

# SINCLAIR'S JOURNAL

## Of British North America.

VOL. I.

QUEBEC, 7TH, JULY, 1849.

No. 10.

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### PRESERVATION OF HEALTH.

#### THIRD ARTICLE.

#### KINDS OF FOOD.

It has been shown, by a reference to the structure of the human intestinal canal, that our food is designed to be a mixture of animal and vegetable substances. There is, it is to be remarked, a power of adaptation in nature, by which individuals may be enabled for a considerable time to live healthy on one or the other kind exclusively or nearly so. The above is nevertheless the general rule, to which it is safest to adhere. It has been found, for instance, that field-labourers, including ploughmen, will live healthily for many years on a diet chiefly farinaceous—that is composed of the farina of grain. But it is to be feared that the food in this case, though apparently; sufficient for health, is only so apparently; and that the constitution, being all the time not supported as it ought to be, breaks down prematurely in a great proportion of instances. It has been said again that the Irish labouring classes are a remarkably robust race, although their food consists almost exclusively of potatoes. The fact is overlooked, that the Irish eat a quantity of potatoes so enormous, as could not fail to make up in some measure for the want of animal diet. It was found by the Poor-Law Commissioners, that the greater number of the peasantry of Ireland, women as well as men, take at their two daily meals in general about nine pounds weight of this aliment! Such a case is rather to be ranked amongst instances of extraordinary adaptations to a particular variety of food, than as a proof that an unmixed potato diet is healthy.

Climate has a remarkable effect in modifying the rule as to the mixture and amount of animal and vegetable food. The former has most of a stimulating quality, and this quality is greater in beef, and flesh in general, than in fowl or fish. Now the inhabitants of torrid countries are, in their ordinary condition, least in need of stimulus: hence they find a simple diet of rice and sago sufficient for them. Those, on the contrary, who dwell in cold countries need much stimulus: hence

they can devour vast quantities of flesh and blubber, with scarcely any mixture of vegetable food.

Inquiries with respect to the comparative digestibility of different kinds of food, are perhaps chiefly of consequence to those in whom health has already been lost. To the sound and healthy it is comparatively of little consequence what kind of food is taken, provided that some variation is observed, and no excess committed as to quantity. Within the range of fish, flesh, and fowl, there is ample scope for a safe choice. There is scarcely any of the familiar aliments of these kinds but, if plainly dressed, will digest in from two to four hours, and prove perfectly healthy. One rule alone has been pretty well ascertained with respect to animal foods, that they are the more digestible the more minute and tender the fibre may be. They contain more nutriment in a given bulk than vegetable matters, and hence there less need for length of intestine to digest them. Yet it is worthy of notice, that between the chyle produced from animal and that from vegetable food no essential distinction can be observed.

Tendon, suet, and oily matters in general, are considerably less digestible than the ordinary fibre; and these are aliments which should be taken sparingly. Pickling, from its effect in hardening the fibre, diminishes the digestibility of meat. Dressed shell-fish, cheese, and some other animal foods, are avoided by many as not sufficiently digestible.

Farinaceous foods of all kinds—wheat, oat, and barley bread, oat porridge, sago, arrow-root, tapioca, and potatoes—are highly suitable to the human constitution. They generally require under two hours for digestion, or about half the time of a full mixed meal. The cottage children of Scotland, reared exclusively upon oat porridge and bread, with potatoes and milk, may be cited as a remarkable example of a class of human beings possessing in an uncommon degree the blessing of health. Green vegetables and fruit, however softened by dressing, are less digestible, and less healthy as a diet. One important consideration here occurs: there is need for a certain bulk in our ordinary food. Receiving nutriment in a condensed form, and in a small space, will not serve the purpose. This is because the organs of digestion are calculated for receiving our food nearly in the condition in which nature presents it—namely, in a considerable bulk with regard to the proportion of its nutritious properties. The same law applies with respect to the lower animals. When a horse is fed upon corn alone, it does not thrive. Nature did not contemplate that all horses should readily obtain a corn diet, but looked chiefly to grass and hay for their support. She therefore prepared the organs for the reception of something of considerable volume; and when a food of less volume is persisted in, her law is violated, and fatal consequences ensue. Civilised man is apt to pay little attention to this rule in his own case. Consulting taste alone, he is apt to refine his food overmuch, and reject what it were better for him to take. The