NATURE'S SIMPLE REMEDIES.

Those who fly to the doctor at the least indication of illness, and who dose themselves with physic and decoctions, which, if faithfully, but give temporary relief, would do well to study the healing art of the old herbalists.

Many of the simples of their day are of greater value than any we possess now.

The flowers, leaves, and roots of many of the simple herbs, flowers, and weeds which grow around them.

Although in serious cases it is necessary to have recourse to the physician, many of these simples are of great value in the less serious cases of illness.

The recipes here given were supplied to me by an old Breton cook, whom I came across whilst staying in an ancient and very isolated castle situated on the extreme western coast of Normandy.

Now though life in these castles is extremely interesting, it is fraught with inconveniences, and the drawback of our Breton domain was its want of a doctor.

Dr. — the medical practitioner of the little town of Le Conquet (situate some distance from the castle), was also physician to the village of Villedieu.

Consequently his figure was rarely seen within the castle walls, and he was never called for except in cases of dangerous illness.

This figure, however, who had been the only doctor and amongst other things, possessed a very remarkable knowledge of herbs and simples of all kinds, which he used in his practice.

Hundreds and hundreds of years, the inhabitants of the castle have had to be more or less their own doctors, and amongst other things, possess a very remarkable knowledge of herbs and simples of all kinds, which he used in his practice.

Many herbs and flowers of the castle where I was staying, added to her knowledge of culinary necessities a profound learning of Nature's Simple Remedies.

Very often on wandering into her charming old kitchen to admire the bright copper utensils that hung round the brick walls would I see her stirring slowly some herbal concoction to heal the sullen ailments of the invalids, who were being looked after by their nurses.

Watching her stirring over these mixtures, with the smoke curling upwards and reflecting itself ever and anon in the red copper, one might have taken her for a witch.

But I am not sure even now whether she didn't breathe some charm or spell over her simple preparations, of whose wonderful healing and restorative powers I myself have been witness.

Let me begin my recipes with the common, mu-h-despised and much-feared weed —

The Nettle. — Up to my sojourn at the castle I had looked upon this weed as a disgusting weed — an invention or freak of Dame Nature, whose sole use was to ferociously sting any trespasser daring to approach too close, but lately my ideas have changed completely, and I respect its great value.

To gather nettles gloves must be used, to avoid being stung.

Take three or four roots of nettle, well boil them in a pint of water, and strain off. The liquid thus obtained cures the blood of all impurities, and is a soothing stomachic.

A mixture of this made in its first stages by drinking this beverage.

If spots or eruptions appear on the skin, they soon disappear after half a dozen doses of this mixture. During last summer's great heat the children used to drink a half pint bowl of this nightly before going to bed. Its flavour is by no means disagreeable, and with a pinch of salt added tastes slightly of asparagus.

Nettles boiled and served up as spinach are an excellent dish. In the summer months, and most wholesome. The liquid in which the tender green shoots of the nettle are boiled is almost black. It is a good wash for the head, and makes a nice scented hair from falling, and strengthening the roots.

We used to keep a bowl of this mixed with a tablespoonsful of vinegar on our toilet-tablets, and wash the roots of our hair with it about twice a month.

Whether it is due to this fortnightly wash I cannot of course judge, but I have never seen such glossy and luxuriant heads of hair as those possessed by the countess and her children, and she assures me that this is the only hair-wash she has ever used. The oils, washes, poultices, and mixtures for the promotion of hair-growth, so popular in this country, have never penetrated within the castle walls, and the inhabitants are certainly none the worse for their absence.

Nettles boiled in the summer, dried, and used as a tea in the winter, are good for the chest and lungs.

Mint and Sage should be cultivated in every garden, as they are not only pretty little plants, but are of great use for culinary and medicinal purposes. The former strengthens the stomach, and is good for the digestion.

A cup of mint-tea taken in the morning clears the head and leaves the body light, and a little of sage tea is a relief against palpitation of the heart. When prepared in milk instead of water it relieves severe stomach-aches; when mixed with wine it purifies the blood, and makes it agreeable to the liver. Made into a tea, it clears the throat. Wounds, etc., bathed with sage-tea quickly heal.

Honey is a delicious sweet, and also possesses wonderful curative properties. We often had recourse to it at the castle, and our garden literally flowed with it—not only in the flowers, but also in the old trees. I was present at the cutting down of one of the most ancient trees in the park. It was a wonderfully gnarled and knotty specimen, and when split up with the woodpeckers, it was found to be filled with one mass of honeycomb.

These combs were of an immense size, and were brown in colour, and gallons of dark brown fluid exuded from them. Honey of this colour is more precious than that of the lighter golden hue, as it is rarer and of a more perfumed flavour. Three vast brown jars, like those of Ali Baba, were placed as receptacles for the comb, which was being cut up in bits, and placed on top for the honey to run through. One of the jars was for table use, one for Margarette's medicinal purposes, and the third for her own, which was boiled down, mixed with turpentine, and used to polish the floors.

