

Old-Fashioned Invalid Cookery.

By Mrs. M. WESTAWAY.

If we may believe the picture of a sick-room drawn for us by Dickens in "Martin Chuzzlewit," old-fashioned invalid cookery seems to have been designed to suit the palate and digestion of the nurse rather than that of the patient; for Mrs. Gamp was decidedly an epicure and was imbued with the idea that the well-being of the patient was attained by attention to the creature comforts of the nurse. The same idea is partly borne out by a study of old-fashioned cookery books, and particularly of those belonging to the eighteenth century. Recipes follow recipes for dishes compounded of ingredients which could not be tolerated by the invalid digestion, and in proportions so lavish as to suggest baronial halls with endless retainers rather than one solitary invalid. Some of the recipes are for flummeries, caudles, and possets, which sound as though invalids might safely partake of them, but a study, by the light of twentieth century knowledge of their compounding, would cause them to be banished from the sick room. Jellies are numerous, and knowing the high value which was formerly set upon jellies, it is to be presumed that they were intended chiefly for invalid fare. In addition to jellies, there are "mutton broths for sick people" made according to directions which we cannot regard as scientific, and beyond that there is nothing else available besides soups of an aldermanic richness.

An exception to this condition of affairs must be made in the case of "good Hannah Glasse," who wrote: "The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy," and who is credited, but mistakenly, with the saying, "first catch your hare, and then cook it." She devotes a whole section of her book to "directions for the sick," which she prefaces with the words, "I don't pretend to meddle here in the physical way; but a few directions for the cook, or nurse, I presume, will not be improper to make such a diet, &c., as the doctor shall order."

The series starts with a recipe for mutton broth, which is made by boiling a pound of loin of mutton in a quart of water. Presumably the invalid takes the broth after the meat has been boiled for an hour, and someone else enjoys the mutton, with the turnips which are to be cooked in a separate saucepan. Beef or mutton broth is made of "beef or mutton, or of both together," and is intended for very weak people who take but little nourishment. "To very weak people, half a teaspoonful is enough; to some a teaspoonful at a time; and to others a teacupful." We are assured that there is greater nourishment from this broth than from anything else, and so are not surprised to find that a pound of meat only produces a quarter of a pint of broth. Certainly, its virtues should be greater than those

of the "beef drink for weak people" in which a pound of meat provides two quarts of broth. Another broth is made of pork, and has to be taken by the half pint "in the morning fasting, an hour before breakfast, and at noon"; but the recipe concludes with the safe proviso, "if the stomach will bear it."

The recipe for chicken broth seems all that can be desired; but it rather startles the uninitiated to be told to take an old cock or large fowl and "flea" it. The meaning is plain enough when the word is connected with its root "to flay"—meaning to skin. In another part of the book it is a word used with a similar meaning, which gave rise to the much quoted dictum of Mrs. Glasse. The recipe for cooking hare commences with the words, "First case your hare"; the word "case," which means "to skin," is easily corrupted to "catch."

All the soups and broths are boiled with a crust of bread, which seems to have been the only available method of thickening the soups. One soup is made of nothing but bread, water, and butter; a quart of water is boiled with a piece of crust the size of the top of a penny loaf, a piece of butter as big as a walnut is added, with a very little salt, and when the bread and water are well mixed it is ready for serving. The directions are clear and simple, but the final words, "it is a pretty thing for a weak stomach," are rather obscure.

Boiled chicken, pigeons, partridges, plaice or flounders form the more solid part of invalid diet, and, by way of variety there is minced veal or chicken, and pulled chicken. The latter is made by tearing the flesh of the chicken into little bits as thick as a quill, and serving it in strong stock made by boiling the carcase. The object of this method is not quite clear, for it is by dividing the muscle into short lengths that the digestion of flesh is rendered easier.

Caudles, both brown and white, resemble oatmeal gruel, but they are flavoured with ale, wine, lemon, and spice. Panado bears a strong resemblance to the bread soup already mentioned. There is a recipe for isinglass jelly, and we are referred to another chapter for all other jellies.

The directions for making artificial asses' milk deserve to be quoted at full length. "Take 2 oz. of pearl barley, 2 large spoonfuls of hartshorn shavings, 1 oz. of eringo root, 1 oz. of China root, 1 oz. of preserved ginger, 18 snails bruised with the shells, to be boiled in 3 quarts of water till it comes to 3 pints, then boil a pint of new milk, mix it with the rest, and put in 2 oz. of balsam of Tolu. Take half a pint in the morning and at night."

It is difficult to reconcile some of the recipes with Mrs. Glasse's statement that she would not interfere in a physical way. There is a pectoral drink which is ordered in the measles and several other disorders. There is a "very great strengthener" made by boiling comfrey roots, and that, too, in

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)