

## "ARE WE REALLY FEEDING OUR CHILD ARIGHT?"

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



IT is pleasant not only for the Editor himself, but for every member of his staff, to know that the Magazine on which he labours from year's end to year's end is not only duly appreciated, but highly popular. That ours is so, thousands of kindly letters bear annual testimony.

We know, and rejoice to know, that we bring happiness to many a far-distant home, even in the distant Hebrides, and the *Ultima Thule* of the North. We are to be seen in the huts of primitive Thorshaver, in Faroe, and met in the homes of Reikjavik in Iceland, and yearly in ships farther north still we fly—

"To those wild northern climes that lie  
Where summer's day ne'er shuts its eye."

The interest taken in our contents is quite a friendly one; we are often even pre-discussed, for readers wonder, ere they scan a page, what will happen to our hero or heroine next, what our music or illustrations will be like, what Phillis Browne will have to say, or what the Family Doctor will have to chat about in the next number.

I am going to chat this month, if chat you choose to call it, on a subject which is of interest to many among us, but to mothers more particularly, and the subject was suggested to me in a letter from a friendly reader—viz., on the diet and feeding of children.

"There seems to be an idea," says my correspondent, who belongs to the upper middle class, "that a child cannot eat too much, and they are consequently encouraged to stuff all they can. Their appetites are forced by all kinds of dainties.

"Again, the amount of sweets bought for children cannot be good for them. Often I have seen children come to their meals which they are unable to eat simply because they have already partaken so largely of buns, tarts, and sweetmeats."

Plain, straightforward, and sensible remarks are these, as every thinking man or woman will admit.

A child needs, comparatively speaking, a large supply of food, because not only has he, like his elders, waste to repair, but bones to build and flesh to form. Every parent knows this, but the very fact of its being so hard to convince a father or mother that it is what a child digests easily that tends to make a man of him, and not the amount he swallows, forms the rock on which so many childish lives

are shipwrecked, and causes the annual bill of infantile mortality to be such a sadly heavy one.

Children need but little encouragement to gourmandise, especially when dainties are pressed upon them; the sin of doing so is not theirs, it lies at the door of those who feed them, and they often err from sheer ignorance, but more often through pure selfishness, for they seem unable to resist the pleasure of seeing their little ones apparently enjoying themselves.

We do not have to travel far at any time to find illustrations from the life of how children are stuffed, both at table and between meals. Go where we will, on ships at sea, on trains by land, wherever little ones are to be found—and where are they not?—the same thing goes on, a constant forcing to eat on the part of those in charge of them, and a perpetually willing compliance on the part of the poor innocents themselves. I sat the other day at a *table-d'hôte* in a quiet riverside hostelry, *tête-à-tête* with a small party out on pleasure—husband, wife, little boy and girl, and a gentleman, evidently an uncle, and just as evidently the host for the time being.

"Eat, my dear children," he exclaimed, replenishing their plates with beefsteak and onions, "eat, my darlings; bless your little hearts, eat; there is plenty here, and pudding to follow."

Did they need much more pressing, think you? Nay, the faces of those children positively beamed like little rising suns, and at the uncle's last remark, the girl, who was playing even a better knife and fork than her brother, nodded smilingly round to the boy.

"Freddy," she said, "we'll have the hiccups presently." To her innocent young mind, "the hiccups" was the *dénouement* devoutly to be wished, happy proof that the cup of bliss was full to overflowing.

Now, of all the complaints to which childhood is liable, that called dyspepsia, or indigestion, is the most carefully to be guarded against. Over-eating and injudicious feeding are the primary causes of the complaint, but the loss of appetite, or the capricious appetite which is one of its first symptoms, is usually put down to something else. The child is said to be ailing or delicate in constitution, plain food is supposed to be unsuited to him, so he is plied with dainties, and allowed to consume whatever he takes a fancy to, often in quantities out of all proportion to the needs of nature. The case becomes worse of course. Probably a change of air is thought requisite. Seaside residence, or a bracing atmosphere, certainly mends matters for a time, if increasing the appetite can be so termed. However, it pleases the parents to see what they think improvement in any shape, and feeling convinced in their own minds that there cannot be anything radically wrong so long as the child eats, they are happy in consequence. The child may even be rotund, plump it cannot be called, for the fat beneath the skin is of the flabby kind, flabby and



therefore unhealthy. He is just a trifle paler than children brought up on better principles. They look at this with parents' eyes, and perhaps even affect to despise the bronze hues of health. They forget that paleness means poverty of blood.