The following are a few honey recipes.

In case of sore throat —

To two tablespoonsfuls of honey, put one of powdered borax, warm in a tin mug, and stir till dissolved. Apply with a brush to the throat, which will soon become easy. A gargle for sore throat of great efficacy is honey and vinegar. A good gargle for singers whose throats are raw and inflamed, is one tablespoonful of honey in half a pint of boiling water; this can be drunk without injury. Honey is also a demulcent, and relieves dyspepsia, pain, or cough.

It is very nutritious, and we used it as an apertient, and found it beneficial. If mixed with hot water it is supposed to strengthens the eye-sight, but the method which I adopted for clearing and strengthening our eyes was that of opening and shutting them quickly over a basin of cold water, allowing the vapor to enter the nostrils and brightening with the natural friction of the lid.

To cure blood-shot eyes the stem of boiling water is efficacious.

Nettles, like the nettle, is in this country much despised, but the slight bitterness of the leaves is like a tonic, and is good for the stomach. The young and tender leaves when gathered, chopped up and made into a salad with vinegar, oil and salt, is a delicious summer dish. The dandelion roots or taraxacum form a bitter and mild laxative, given formerly in cases of dyspepsia and constipation.

Consils and Viandis, besides being pretty flowers, possess medicinal qualities; the little cup of the former contains a healing fluid, and can be chewed with good result. The green leaves of the violet if boiled in water—add a handful of leaves to half a pint of water—relieves the whoping cough, and is effective in all sorts of coughs, three or four tablespoonsfuls remem two hours, also used for a sore throat gargle.

Seaweed. — A very useful medicine, much resorted to by the Bretons, is the seaweed that grows on the rocks round Finistere. The gathering of this seaweed was, if a little dangerous, an extremely pleasant occupation. I look back with undiminished pleasure to those hot days last summer when, the sun blazing high in the sky, we waded and danced our way in and out of the frowning black rocks and picked up the soft shining branches of seaweed. This seaweed is pale-green in colour, and when cold, it is a delicious summer dish.

The following are a few seaweed recipes.

Some are very wholesome and good for the blood, and if one eats about half a pound daily in the summer, one will note an improvement in the complexion, which will be especially noticeable in those who are suffering from bad blood.

Strawberries are also effective for those suffering from liver. Strawberries mixed with sugar and milk makes a cooling and refreshing drink for the summer.

A tea made from the dried strawberry leaves is good and nourishing to the system.

Sorrel is a vegetable little used and known in this country. In France it is much resorted to, and is said to be a very good dish. In France it is wholesome and laxative vegetable; a soup made from it and seasoned with pepper, has a slightly acid flavour and is a safe and natural antiscorbutic. When made with vinegar and eaten with mackerel and other such fatty and indigestible food it prevents it from disposing with one.

This is another remedy to which we frequently resorted was pure. Olive-Oil, which is always hand in the cruets for salting and dressing. It is used for the same purpose as Olive-oil and water, and a teaspoonful taken every quarter of an hour, is a cure for coughs. In such cases also we used to have a funnel dipped in this same warm oil and applied to our chests. For
ear-ache, humming in the ears, etc., a few drops poured into the offending member and then stopped up with cotton-wool affords great relief.

All boiled in milk may be very advantageously dressed with oil. The old cure (had recourse to by the good Samaritan of pouring oil and wine into the wounds of the beggar) is still in vogue at the castle, and is an effective remedy. Oil renders the skin soft, smooth, and flexible; it is very good in the treatment of stiffs, and if rubbed over the skin of lymphatic people it has a nutrimental effect. It is of course known also that oil is the prime cure for burns, as it excludes the air.

I wonder if any English girl knows the property of powdered carbon?

Powdered Chalk.—Marguerite was very fond of it, and was always giving pinches of it unawares; as it has no taste whatever, it can be taken with ease. Marguerite declares that a pinch or two of chalk dust taken every day is excellent for bone-forming and the building up of the body; it is also good for the digestion, and those suffering from anemia, as it purifies and enriches the blood. Chalk, mixed with a little powdered camphor, is excellent for the teeth and gums.

Crushed, ground carborundum, is another simple remedy. A little of it mixed in water or milk is good for the digestion, and a cure for all complaints of the liver. An occasional dose is also an effective remedy for unpleasant breath.

Bran is very wholesome and nutritious, as much indeed as flour. Marguerite used to make a drink for the children of the water in which bran had been soaked, mixed with honey, and it was as refreshing as it was wholesome.

Those who suffer from indigestion should always eat bread in which the bran is left, as it is a natural cure for indigestion.

Alum should never be missing from any household. It has a very good effect in applied to bleeding wounds, as it checks the loss of blood. Alum boiled in milk in small quantities is good for the toothache. It must be held in the mouth, but not swallowed. For bleeding of the mouth or tongue, a wash in cold milk, in which alum has been dissolved is effective.

