

RAPID MASTICATION.

It is a very general idea that eating too rapidly is the great cause of indigestion, but this is only half the truth, for it is not the rapid eating which does the harm, so much as the inefficient mastication of the food which is usually associated with such haste. It is possible, if the food be only thoroughly chewed and crushed by the teeth, to eat very quickly without any dyspeptic after effects; but when the stomach is called upon to do the duty which should have been performed by the teeth, when, in fact, it has to break up and mince the meat, it has to perform work for which it is unfitted, and then digestion is delayed, the gastric juice cannot act as it should do on the particles of food, and so indigestion results.

Dietetic Inspectors.

THE United States Government is making a totally novel experiment in affording the housekeepers of the country an opportunity of getting object lessons in domestic economy, and in suggesting a change in national dietetics. The last Congress appropriated 10,000 dollars for the purpose of investigating the nutritive values of foods for human beings, the special purpose in view being to suggest to the people of that country a more wholesome and economical dietary system. The Department of Agriculture has charge of the work, which is to cover, as far as possible, all classes, rich and poor, whites and negroes, rural and city people. On application from householders a government agent will call at their houses and put their families under temporary surveillance. He will make note of the kinds and quantities of food they buy, and how much they pay for them. Having taken a complete inventory of the edible stock in kitchen, pantry, and cellar, he will weigh the meat, milk, molasses, and eggs. He will desire samples of everything for chemical analysis, only requiring that all the refuse from the table, and other waste, shall be kept for subsequent weighing. Finally, he will probably be able to suggest a system of diet more wholesome and more economical.

These inspectors are instructed to deal with the prejudices of the "ladies of the house" with much tact and caution. Housekeepers are, as a rule, very sensitive on the subject of their ways and methods in pantry and kitchen, and so it will be necessary that the agents appointed shall be persons of tact. It is a delicate bit of diplomacy, even when armed with a Government certificate, to enter a stranger's kitchen, to point out waste and useless extravagance, and suggest reforms. If there is one point on which women are more convinced than on any other it is that their jams and jellies are superior to those of their neighbours. Let but the inspector offer a suggestion or breathe a hint that the "jam" is not boiled long enough, or point out the thin surface of mildew which results, and it is to be feared his reign of office and tenure of the kitchen department will be short without being sweet.

Having obtained the consent of a family to be investigated, the government agent will first make his

inventory of the stock of food on hand in the house. He will weigh everything, not trusting purchase weights. Tea, coffee, salt, spices, beef extract, and condiments will not be taken into account. Beef tea made from beef extract is a stimulant, but it is not nourishing to any great extent. Beer will be considered as food, and likewise spirits. Whatever is bought during the term of trial will be subjected to similar treatment, and at the end another inventory will be taken, the stock remaining being subtracted from the total. Choice will not be made of families in which there are invalids, aged persons, greatly oversized or undersized individuals, or excessive users of stimulants.

Some of the results already obtained are quite striking. One family investigated was so poor that the members had not decent clothes. The mother, for lack of a respectable dress, was a prisoner in her own house and unable to appear out of doors. Yet that household, which comprised six persons, spent nearly £3 a week for raw food. Another case was that of a students' boarding-house, where the quantity of food material wasted was equal to the amount eaten. It is expected that the evidence obtained respecting the waste of food by rich people will be surprising.

Examinations will be made in a general way of the food supply of various localities. It will be ascertained what foods are purchased by people of different occupations, and how much they pay for them. The question whether these foods are most economical and best suited to the condition of the consumers will be a point of inquiry. Operations have been started in many of the colleges, universities and public institutions, and no doubt much economy will result from a scientific dealing with the culinary departments.

Work of the same kind has just been begun with students at the Tuskegee Institute, all of whom are negroes. As in the case of the white boys, the foods and liquids consumed will be weighed. At Suffield, Conn., experiments have been commenced with selected families of farmers. In some localities the inquiry will not be carried further than to find out what foods are in the market, and what is consumed by typical households, with notes of expenditures for edibles by such households. In other places, as at the experiment station at New Brunswick, N.J., and Auburn, Ala., where there are laboratories, chemical analyses of samples will be made. At the same time all waste will be saved and weighed carefully, in order to determine the proportion thrown away.

A great many students are being specially trained to engage in this national work, but so far it does not seem to have occurred to the authorities that the work is essentially a work for women. It would be an enormous saving of time, expense, trouble and friction if the services of expert housekeepers could be placed at the disposal of young married couples, to suggest, instruct, and lay down some general plan of household expenditure as would suit their incomes. Half the miseries of domestic life arise from an ignorance of how things should be done, and half the health and time of our women is frittered away in fretting over housekeeping difficulties which only need a little expert straightening out. This experiment of Uncle Sam is decidedly interesting, and the women of America should be very grateful for the splendid opportunity now offered them of minimising their housewifely cares and enabling them to set their houses in order, in so simple and convenient a way.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)