

A DISH OF VEGETABLES.

From the moss to the palm-tree, the number of contributions made by the vegetable world towards the sustenance of man, would make a bulky list of benefactors. We have not room to advertise them all, still less to talk about them all. It may be well, however, and only grateful in us as human beings and recipients of vegetable bounty, to do a little trumpeting in honour of the great families of plants, which have contributed with more especial liberality towards the colonization of the world by man.

For example, there is, in the first place, the Potato family, famous for its liberal principles, and the wide sphere over which its influence is spread. The members of this family, with equal generosity, are prompt to place a luxury upon the rich man's gravy, or a heap of food beside the poor man's salt. The Potato family has been for many years one of the noblest benefactors to the human colony, and when it was prevented lately, by ill-health, from the fulfilment of its good intentions, great was the anxiety of men, and many were the bulletins of health sought for and issued. Its constitution still appears to be a little shaken, and we all still hope for the complete recovery of so sincere and influential a friend.

The family seat of the Potatoes is well known to be in America. They are a comparatively new race in our own country, since they did not come over until some time after the Conqueror. The genealogists have nearly settled, after much discussion, that all members of this family spread over the world, are descended from the Potatoes of Chili. Their town seat is in the neighbourhood of Valparaiso, upon hills facing the sea. The Potatoes were early spread over many portions of America, on missions for the benefit of man, who had not been long in discovering that they were friends worth cultivating properly. It is said that the first Potato who visited Europe, came over with Sir Francis Drake, in 1573; it is said, also, that some of the family had accompanied Sir John Hawkins, in 1563; it is certain that a body of Potatoes quitted Virginia, in 1586, and came to England with Sir Walter Raleigh. M. Dunal, who has written an elaborate history of the Potato family, shows it to be extremely probable that, before the time of Raleigh, a settlement of Potatoes had been formed in Spain. Reaching England in 1586, the benevolent Potato family was welcomed into Belgium in 1590. In 1610, the first Potatoes went to Ireland, where they eventually multiplied and grew, to form one of the most important branches of this worthy race. The Scotch Potatoes date their origin as a distinct branch, from 1728. It was at dates not very different from this, that other branches of the family settled in Germany. The Potatoes of Switzerland first settled in 1730, in the Canton of Berne. In 1738, the thriving family extended its benevolent assistance to the Prussians; but it was not until 1767 that its aid was solicited in Tuscany. In France, the kindly efforts of this family were not appreciated, until, in the middle of the last century, there arose a man, Parmentier, who backed the introduction of Potatoes into France with recommendations so emphatic, that it was designed to impute to him the interest of near relationship,

not indeed by calling him Potato, but by calling Potatoes by his name, Parmentiers. The benevolent exertions made by the Potato family on behalf of France, during the famine of 1793, completely established it in favour with the grateful people.

Potatoes, though so widely spread, are unable to maintain their health under too warm a climate. On the Andes, they fix their abode at a height of ten or thirteen thousand feet; in the Swiss Alps, they are comfortable on the mountain sides, and spread in Berne to a height of five thousand feet, or not very much less. Over the north of Europe the Potato family extends its labours farther on into the cold than even Barley, which is famous as the hardest of grain. There are Potatoes settled in Iceland, though that is a place in which barley declines to live. The Potato is so nutritious, and can be cultivated with so little skill and labour, that it tempts some nations to depend solely on it for sustenance. The recent blight, especially in Ireland, consequently occasioned the most disastrous effects.

The BARLEY branch of the Grass family has, however, a large establishment in Scotland, even to the extreme north, in the Orkneys, Shetland, and, in fact, even in the Faroe Islands. They who are in the secrets of the Barleys, hint that they would be very glad to settle in the southern districts of Iceland—say about Keikiavik—if it were not for the annoyance of unseasonable rains. In Western Lapland, there may be found heads of the house of Barley as far north as Cape North, which is the most northern point of the continent of Europe. It has a settlement in Russia on the shores of the White Sea, beyond Archangel. Over a great mass of northern Siberia, no Barley will undertake to live, and as the Potatoes have found their way into such barren districts only here and there, the country that is too far north for Barley, is too far north for agriculture. There the people live a nomad life, and owe obligation in the world of plants, to lichens for their food, or to such families as offer them the contribution of roots, bark, or a few scraps of fruit.

It is not much that Barley asks as a condition of its gifts to any member of the human colony. It wants a summer heat, averaging about forty-six degrees, and it does not want to be perpetually moistened. If it is to do anything at all in moist places, like islands, it must have three degrees added to the average allowance of summer heat, with which it would otherwise be content. As for your broiling hot weather, no Barley will stand it. Other grasses may tolerate the tropics if they please; Barley refuses to be baked while it is growing. The Barleys are known to be settled as an old native family in Tartary and Sicily, two places very far apart. Their pedigree, however, and indeed the pedigrees of all the branches of the great Grass family, must remain a subject wrapt in uncertainty, buried in darkness, and lost in a great fog of conjecture.

We find OATS spread over Scotland to the extreme north point, and settled in Norway and Sweden to the latitudes sixty-three and sixty-five. Both Oats and Rye extend in Russia to about the same latitude of sixty-three degrees. The benevolent exertion of Oats is put forth on behalf not only of men, but also