Salt, moistened with water, is a cure for the sting of a bee. If the teeth are washed once a week, it is said to prevent decay. If the table-cloth is stained with salt, salt sprinkled over it removes the stain.

Mustard is useful for both external and internal purposes. As a poultice it is effectual in cases of rheumatism, neuralgia, and pains in the chest. When suffering from headache, or at the beginning of a cold, a hot mustard foot-bath should be taken. If rubbed on a part that gives great pain, it acts as a counter-irritant, and is sometimes very useful for this reason. It is of all condiments that which makes one relish one's food the most, and is good for the digestive juices, mixed with warm water, three or four teaspoonsful to a pint a half a pint, it is a powerful emetic in cases of poison, etc.

Mustard is an important fruit for medical purposes. They are very good for the blood, and have been used successfully against the disease called scurvy, which is generally caused by the want of fresh vegetables and meat. For this reason they should always be procurable on board ship.

Lemon-juice, further, a preventative of sea-sickness, is recommended as a great healer by sea, and am not at all a good sailor. I have tried almost every remedy against sea-sickness, including champagne, soda-water, etc., but I can say that by far the pleasantest thing to have by one's side is a freshly-cut lemon. I never journey without one; their scent is refreshing, and prevents one from smelling the horrid odours of the oil and the engine. A drop of the juice on the tongue is pleasant against nausea, and it is also a cure for that sick headache with which the rolling steamers are liable to suffer. If one has been taken ill and drunk over night is supposed to be efficacious. Lemon-juice is also given in cases of gout and rheumatism; it is an aid to the digestion, and to the digestion of lemon-juice and camphor is rubbed on the skin during cool climates it is very soothing. Milk is a harmless cosmetic for the removal of sunburn—another for the same purpose is the white of an egg well beaten. Much better is prevention than cure in the case of sunburn, and Marguerite gave me a recipe for the preservation of my complexion during the hot summer days spent by the seashore, which was as follows:

First smear the face slightly over with a little oil, lard, cold cream or vaseline. Rub off gently with a towel, and dust the face afterwards with either powdered starch, white fuller's earth or flour. This preparation may not sound very elegant, but it is a most excellent combination, and is only a cheap copy of a recipe that I have ever found beneficial in the prevention of sunburn, freckles, tan, roughness or chaps. Scalds and burns are relieved by turpentine. Whiting made into a paste and applied is also beneficial. For chilblains, Marguerite used to supply us with the water in which potatoes in their peel had been boiled. Mustard rubbed on is also good.

Raw onion is a remedy for a wasp's sting. The sting must first be abstracted with the nail or tweezers. I hear that tobacco rubbed into the sting is also as effective a cure.

For goose or mosquito bites, use vinegar, wine, or sweet oil.

If one has been bitten by an animal suspected of being infected with the bubonic plague, a bowl of hot milk should be drunk off at once.

Bruises and sprains can be effectively treated with vinegar and water applications. Three times the quantity of water to one of vinegar.

If sting by an adder is not attended with a frequent occurrence in Brittany, where they exist in vast numbers, have the presence of mind to slit up the animal's back with a penknife; a chicken's feather will be applied to the sting affords instant relief.

Warts should be rubbed daily with a radish, or steeped in a mixture composed of vinegar, salt, and the root of a lemon.

Sour milk—Hold the part affected in very cold water for about two hours. In bad cases mix a little turpentine with flour and yolk of egg. Apply as a plaster.

The juice of unripe grapes, or lemon-juice is good for a tanned skin.

Scratches should be washed in cold water and salt as much as possible; if inflamed a bread poultice should be applied.

In case of nose bleeding, put a key down the back, or something very cold; wipe the nose with a cold, dry cloth, and keep the head as upright as possible.

I could give many more recipes of this kind, but my article is already very long, so I desist. Many of these recipes may be already well known to "Our Girls," though for the most part they were quite original to me. They are mostly doubt old-fashioned recipes handed down from generation to generation. The inhabitants of these ancient Breton castles are very wary of trying new medicines, of the preparation of which they are ignorant. I speak quite naturally to the traditions of their ancestors in this respect. Their health does not suffer for their obstinacy.

At the castle, where we got the milk from our own dairy, we introduced it at nearly every meal. A bowl of warm milk in the morning is of itself a delicious and wholesome repast. In the last thing of night it acts as a sedative. For those who go in for much exercise, milk is an excellent food, but many who pass a sedentary life cannot digest it except when boiled. It should not be drunk on an empty stomach. If its fatty properties recommend it to the thin and scrawny who wish to gain a little adipose tissue. If you stir up a cup of milk with a little sugar and apply it with limes to inflamed eyelids it is very soothing. Milk is a harmless cosmetic for the removal of sunburn—another for the same purpose is the white of an egg well beaten. Much better is prevention than cure in the case of sunburn, and Marguerite gave me a recipe for the preservation of my complexion during the hot summer days spent by the seashore, which was as follows:

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