I wish I could induce such parents to endeavour seriously to answer these questions. Are we really feeding our child aright? May we not be acting with mistaken kindness, and sowing the seeds of disease in his constitution, or at all events rendering it practically impossible for him ever to possess that amount of health and happiness which alone fit boys or men to be useful members of society? Dyspeptic children are generally pampered, petted and spoiled, and often puling and peevish to a degree. Their very presence is often far from a blessing in a house; indeed, I can go truthfully further than this, and can say without fear of contradiction, that his home is often rendered miserable and distasteful to the husband and breadwinner, owing to the results of the mismanagement in dieting of his child or children.

But the peevishness of dyspeptic children, or rather I ought to say of the few among them that live to manhood, is sure to develop into moroseness and bad temper in after-life; thus from errors in diet in childhood arise results, both mental and physical, which we can only characterise as deplorable.

Permitting children to sit at the table with their elders, is the cause of a good deal of mischief and injury to their youthful digestions. A variety of dishes should never be permitted, and any attempt at wastefulness should be checked at once. Economy and self-denial can be taught at the children's table far more easily than at school.

The diet of children can hardly be too plain. If they require to be encouraged to eat by the administration of dainties, there must be something radically wrong somewhere. It is unlikely that that something is constitutional, more probably insufficient exercise is taken, or taken at wrong times, or the nursery is stuffy, or the bed-room badly ventilated, or the parents have forgotten that sunshine and fresh air are as necessary to the healthy life of a child as wholesome food itself is.

The want of cleanliness, or frequent use of the bath, is many times the cause of indifferent appetite in children. Without cleanliness of clothes and cleanliness of person you cannot have healthy children. Without this the young blood seems poisoned, the child has neither buoyancy nor heart, appetite is depraved or absent, and he grows up as pale and poor as a sickly plant.

Injudicious clothing is another cause of dyspepsia. It is bad enough to encase the body which has attained its full development in a tight dress, but it is ruinous for a child to be clothed in tightly-fitting garments. Every organ of a child's body requires room to grow and expand; if it be in any way compressed, the circulation through it becomes lessened, and it is therefore sicklied and rendered weak.

Tightness, therefore, of any portion of a child's

clothing ruins not only the organ directly underneath the constriction, but indirectly those at a distance from it, for no damming up of the circulation can be tolerated by nature. Tightness round the waist in children and young people is the cause of many cases of dyspepsia, and in a lesser degree so is tightness of the neckerchief, by retaining the blood in the brain. Have your children's clothing loose, then, if you would see them healthy and happy. See, too, that at night they sleep not on feather beds, and that though warmly they are not heavily clothed.

Children should be fed with great regularity day by day. The parents having chosen the hours for dinner, breakfast, and tea, ought to see that the times are strictly adhered to.

Irregularity in meal-hours, and times of getting up in the morning and retiring to bed at night, is not only prejudicial to the present health of a child, but it teaches him habits which are greatly against his chances of success in after-life.

I need hardly speak here about the quality of the food that is placed before a child; against indigestible or too rich food, against sauces and spices of all kinds, including curries; against heavy foods of the pancake, dough, and dumpling kind, against unripe fruits, against too hot soup, against strong tea and coffee, or beer, or against over-much butcher's meat.

They who ought to know tell us that a day is coming, and is not even now very far distant, when butcher's meat will be double the price it now is. I do not think this will be a national calamity; it will doubtless cause flesh of all kind to take its proper place in the scale of diet, which it certainly does not fill at present; and it will tend to check the shameful waste which now goes on at almost every table in the three kingdoms.

Pray, mothers, do not forget that an interval of rest should ensue between the meals you give your children, and do not ruin their young digestions by cramming them with cake, or buns, or sweets of any kind. To do so is worse than cruel, it is a sin, and a sin which you are but little likely to commit if you truly love them, and really wish to see them generate into strong and healthy men and women. Tarts and sweets and confectionery would be bad enough in all conscience for children, even if they were always pure and unadulterated. But they are too often positively poisonous. Feed on plain and wholesome food regularly from day to day, permitting no stuffing between meals, and not forgetting the benefits that accrue from frequent changes of diet, more especially as regards dinner. Do this, and your children will live to bless you; do otherwise, and expect to see them sickly, with veins and arteries possessing no resiliency, with mucous membranes pale and flabby, pipes of lungs that the accident of a slight cold is sufficient to close, muscles of limbs so weak that exercise is a penance instead of a pleasure, and flesh so unwholesome that a pin's prick may cause a fester, and all this because the blood is impoverished through errors in diet.