

INDIGESTION.

By "THE NEW DOCTOR."



WE hear wonderful things in medicine nowadays.

But yesterday I heard a man make a speech, in which he said that "it was impossible for anyone who ate flesh to arrive at the full use of his faculties; he must ever remain stunted in growth, deficient in intellect and incapable of bearing hardships. If a man were only a vegetarian, look what he might be!" Yes. Look and see—a man making the statement that I have given above, trying to instil into us—we who pride ourselves on being the greatest nation in the world (as we are likewise among the greatest flesh-eaters), that it is impossible for us to arrive at the full use of our intellects unless we follow his example. And be like him—never! Never was there a stronger argument against vegetarianism than the statement that we have just heard.

We hear the same on all sides. The possessor of one "crotchet" is just as illogical as his opponent. But what is going to be the outcome of all these furious battles of theory? Well, if I am not very much mistaken, its influence will be nothing. We see for ourselves that he who upholds one theory is just as illogical and impossible as his most formidable adversary. No compromise can ever be arrived at in a case of this kind.

The partisans of various fads who uphold minor doctrines agree on one point only, that is that the teaching of medicine demonstrates the validity of their arguments! Poor medicine, it has a hard task to perform to throw the weight of its teaching into two diametrically opposed propositions! I could never see how medicine could favour any violent measure, it certainly has never done so in my time.

One of the most extraordinary ideas ever held was that a person was responsible for the diseases with which he is afflicted. This doctrine is as false as it is uncharitable. The only suggestion of truth in it is that a few diseases are due in a certain, probably very minor, degree to indiscretion, or more commonly, ignorance.

The subject I have before me demonstrates this point very clearly. Indigestion is usually supposed to be due to overeating. I am not going to say that overeating is not a cause of indigestion, nor even, that it is not a common cause, but I do say that it is not the chief cause. I have been told that everybody overeats. Great authorities have said that such is the case. Everybody does not suffer from indigestion, so that overeating cannot be the chief cause of indigestion, if it be true that everyone overeats.

We do not go to medicine to dictate to us how much we should eat. We are all endowed with an intelligence and with a special appetite which tells us how much to eat, and I feel confident that nature is the best guide. Of course you can disobey Nature and eat more than you require but do you not disobey your doctor? I am afraid that most of you do.

Indigestion does undoubtedly arise from indiscretion in diet as regards the quantity eaten, but very much more the quality of the food and the way it is eaten.

Some people cannot digest certain articles of food, and these they rightly avoid. In certain individuals the slightest indiscretion produces

great discomfort, with others the stomach will stand great abuse without retaliating. Thus we speak of strong or weak stomachs.

Indigestion has been divided into any number of varieties, and contrary to what is usual in such cases, the majority of these classifications are based upon sound principles. But of all the various ways in which dyspepsia has been classified none do I like better than the following division into three main groups. The "irritative," the "atonic" and the "nervous" or "neurotic."

There are many kinds of dyspepsia that lie on the borderland between two or all of these classes; but, as a rough classification I have found it exceedingly useful. It was the first I learnt, it is the simplest and I have found it the most convenient.

Let us talk about irritative dyspepsia first. This, as its name tells you, is due to irritation of the stomach. We have all heard of this condition and most of us have suffered from it. It is a very common affection in England. Both sexes and all ages suffer from it though perhaps not to the same extent. Does it occur in infancy? most certainly it does. Let us go to the children's department and see for ourselves.

As we pass the patients we see that the majority of them are very young children, some merely babies, all accompanied by their mothers or other relatives. We go into the consulting-room and ring the bell. A woman appears with an infant of eight months' old in her arms. Immediately she enters the room her child is sick. The poor child has been sick already four times to-day and has been ill for a fortnight. She is quite wasted. Her poor little limbs are nothing but skin and bone, and her face wears that singular look, like a very ancient man, that is so constantly present in ill-fed children. We hear from the mother, as indeed we can see for ourselves, that when the child is sick she brings up large curds of milk.

We know at once what is the cause of this child's trouble—wrong feeding. The curds of milk tell us this plainly. Wrong feeding—it is this that causes all the gastric troubles of childhood and most of those of adults—but more of this later on, let us return to the case before us.

