

THE LENTIL IN SCOTLAND.

The *Ervum lens*, although a new field-crop in Scotland, in its cultivation as an article of food, is so well known abroad, especially in Catholic countries, that the very name *Lent* is unquestionably derived from the use of lentils during that period of abstinence from all sorts of animal diet. As green crop for cattle-feeding, however, we can trace its introduction into Britain three hundred years back: the date which Mr. Lawson gives being 1545. But he adds in his "Agriculturist's Manual," that "although well adapted to our climate, its cultivation has not been attended to"—for what good reason it is difficult to discover, unless, like other items of husbandry practised by the monks in the vicinity of their settlements, it was driven out with the Reformation. The vine, which was general in the south of England, shared this fate. The *Ervum lens* belongs to the general order *leguminosæ*; in generic character its calyx is five-parted; segments linear, acute; corolla, sub-equal; pod, oblong, and two and four seeded. Six species are natives of the northern hemisphere. The species termed botanically *Ervum tetraspermum hirsutum*, presents us with those troublesome weeds of the New Testament parable called tares. They are natives of England: but the *Ervum lens*, the lentil, is a native of the south of Europe. The eatable lenticular seed is of very ancient culture. On the authority of Genesis xxv. 34, it distinctly formed the mess of red pottage for which Esau sold his birthright. Several references to it occur elsewhere in holy writ, as in 2d. Sam. xvii. 28; xxiii. 11; and Ezek. iv. 9. It constitutes at the present time much of the food of the common people of many continental states, being not only the cheapest, but the most palatable and nutritious diet. For the value of *twopence* six men may dine well on lentils; and as this extraordinary fact will doubtless excite the attention both of the poor and the benevolent, we shall mention the various modes of cooking adopted.

Steep the lentils an hour or two in cold water; then take them out and place them in a goblet, with enough of water to cover the surface; adding a little butter, some salt, and flavouring with parsley. Place the whole over a slow fire. They must boil slowly; and care must be taken to add water enough to keep the surface covered, but merely covered.

They may be boiled with ham, bacon, sausage, or merely with water and salt, or prepared afterwards with onion *a la maitre d'hôtel*.

In schools, barracks, or large boarding establishments, they are often boiled in salt and water; and when cool the water is poured off, and they are dressed with oil, vinegar, &c. like a French salad.

When the lentil is bruised or ground into meal, it makes an excellent *purée*, with wild fowl or roasted game.

It is prepared also like peas for soups, dumplings, puddings, &c.

One single pound of meal makes soup sufficient for fifteen persons; or a pudding-dumpling, *purée*, &c. for six; and the pound costs from 2d. to 3d. in France or Germany.

Being exceedingly nutritious, lentils would make a capital substitute for potatoes; and it is mainly on this ground that the recent efforts of a French gentleman, M. Guillerez, of Castle Street, Edinburgh, have been directed to bring about their adoption as a British field-crop. But why is it that, having free trade in corn of all kinds, this foreign crop is not in the meantime more largely imported for British consumption? This is a singular circumstance, for it affords one of the most popular of all dishes abroad; the finest or small brown kind—which is also the most prolific—being esteemed a delicacy by the rich, and highly relished by the poor. The very paucity of the supplies that have lately reached us of the flour of lentils have tempted those by whom it is vended as food for invalids, to palm off mixtures of bran-meal, and other leguminous products, for the genuine article. And the high price put upon the packages doled out so mysteriously, and pushed so extensively, would preclude the public from enjoying the advantages of this cheap and plentiful description of food, even if their contents were legitimate.

The character of the lentil, both intrinsic and economical, would seem to point it out as a proper substitute for the potato; and the important question is, whether it would thrive under general culture in this soil and climate as luxuriantly as that root? One of our scientific growers (Lawson) has already given his testimony in the affirmative—"Agriculturist's Manual," p. 95. Dr. Palkneel failed, indeed, in an attempt to cultivate them twenty years ago, at Canonmills, near Edinburgh; but Messrs. P. Lawson and Son ripened specimens of the seed of the larger lentil at their Meadowbank nursery in 1835. They were sown on the 7th April, were in flower on the 6th July, and ripened the second week of August. The only systematic and persevering attempts, however, to ripen the seed, and acclimatise the plant, have been those of M. Guillerez. These have been carried on at Queensferry; and in the course of his experiments, it has been found that seed of his own produce ripened there, and proved more luxuriant than continental seed newly imported from France, given to him in exchange by Lord Murray. Here, then, there is room to hope that, if not already predisposed for vegetating kindly in our climate, the lentil is in a fair way of being acclimated.