

WHAT IS DIGESTION ?

DIGESTION is the final result of the work done by the teeth, the tongue, the palate, the glands, the gullet, the stomach, the intestines, &c., the object of the work being to prepare the food in such a way as to make it fit to be absorbed by the blood, and consequently to nourish the body. For this purpose the food, after having been received into the mouth, is masticated and insalivated ; then it is swallowed, and, after passing through the throat and gullet, is received into the stomach, where the action of the digestive fluids, which form the so-called gastric juice, and a too-and-fro movement of the stomach itself, convert it into soft pulp, which is called "chyme." Thence it passes into the intestine, where it meets the bile poured out by the liver and the secretion from the sweetbread. Finally, after the nourishing part has been selected and absorbed by the blood-vessels and the lymphatics, the part which is useless for the purposes of nutrition is conveyed out of the body.

Non-digestion, therefore, means that one or more of all the working units in the process of digestion are so modified that the final result, instead of being digestion purely, has become indigestion. Now, all this may take place more or less suddenly, coming on like a storm on a fine day ; or we may have an acute attack of indigestion in the shape of colic, diarrhoea, cramp, spasm, &c. ; or it may take place in a slow, mild, but steady manner, going on for months, even years ; in such a case we have the chronic condition known under the name of dyspepsia. In connection with the above remarks we would recommend our readers to abstain from hearty meals either immediately following or preceding violent exercise. In each case the stomach is rendered unfit for the vigorous discharge of its office.

A hearty dinner taken in the evening after an unusual day's exertion, let it be physical or mental, is sure to be followed by more or less indigestion, and, it may be, vomiting. Sportsmen, pedestrians, and those of sedentary habits are acquainted with this fact from experience. When such an error occurs as an excessive meal, in consequence of yielding to the gratification of the palate, or eating largely to make up for a too prolonged fast, one or two Pepsin "Tablets" will at once help the sufferer out of the unpleasantness. The so-called gastric juice is nothing but a mixture of pepsin and hydrochloric acid, and the active principle of the so-called pancreatic juice is a substance called Zymine, which is composed of trypsin and other ferments. It will digest all kinds of food ; five grains of Zymine in the shape of a peptonizing powder, with a little soda, will sufficiently peptonize a pint of milk in a few minutes ; thirty grains, with a little soda, will peptonize four ounces of beef, producing a concentrated, nutritious, and delicious beef-tea. What, then, is more rational than to supply those digestive fluids in an artificial manner, when either their quantity is smaller than it should be, or their digestive power is not equal to the requirements of the body ?

A cheerful state of the mind is conducive to the easy digestion of a meal. The influence exerted by the state of the mind upon the appetite and digestion, as well as the nutrition of the body generally, is a matter of common observation. In these days of keen com-

petition no wonder that the majority of those who populate our large cities suffer from dyspepsia in one form or another in consequence of the worry and anxiety they have to undergo daily. A person receiving a piece of unwelcome news just before the commencement of a meal may be unable to eat a mouthful, no matter what might have been the appetite previously. Henry VIII., frowning upon Wolsey, and handing him papers of disgrace, is made by Shakespeare to say :

" Read o'er this ;
And after this ; and then to breakfast with
What appetite you have."

"Laughter," writes a German physician, "is one of the greatest helps to digestion with which I am acquainted ; and the custom prevalent among our forefathers of exciting it at the table by the jesters and buffoons was founded upon true medical principles. In a word, endeavour to have cheerful and merry companions at your meals ; what nourishment one receives amidst mirth and jollity will certainly produce good and light blood."

HOW BEEF-TEA SHOULD BE MADE.

BEEF-TEAS as commonly made are a snare and a delusion. They often are given with the fatal notion that they are highly nutritious, when they are nothing of the kind. They contain usually the soluble ingredients, some of the extractive, and are more stimulant than anything else. It is supposed to be one office of meat to assist in the liberating of "stored up" force. This has been inferred from the immense energy the carnivorous beasts can all of a sudden set free.

As beef-tea is ordinarily made, there is a considerable residue which is thrown away. In that discarded portion the tissue-forming principles of the meat are to be found. The other part is not to be despised, but it is not life-giving. A scientific beef-tea should contain all the nutriment and valuable constituents of the beef. The question then, is, "How is the nutriment ordinarily lost to be retained?" In this way :—

If four ounces of finely minced lean meat be added to half a pint of cold water, this cooked over a gentle fire, and very gradually brought to a boil, what is ordinarily thrown away will appear. Pour off the liquid, rub this boiled meat to a paste, and put all into a jar or bottle, with half a pint more water. To this add half a teaspoonful of Zymine (Fairchild), one-third of a teaspoonful of sodium bi-carbonate. Set the jar or bottle in a warm place for three hours, shaking occasionally, then boil quickly.

Beef-tea and similar aliments prepared as directed above, annul any necessity for resorting to reprehensible means and comparatively valueless materials. A matter like this, apparently trivial, is of the greatest importance in cases of protracted illness, when, perhaps, the digestion and assimilation are low, the reserve forces at an ebb, and the life hangs as by a thread. Peptonised beef-tea is a scientific preparation ; it is nutritious, and is all that can be wished.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)