

PRIZE ESSAY COMPETITION.—III.

“DESCRIBE, IN FULL DETAIL, A SCHEME OF DIETS FOR THE NURSING STAFF OF A HOSPITAL.”

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(Concluded from page 242.)

IT may seem incredible, yet it is true, that for one whole month, in a large Hospital where the diets are arbitrarily laid down, a pudding was not served. The dinners consisted of hard-crust fruit pie, or open tart, once a week, with brown sugar—the dearest that could be bought—and old milk, which, the moment it came in contact with the acid fruit, turned to curds and whey. Pickled mackerel came once a week, with roast beef or roast mutton generally. Lamb appeared once, and a large, hard-crust meat-pie once a week. The crust of this, by-the-bye, required a strong knife and a fairly strong hand to cut it; and the meat, of which there was a great deal too much, in large solid blocks, was so hard it was scarcely possible to eat it, while its gravy was thin and fat; the natural result, of course, being that the greater part of both crust and meat was left on the plates, just so much waste. The meat was good meat, but it was ruined by bad cooking, and the Nurses left the table in less than fifteen minutes, very little better for the “dinner” they had had. They found no fault; it was quite a thing they were used to, and accepted as something inevitable. The same meat, if it had been gently *stewed* before it was wanted for the pie, seasoned cold, and baked only long enough to bake the pastry, would have made a very good pie. Coarser beef, with two or three kidneys, if properly *stewed*, would have made a better pie still.

Writing about pie-crust brings to mind, dripping. There is always plenty of dripping. Scientific people tell us, beef dripping is better food than butter. Beef and mutton dripping should not be mixed. Mutton dripping is too hard for baked pastry. It may be used for frying purposes, and it can be used for boiled or steamed pastry. Beef dripping, when it is to be used for pastry, should be clarified, in this way. Put the dripping into a large pan; pour hot water upon it; let the pan stand on one side of the range until the fat is melted; stir the water and fat well, so that the water may wash away any gravy, and bits out of the dripping; then set the pan away, in a cold place. A great sale of dripping is not advisable. It is good food, and should be used for pastry, cakes, &c. Many people who cannot eat pastry

made with any other fat, can eat pastry made with beef dripping.

In asking for a diet table for Nurses, I suppose the diets are to be appetising for those who have to eat them, sufficiently economical for those who have to pay for them, and not too elaborate for those who have to cook and serve them. Nurses do not expect dainties, but they would like to have their tea and coffee always made with boiling water; eggs that are not fusty, for surely there *are* eggs, though foreign, that do not taste of fusty straw. How do Hospital eggs acquire this taste? Is it that they come packed in damp straw, or are they packed whilst they are still warm? A very large proportion of these eggs are never eaten. Is not this great waste? Then the butter, too. How bad it often is—not when it comes in, but because it is kept in a general store-room, and the air is not kept from it. The butter draws to itself all kinds of flavours, soap amongst the rest. And yet how easy it would be to press the butter down into large jars, and cover the top with water, thus preserving it from air, and keeping it good.

A word or two about puddings. Why, for the most part, only milk puddings? Why not oftener fruit puddings—any fruit that is in season? And why not ring the changes, sometimes, on well steamed or boiled suet puddings—plain one day, with sugar, or jam or treacle on others? Very little ingenuity on the part of cook, will another day turn the plain pudding into a ginger pudding, by adding ground ginger and treacle; another day, raisins “cut into three,” or it may be sultanas, or figs, or marmalade. Of course these things must be given out of store as they are wanted, and in right quantities. Marmalade is one of the cheapest, and most easily made, jams. Who ever saw, in Hospital, a well stewed oat or wheat pudding with a little suet, sugar, dash of nutmeg, and a few raisins? Yet these are good, inexpensive puddings, which do not require much more attention than an occasional stir, *plenty of time*, good grits of wheat, *plenty of water*, and not too much heat. Both may stew half-a-day, and are all the better for standing until the next day, when, with the addition of a little milk, a pinch of salt, and the other ingredients, they may be baked an hour or two in a gentle oven. A gentle oven! That is something our Hospitals cooks never seem to know about. Their milk puddings are often burnt at the top, and at the bottom, and round about, until there is very little eatable pudding left. Their idea seems to be, vigorous heat, and from an hour and a-half to two hours, for every kind of milk puddings. Again, puddings should be dished upon hot dishes, and not until they are wanted. Nurses had better wait five minutes for the pudding, rather than the

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