

KITCHEN PHYSIC.



THE mere mention of kitchen physic confronts one with a subject so intensely important, and, alas! so little understood, *as a rule*, that one is tempted to shirk the topic, and choose one of more general interest. But the fact that it *is* so little understood, on second thoughts, decides us, for we know that if any reader of the Magazine gathers from this but a single idea which, if carried out, shall make even one invalid the stronger, it will not have been written in vain. We feel, for once, how inexorable are the laws of space, for beef-*tea* alone, fully treated, would monopolise all at our disposal.

Now, while entertaining the most profound respect for old-fashioned customs, we know that many ideas concerning cookery will not bear the light of modern science; and cookery, to be perfect in its results, is as inseparable from science as night from day.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," is argued by many; but it is no exaggeration to say that a little practical knowledge of the chemistry of food, of the action of heat on certain kinds of food, and the composition (*i.e.*, the elements of nutrition contained therein) of the edibles in common use, would have prolonged, if not saved, many a life, and it is equally true that recovery has been retarded again and again during illness and convalescence by diet of an unsuitable kind, or cooked in such a manner as to deprive it of a good deal of its nutriment.

A golden rule is—"A *maximum* of nutrition with a *minimum* of digestive force," a typical article by way of illustration being an egg. Albumen, present in both the yolk and white, is rendered practically indigestible when subjected to a severe heat; hence, a fried egg would be of no more value to a sick person than an old kid glove. We instance a *fried* egg because fat is hotter than water, and so the egg is hardened to a greater extent. Here is a digestible way of cooking an egg:—Break it into a small cup, slightly buttered, and set this in a saucepan with enough boiling water to come half-way up the cup. Put the lid on, and at once remove the saucepan *from* the fire, *to* the hob or fender, so that the water is reduced to a lower temperature. In six minutes, more or less, according to the size of the egg, it will be cooked—just *set*, that is. Slide it on to a piece of toast, or boiled rice if agreeable to the patient. The egg may be cooked in the shell in the same way. The process is then known as "steaming;" five or six minutes is the average time required.

Raw eggs are frequently ordered, as when they can be taken and retained by a sick person they are extremely nourishing, simply because the albumen not having been hardened is the sooner digested. Many, however, cannot take raw eggs as usually given; that

is, beaten up with milk or wine. The following mode is a good one; the appearance of the dish being nice, an invalid will often be induced to try it; it is free from oiliness, and clean to the palate. Put the yolk of an egg into a basin with a tea-spoonful of white sugar and a table-spoonful of orange or lemon-juice, and beat lightly together with a fork. Put the white on a plate, and add a pinch of salt, then, with a broad-bladed knife, beat it to a stiff froth. Now, *as lightly as possible*, mix all together in the basin; then, as lightly, transfer it to a clean tumbler, which it will nearly fill if properly made. This must not stand in a warm place, or it soon becomes liquid, and loses its snowy look.

Any fruit-juice can be used in place of orange or lemon, or even brandy, if the doctor has ordered it. Those unaccustomed to beating whites of eggs will find a pinch of salt a help, and also a current of air, near the fire or in the open.

Gruel needs care, and it requires long cooking; fine oatmeal should be boiled an hour at least, though twenty minutes is the most some people give. When it is made with water (in cases where milk disagrees) lemon-juice, as a flavourer, is preferable to nutmeg, spices being often irritating to the stomach.

Cereals, as a rule, require long cooking for the starch grains to have time to swell. Some kinds, however, in use nowadays, are "steam-cooked" before packing; this kind will not need so long. Arrowroot is often simply mixed with boiling milk or water, then served; but if returned to the fire and simmered for two minutes it is much better. Years gone by this food was regarded as very nutritious; now we know that, as its main element is starch, the nourishment is but little. But it has *this* to recommend it: it usually agrees, and is readily digested; it is also often very soothing in an irritable condition of the internal organs.

Lemonade, sometimes the only thing a patient is allowed, is often spoiled. Yet the mode of properly making it is so simple:—Peel the lemons so thinly that the peel looks yellow on both sides, this is the secret; the least bit of white spoils it, as that is the bitter part. The peel of one lemon, and the strained juice of two, should be put into a jug with a pint of boiling water, covered with a cloth—stuffed into the neck—and left for a few hours, when it should be sweetened and strained off for use.

Barley-water is nourishing, and soothing to a sufferer from sore throat in any form. It needs thorough washing, and the first water poured over and brought to the boil should be thrown away. Then add to two ounces of pearl barley, three pints of cold water; again bring to the boil gently, and simmer for two hours. A little lemon-juice and loaf-sugar to taste should be added after it is strained. *Clear* barley-water is sometimes preferred. Use a pint of *boiling* water to two ounces of barley; make in the same way as lemonade. Wash and scald the barley as before.

