

## A VALUABLE PAPER ON FOODS AND DIGESTION.

**I**N the Dietetic Gazette is the following valuable paper by Sarah E. Post, M. D., of New York. In view of the prevalence of kidney diseases and also diseases of the liver and nervous system, it should be widely read and receive much attention in practice:—

Having detected this condition, [one predisposing to kidney disease], I would like to consider the question of prophylaxis. Dr. Fothergill has, more than any other writer, insisted upon excessive meat eating as the predisposing cause, basing his argument upon the growing tendency to gout and Bright's disease among the English, associated with their flesh-eating propensities and the work imposed upon the kidneys and liver. Voit tells us that the adult may maintain nutritive equilibrium upon a diet of proteids, water and salts. The advisability of such a diet is, of course, another matter. Of the proteids taken as food, a small portion only is appropriated to the growth and repair of the tissues. The remainder is immediately split up into a nitrogenous constituent, such as urea or one of its allies, and a non-nitrogenous constituent, such as sugar, fat or something else. The latter may be oxidized or stored up, it is useful; the former is on the contrary poisonous, it serves no purpose, it must be excreted at once. Voit tells us that the amount of urea rises during the first hour after the ingestion of food, and on a pure proteid diet it may amount to ten and fifteen times the amount which tissue waste requires. In the face of these facts we are forced to the conclusion that where the kidneys require shielding it would be better to limit proteid food to the amount required for repair and growth and to supply carbonaceous food under its own form. Why impose work by giving a complex food where the simpler food is required? We have seen that the extra nitrogenous food serves no purpose but that of its carbonaceous constituent, that a process of analysis must be performed in the body before this can be liberated, and that a waste product is also the result,

which must be eliminated. If we care for the kidneys shall we not cease requiring from them this apparently useless work?

In the third place I would like to call attention to the question of digestibility as applied to the proteid foods. However well arranged our dietary, a certain amount of nitrogenous surplus will be probable in every case. It will be impossible for us to estimate exactly the body's needs. The appetite, too, will have to receive consideration. How shall we manage this surplus so as to give the kidneys the least work? The waste of the body is supplied to the kidneys little by little. It is possible that we may safely imitate this method. It is possible that the kidneys would be thus less embarrassed than if asked to do the whole piece of work at once. This is something that we hear little about. The great cry is for easily digested food, pre-digested food, etc., something that the absorbents can take up. The whole business of therapeutics upon this point is apparently to get the food out of the alimentary canal. Its later vicissitudes are apparently uncared for and indeed unknown. Yet we are told that absorption is a mechanical matter. Having an exceptionally good digestion, or having the food pre-digested, why might not one absorb enough to embarrass the economy? . . . The food which chokes the liver is all regularly digested and absorbed. If in a bird (in feeding for that delicacy, *paté de foies gras*) digestion can outrun assimilation, why not in man? The appearance of many men and women suggests a parallel case. The fact that food is easily digested is no sufficient proof that it is required. Voit says that peptones are rapidly absorbed, that within an hour they appear as urea in the urine, that they do not serve the office of albumen in the economy, but that they are entirely eliminated within a very short time. Our present system of feeding on easily digested proteid food simply floods the system with excrementitious material. Without completely interdicting proteids, can this flooding with