

INDIGESTION.

By "THE NEW DOCTOR."



E 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