We ask the mother how she feeds the child. She tells us "with the bottle." We ask her what she puts into the bottle. She answers "cow's milk," and this is what we expected. We then ask "do you use pure cow's milk?" She answers "yes." "Anything else?" "No." "Do you give the child any other food?" "Now and then a biscuit." The next question one feels inclined to ask is "have you any notion how to feed an infant." And if she told the truth she would answer emphatically, "No; I have no idea how to feed a child." And so it is with most mothers. They do not know how to feed their infants, especially between the ages of eight and sixteen months old.

For the first months of life milk should be the only food for infants. A little later some other form of nourishment is required. Gravy with bread or potato is best to begin with. After the child is two years old she may have much the same food as an adult.

I said milk is to be the only food of infants during the first months of life. There is rarely any difficulty here; but when mothers are unable to nurse their babies, it often becomes an exceedingly important and difficult question how to feed the children. To rear children with artificial food is a most laborious

task, and if it is not done correctly they are almost certain to die.

The best artificial food for infants is undoubtedly ass's milk, but the very great expense of this prevents it from being used, except by the very wealthy. For those that cannot afford ass's milk cow's milk must be used. But cow's milk of itself is much too rich and not quite sweet enough. It also clots in the stomach in large flakes causing, as in the instance before us, sickness and rapid wasting.

We must mix the milk with something that will prevent it from clotting *en masse* and that will dilute it. No substance fulfils these conditions better than barley-water.

Until the child is three months old, one part of milk to two of barley-water is the right proportion. As the child grows older the quantity of the barley-water may be reduced.

Barley-water should be made in the following way. Boil a tablespoonful of pearl-barley in a pint of water for half-an-hour, and strain. It will not keep over-night, so it must be made fresh every day. If it is kept long it sometimes develops a very poisonous substance which has caused several deaths.

There is absolutely no difficulty in making barley-water, and there is no excuse for a person serving up a thick gruel and calling it barley-water. This I have myself seen done.

You may perhaps think that I have exaggerated the importance of infant feeding. But look at the death-rate of infants. Is it not terrible? And instead of diminishing I am sorry to say that it is on the increase. The majority of deaths under a year old is due to wrong feeding.

Some people have the most extraordinary notions of the value of infants' lives; some do not consider the death of a baby as anything serious. But have they not souls just as much as adults! Surely we ought to give as much trouble to save the life of a baby as we would do to save that of a grown-up person. I am disgusted with the terrible returns of infant mortality. Doubtless the death-rate of infants must be very great, but it is absolutely unnecessary that it should be as high as it is. It can and ought to be reduced.

Let us leave the children and go to the general medical department. We shall not have to wait long to see some cases of irritative dyspepsia.

First we see a school-boy, looking very green and ill. He has been indulging in a hamper and is now suffering atonement for his greediness. Let us ask him what were the contents of the basket. "Oh! there was a big cake, then there was a ham and a pot of marmalade, four bottles of sweets, and a veal and ham pie, three tins each of sherbet, biscuits and anchovy paste and three pots of jam."

We do not wonder that the boy has indigestion—neither does he. A hamper is necessarily followed by dyspepsia, and he is quite resigned to bear the consequences of the feast.

The next patient whom we investigate is a girl of sixteen, suffering from the effects of eating "twenty-two green apples and a pound of pea-nuts" yesterday.

Patient after patient of all ages and both sexes enter the room complaining of gastric pain or vomiting, and on inquiry we get a history of various mistakes in diet. One woman has indigestion after having eaten three herrings, which had gone bad—not at all an uncommon event among out-patients. A family of father, mother and four children

come suffering agonies, the result of having partaken of a mouldy rabbit-pie. Unripe fruit, over-ripe fruit, too much alcohol, mussels, crabs, etc., are all common causes of irritative indigestion.

It is not only in hospital patients that we see the irritative form of indigestion. It occurs among all classes, and is indeed more common among the well-to-do than among the poorer members of the community.

All the causes of irritative dyspepsia may be grouped into three classes: indiscretion in the quantity of food eaten; unsuitable food or food that is unwholesome, and insufficient mastication.

