

HOW FOODS MAY BE A CAUSE OF STOMACH & INTESTINAL DISORDER.

AMONG the most extraordinary passions for eating must be that for devouring earth. This habit with Europeans would prove most disastrous to the constitution; but in West Africa the negroes are known to eat a yellowish earth called *caouac*; the flavour is agreeable to them, and they eat enormous quantities, and it is said to cause them no inconvenience. When Guinea negroes were taken as slaves to the West Indian Islands, they continued the custom; but the substance they obtained there was observed to injure the health of those who ate it, and the practice was forbidden.

In Eastern Asia a similar practice prevails; and in the island of Java, Labillardière found little squares of red earth were freely sold in the market for eating purposes. Upon examination the substance was found to consist of the remains of microscopic animals and plants deposited from fresh water. In tropical America earth-eating is considered to be really a disease, and even invalids in bed will pluck pieces of earth from the walls of their huts, and not only eat it themselves, but afford some of the tempting morsel for their children. The Indians living on the shores of the Orinoco and Meta select a special kind of earth as most acceptable to their palates, and knead it into balls for food. Some of these natives will eat as much as a pound per diem. Probably an amount of organic material predominates in the substance, and the real earth may act in the same way as woody fibre does in the food of herbivorous animals, *i.e.*, simply as a disintegrator.

The natural cravings of the animal appetite for special kinds of food is often an indication of what is needed for good health. In order, however, to maintain the proper process of blood formation and the animal heat of the body, the food must contain a regular proportion of gluten, fat, starch, &c., somewhere, according to the following quantities:—Water, 100; albumen, or flesh formers, 5; heat givers—carbo-hydrates, fat, starch, &c., 22; salts, 1. The Irishman mixes cabbage with potatoes; the Englishman, bacon and beans, and also milk and eggs, with farinaceous foods; the Italian mixes rich cheese with his macaroni; and the Indians pulse, &c., rice in gluten, with their millet and rice.

The bad selection of foods is probably one of the most prevalent causes of stomach and intestinal complaints. Foods composed largely of fatty matter are not suited for the human system, and foods containing simply carbo-hydrates do not alone afford sufficient nutrition. Fat is necessary to promote the perfect metabolism of the food taken, and to restore the waste incurred during tissue metamorphosis. The human subject requires food containing equable parts of carbo-

hydrates, proteids, and fat, the amount of each constituent to be varied according to the conditions of work. Improper feeding is probably the main cause of dyspepsia. Food may be taken hurriedly and then imperfectly masticated. It may be imperfectly masticated through loss of teeth. Then, again, indigestible food may be a cause of gastro-intestinal disease. Dr. Letheby says, in assorting different articles of diet so as to secure the right proportion of the several constituents of food, *viz.*, fat, sugar, starch, and nitrogenous material, "We find that we may not only rely on the sound indications of science, but may also trust to the unerring guidance of our own digestions, providing they have not been vitiated by fashion or perverted by evil habits."

Certain meats, for example, which are themselves deficient in fat are always eaten with substances rich in it. Bacon is associated with veal, with liver, and with fowl. We use melted butter with most kinds of white fish, or we fry them in oil; some, however (*e.g.*, salmon and eels), contain sufficient fat in themselves to properly regulate the amounts of the several constituents of the food. It is evident, therefore, that if the foods obtainable are deficient in any particular, we must add sufficient of an artificial food to bring up this component part to a normal figure. For instance, let us take the case of a phthisical patient in whom metabolism is proceeding at lightning speed. Cells are being rapidly formed by the oxidation of food, and as quickly are wasted unless an inordinate amount of fat is taken to assist the tissues against progress of the disease. It is for this reason that cod liver oil has been so extensively employed in consumption, and with the happiest results in a large number of cases.

It was found, however, that cod liver oil *per se* frequently passed out of the system without being absorbed, and it was suggested that if the cod liver oil were mixed with some other suitable aliment, assimilation could by this means be ensured. This idea originated the Kepler Solution of Cod Liver Oil and Malt Extract. This preparation contains a large percentage of cod liver oil, and the peculiar ferment diastase in the Malt Extract assists in the digestion of farinaceous foods. The Extract of Malt, therefore, is one of the most useful agents to be taken when there is a deficiency of carbo-hydrates in the ordinary food. Should there be a deficiency of both carbo-hydrates and fat, probably no better substituted food could be designed than the Kepler Solution of Cod Liver Oil.

Fat serves important functions in the processes of digestion, assimilation, and nutrition. It is one of the most active agents in the metamorphosis of animal matter; and this is seen not merely in the assimilation of nitrogenous matter during digestion, but also in the conversion of assimilated substances into cells and fibre. Lehmann has recently determined by actual experiments on animals that food deprived of fat remains much longer in the stomach and requires more time for metamorphosis. Fat, therefore, facilitates digestion, and it is suggested that the digestive power of the pancreatic juice is due in a great measure to the presence of fat. It is said there is good reason for believing that fat is largely concerned in the formation of bile, and it is thought that the well known action of fat bacon, &c., in promoting the secretion of bile is due to this fact.

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