

upon. Scientific men were bewildered, and all sorts of strange theories as to its cause were advanced; there was a general ferment among agriculturists, corn-merchants, rulers and economists, and numerous substitutes for the potato were suggested among which was the parsnip, in consequence of which there was a run on par-

Fig. 3.



A good potato.

snip seed; it went up to ten times its previous value, and even then the supply was not equal to the demand. Another remarkable fact was, that the threatened annihilation of a root which had been only popular for a comparatively short time, should have caused so much consternation.

It is curious also to note, with the light we now have, the strange ideas that people entertained as to the cause of this disease, and its rapid spread, some attributing it to degeneracy caused by over cultivation, which was evidently a false theory in some respects, because the most vigorous crops were suddenly attacked; bad and careless cultivation was blamed, but

crops under good culture suffered as much as others; then the introduction of foreign manure, and lastly, a peculiar electrical condition of the atmosphere were said to be the cause. But at length, the microscope revealed the fact that the disease was due to the presence of a minute fungus or mushroom growth, which for some un-

Fig. 4.



A diseased potato.

accountable reason had not appeared before, but which is a natural parasite of the potato, just as some fungi of a larger growth prey upon, and gradually destroy large trees.

One savant of that time came nearer the truth than his compeers by stating that his opinion was, that the peculiar state and action of the atmosphere favoured the propagation and distribution of the myriads of spores of minute fungi which enter into the pores or stomata which are found on the surface of the leaves of all plants. The real cause of the wholesale, devastating potato disease, which, notwithstanding all the precautions of cultivators has not even yet been overcome, is a fungus.