once more, that no one should attempt to acquire a taste for any particular vegetable, but be guided by that which nature has given him; and that vegetables are sure to do good, when partaken of judiciously and not over-freely.