Fish cookery is not carried out to perfection in the

majority of households. Fish is often overdone when boiled, and is so sodden as to be most unappetising, as well as bereft of the "goodness." Now, all caterers for the sick must agree that there *is* something in appearance, and those who take pains to make food *look* as well as *taste* nice, reap their reward.

Very often, after a doctor's order to give "a little fish," a sole is sent for and fried. Even when properly carried out, this method is not a good one; fish so cooked is the most indigestible. Try this way, as nice for a healthy as for a sick person:—Slightly butter two plates, and lay between them as much white fish cut into fillets as may be required. If soles, the black skin must be removed. Put the fish in a single layer only, skin—white skin, we mean—downwards. Set it over a saucepan of fast-boiling water, and keep it boiling until the fish is done. It will take from twenty to thirty minutes according to thickness, and as soon as a skewer will pierce it easily, should be served. Send it to the patient, with salt and, if it may be taken, a dash of lemon-juice. Garnish with cut lemon and parsley.

The reason for filleting fish for an invalid is obvious; there is no danger of choking. During convalescence sauce may be served with fish, in which case the skin and bones may be stewed, and the liquor used instead of water, and the sauce thickened with arrowroot. In some cases butter had better be left out; but these minor details must necessarily be left to the nurse.

A *Fish Pudding* is a nice way to re-serve the remains of any cooked fish. To two table-spoonfuls of fish, cut small, add one of bread-crumbs; the latter to be soaked a little in warm milk, then strained, and beaten fine. Add a beaten egg and a little salt, pour into a buttered cup, cover with a piece of white paper buttered, and steam half an hour. The water should only reach half-way up the cup and should not boil too fast, or the egg will become more hardened than is desirable. Salmon, eels, mackerel, and herrings, being oily, are *unsuitable* for invalids.

It may here be remarked that all puddings containing eggs are more digestible steamed than baked. When it *is* necessary to bake one, see that the oven is gentle, only hot enough just to set the pudding and lightly brown the surface.

Of jelly it is difficult to speak except lengthily. Suffice it here to say that the uses and action of gelatine in the human stomach have yet to be determined. Some authorities contend that there is practically no good in it, others that there is a little nutriment, though so slight as to be of no value as food. This by the way, for certain it is that many people crave for it, and when lemon-juice, or something equally cooling, enters into its composition, jelly is refreshing. Care must, however, be taken that it is pure, and that acids (citric acid and the like) are not used for clarification and flavouring.

A few words on *Beef-tea*, or our paper will be incomplete.

It used to be looked upon as a sign of goodness if beef-tea "jellied" when cold. This is an error. No good beef-tea can possibly "jelly," for this reason—it must not, or rather *should* not, be made from gelatinous parts of the beef. Shin of beef is suitable to make stock for clear soup, but that is another matter. If shin be used at all, it ought to be the top, where a thick piece of meat can be cut; but other parts are better—the round, or the roll of the bladebone. Ask the butcher for a lean, tender steak; buy it as if it were to be cooked *as* steak, and exercise the same care in the selection, and the patient will reap the benefit. Now, as to the mode of making the tea: it is a mistake to cut the beef in large pieces, or to let it boil for a single minute. Scrape the meat finely, and put it in a jar of cold water, with a pinch of salt, to soak for an hour, or more if convenient; then tie it down with paper over the mouth, and set the jar in a saucepan of cold water; bring this to the boil, and let the water simmer two or three hours (in the saucepan, we mean) and then strain off the tea; not through a *fine* strainer—nothing should be left behind but the meat: the brown thick-looking particles that float about contain nutriment. Now, so long as anything is cooked in a vessel set in another, the contents of the inner one cannot boil; this, in the case of beef-tea, is as it should be. The quantity of water must be regulated by the strength required, but a pint to a pound is about the average.

• The soaking in cold water is most essential, as by this means the goodness is extracted. *Raw* beef-tea ordered in cases of *very* weak state of the stomach, after fever or dysentery, is simply the liquor poured off after the meat has been in water for some time; five or six hours should be allowed, and the meat pressed from time to time with the back of a wooden spoon. This, being objectionable in appearance, should be given in a coloured glass. To turn it brown, and so give it the appearance of *cooked* beef-tea, a few drops of hydrochloric acid are sometimes added, subject of course to the doctor's permission.

Mutton-tea is made in the same way, the leanest, freshest meat being chosen for it; by way of variety this can receive the addition of a little rice or crushed tapioca. The latter is sold in tins, and the liquid to which it is added must be stirred until it is transparent, when it is ready to serve.

Chicken or *Mutton Cream* is a dainty preparation. The meat should be finely minced, covered with cold water and seasoned, then simmered until tender enough to go through a sieve. To a tea-cupful, half the measure of cream should be added, after first being heated nearly to boiling point. Pearl barley, half an ounce to a quarter of a pound of meat, is sometimes put with this; then much more water is necessary, as the barley swells and absorbs it.

A little ingenuity will enable a good cook to concoct many dishes of the same nature, the stewing process being a great help to digestion.