There is little to be said under these headings, but I will make one or two remarks about each.

I have already shown you that improper food is a fertile cause of indigestion. Any substance that is not thoroughly fresh or that is not well cooked is likely to cause indigestion in those partaking of it. As I wrote about food some short time back it is unnecessary to enter into the question of feeding here.

Insufficient mastication is a very important cause of dyspepsia. A piece of meat, for instance, that has been well masticated will be digested in about one-fourth of the time that the same piece of meat would take if swallowed whole. Always chew your food well and you will remove one of the greatest causes of difficult digestion.

The treatment for this condition is to give a dose of castor oil, if the patient is a child; and a dose of calomel or blue pill, in the case of an adult. Attention to the feeding is of paramount importance. With adults it is best to withhold food of any kind for twenty-four hours, and after that to eat sparingly and only of very digestible food.

While on this subject, I should like to mention that a "bilious attack" though differing considerably from the affection we have just described is to be treated in the same manner as irritative indigestion.

The second great variety of indigestion is "atonic dyspepsia," that is the condition when the stomach is out of "tone" and does not properly perform its functions.

Unlike the affection we have just discussed, atonic dyspepsia is a very chronic malady, and instead of lasting a day or two often drags on for months or years. It also differs from the

irritative form of dyspepsia, in that diet is by no means the chief factor in its causation, and also in that it does not attack all ages and both sexes indiscriminately.

One of its chief causes is anæmia, and therefore we should expect to find it most commonly in young women. This is indeed the case, the great majority of sufferers being girls between fifteen and twenty-five years of age.

The outpatient department of hospitals give relief to more of these cases than to any other form of illness, they are so common. The symptoms are pain after food; pain in the chest; heartburn; palpitation; water-brash; nausea; loss of appetite and sometimes vomiting. Anæmia is almost always present. Not by any means rarely this condition terminates in ulceration of the stomach, and then, in addition to the above symptoms another is added which is most alarming—that is, vomiting blood.

The treatment of this condition is exceedingly important, because, if it is treated properly and at once, the danger of gastric ulcer is very greatly diminished. There are various ways by which this condition is treated, for its manifestations are of most diverse characters, and the patients are very, very capricious.

As it is an "atonic" affection a tonic treatment is, as a rule, better than any other. A mixture containing iron with possibly arsenic often does a great deal of good. But as you cannot give either of these drugs to a patient with a weak stomach, it is necessary to get the stomach well as soon as possible. Nothing will do this better than bismuth and soda. An occasional pill of aloes and belladonna is also very useful.

The last form of dyspepsia is the "nervous" or "neurotic" kind. The very mention of the word "neurotic" should at once suggest that the condition is almost exclusively confined to women. But, for once, this is not the case; by far the greater number of sufferers from this complaint being business men. And the reason for this is not far to seek.

A city man gets up, let us say at half-past seven. He goes down to breakfast. Having swallowed down his meal with lightning rapidity, he rushes off to catch his train. At lunch time he has his meal and plays a game of chess. He comes home in the evening to dinner. This he eats more or less in a "physiological" manner, and rests after it.

Can anyone expect his poor stomach to stand such insults as these? During digestion the majority of the blood in the body is required by the digestive organs. Consequently, rest after meals is essential so that no more blood than is absolutely necessary should course through the limbs or brain. But here, a man "gallops" through one meal (this of itself would give anyone indigestion) and runs off immediately afterwards, and over another meal he plays chess; and then talks about his "hard luck" because he suffers from indigestion!

The treatment for this condition is as simple in theory as it is difficult to carry out in practice. It is—"Do not hurry over your meals, and always rest both body and mind afterwards."

There are other varieties of true nervous dyspepsia—such as that which occurs in people who are overburdened with cares; the gastric pain of hysteria and some spinal complaints and possibly that obscure condition "migraine." These are all very serious affections and most difficult to cure, as the cause is too often impossible to remove.

Before I leave you, I will give the following maxims to everybody suffering from indigestion or dyspepsia of any kind—

1. Avoid food that is very hot or very cold, especially ices.
2. Avoid potatoes, cheese, pastry, and take farinaceous foods in great moderation. Do not take brown bread in preference to white; it is less nutritious, in every way inferior and far more indigestible.
3. Avoid tea, coffee, and alcohol in all forms—beer, wine or spirits.
4. Never take any drugs if you can possibly help it. Above all, never take "pepsin," unless under the immediate supervision of a physician.
5. Masticate your food thoroughly. Eat slowly and rest half-an-hour after each meal.
6. Do not take one big meal in the day, but four, five, or even six small ones.
7. Always have your meals at the same hour every day.
8. Take a walk every day, rain or shine.
9. Avoid anything that disagrees with you, and never again be tempted to touch that particular article of food.
10. Never eat anything that has not been thoroughly cooked; nor drink anything that has not been boiled.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MEDICAL.

ESSIE WRIGHT.—You certainly suffer from catarrh of the throat, and probably of the nose as well, although you do not give us any information regarding the latter. What is your occupation? The condition which troubles you is often due to excessive use of the voice. Again, do you breathe through your nose? You cannot expect to have a healthy throat if you breathe through your mouth. Doubtless you will tell us "that your nose feels as though it were stuffed up" so that you cannot breathe through your nose. What this means is that the condition of your nose is the cause of the throat affection and must be seen to first. To cure the condition you must spray out your nose and throat three or four times a day with a lotion made by dissolving a teaspoonful of the following powder in half a tumbler of tepid water:—

R. Sodii bicarbonatis }
Sodii biboratis } ʒss.
Potassii chloratis }
Sachar. abl. } ʒj.

In addition to this an astringent lozenge, such as rhatany or red gum, taken occasionally would do good. We are pleased that you derived so much benefit from sulphur ointment.

PRISCILLA.—Undoubtedly the best thing you can do is to leave your nose alone and not meddle with it. It will probably improve if left alone.

HEALTH-SEEKER.—No; ferns in a bedroom are not injurious to health, provided that the room is not overcrowded with them. The plants to be avoided in rooms are those that have strong scents, especially lilies, jasmine, stephanotis, certain orchids and laurel.

FLOSS STANLEY.—The condition of your face is due to the soap you use. It is exceedingly common for the face to become red and to smart after washing with soap which is not intended for toilet use. If you use a good soap which is made for washing the face with you will not be troubled further.

I. R.—1. Styes on the eyelids are very apt to recur, but if they are thoroughly and carefully treated at first the tendency to form again is greatly diminished. When you have a sty, bathe the eye frequently with a warm solution of boracic acid (1 in 40). When a yellow point has become manifest, look carefully and see if there is an eyelash in the centre, if there is, pull it out and the trouble will soon subside. Bathe your eye with the lotion for at least a week after all traces of the sty have vanished. If you do this the condition will not return.—2. You should not use a hard brush to scrub your teeth with as it is liable to make the gums bleed. We doubt whether any amount of rubbing could injure the enamel.

CONSTANCE.—We know of no substance that will darken the hair that is not a dye. You had better ask the advice of a hairdresser about this point.

F. G. F.—Your eyes became crossed because of your long sight. No doubt when you first began to read you did not wear spectacles, and this is the cause of your squint. You say you wear glasses now, but are you sure that they are accurately suited to you? We strongly advise you to see an oculist about your eyes, as they ought to be looked to without delay.

MISCELLANEOUS.

VILLA FARMS, OR TWO-ACRE ESTATES.—There are a good number of foolish people in the world, but surely you would not be so unwise as to invest money in land at Methwold, or any other place, without investigating the property first. You must of course go and see for yourself, interview the tenants already existing there, and also ask the opinions of outside farmers as to the quality of the land and the chances of success in fruit-growing. It would also be as well to call on the clergyman of the parish, who would know better than any one else, perhaps, the success or non-success of previous tenants. Caution is needed in every investment, but especially so when it takes the form of a freehold tenancy. We have great faith in this form of land-culture, and should like to see our towns less populated, and our country places more occupied by actual owners of, and workers on, the land. But each person who contemplates a purchase of land must have her wits about her.