

THE VALUE OF FRUIT AS A FOOD.

Within the last quarter of a century fruit has entered far more largely into the dietary of the people than was the case in the nineteenth century. Probably the discovery of the vitamins and their value, from a health point of view, is to an extent accountable for this, but also there is the economic factor—most fruits have come much more within reach of the poorer classes than was formerly the case. The actual value of fruit, from the aspects of the nourishment it contains, depends largely upon the good sense of the housekeeper in the arrangement of meals. It is curious in this connection to realise how people in the past were able to plan meals from a kind of instinct rather than from scientific knowledge such as is available nowadays. Old customs, existing into the present, in relation to the daily menu, indicate this but we came across a somewhat quaint instance of the fact in an old prayer which petitioned for sufficient "apple pie and cheese." The petition may sound a modest one enough but it appears none the less practical when we realise that such a dish would actually combine all the necessary constituents in a food. In those days people troubled themselves less with a calculation of proportions. Generally speaking fruit has very little nutritive value but some varieties may be said to contain real nourishment. The best examples in this respect are bananas and nuts. The former would prove too bulky, the latter too indigestible to be used as a sole article of diet. The banana is rich in carbohydrate and reasonably so in protein but it would take over a hundred a day (if used as the sole article of diet) to supply the nourishment required by a person of average activity. Banana meal is manufactured now from half-ripe bananas but it has not proved very popular and neither have the sun-dried bananas yet taken the place of dried figs on our dinner tables. Nuts are of course, richer in fat than any other fruit and this and the amount of cellulose contained detract considerably from their digestibility and consequently it is not possible to take full advantage of their high nutritive value. Certain dried fruits also hold high place from the point of view of their nourishing qualities, such for instance are dates, raisins and figs; the latter have for centuries been a favourite article of diet in the East, strung up, as onions are in Italy, to be sun dried. They are more nourishing than bread and are found to be particularly sustaining, or so we are told, by our bands of young hikers. In figs, as indeed in almost all fruits, the only nutritive element present to an extent that makes it valuable, is carbohydrate which usually exists in the form of fruit sugar. Other carbohydrates in fruit are of a form in which they cannot be made use of as nourishment, for instance, cellulose, hemiculose, etc. Pentose is present in fruits but is of doubtful nutritive value, although useful from the housewife's point of view as it yields the jelly required for preserving.

The mineral constituents in fruit are important. Chiefly they consist of potash and the acids of the fruit combining with this serve to give to the fruit its flavour to some extent. These acids tend, when converted into carbohydrate to make the blood more alkaline and the urine less acid. As fruit ripens these acids decrease and the proportion of sugar increases. The ethereal flavouring elements in food are of value as stimulating to the appetite and the flow of gastric juice.

The chief value of fruit lies in its antiscorbutic properties and in this connection it is important to remember that prolonged cooking destroys Vitamin C which is so valuable, not only in the prevention of scurvy but in the direction also of arresting decay and loosening of the teeth and softening of the gums. To avoid these conditions people frequently

take from one to two tumblers of orange juice daily besides lemons and other fruits. There is an idea, still more or less prevalent, that fruit and especially the orange, when taken by the nursing mother, is likely to cause her milk to give rise to digestive disturbances in the child. She is much more likely to have a delicate peevish baby if she cuts fruit out of her diet. Dried fruits have no antiscorbutic value and therefore the idea that some people hold that stewed prunes or figs can take the place of fresh fruit in a child's diet is untenable.

The digestibility of fruit depends largely on the variety chosen and, of course, on the degree of its ripeness. The cellulose is in much greater proportion in unripe fruit and its acids are irritating to the intestine especially. In ripe fruit the case is different, for the amount of cellulose and acid is only sufficient to act as a stimulant to it. Some patients find difficulty in digesting the grapes, usually supplied in great abundance to the sickroom, and this is usually due to the acids contained in them. When he can digest them, grapes are a real food because of the large amount of sugar they contain and also they act, to some extent, as a laxative and diuretic.

As regards the absorption of fruit, one can only consider this from the point of view that we think only of the nutritive constituents, for necessarily fruit contains a large amount of non-metabolic substances. Generally speaking we can say that close upon 90 per cent. of the nutritive elements are absorbed.

From the economic aspect fruits compare somewhat unfavourably with the other foods in general use. They do not give a large amount of actual nourishment for the money expended but people are learning that there are other points of almost equal importance and that, because of its hygienic and medicinal value, fruit is no longer to be regarded as a luxury but is a very necessary component of the daily diet sheet, whether in the home, the nursery or the hospital ward.

CLUB FIXTURES.

Our Autumn fixtures commenced on September 29th, when Miss Macdonald was "At Home" to Members and friends, and the following fixtures are being arranged.

For Saturday, October 17th, we are arranging a dance from 8 to 12 p.m., and Members who wish to attend must notify the Secretary beforehand.

On Thursday, October 22nd, at 3 p.m., Major Rigg, O.B.E., F.S.A., has promised to give us a lecture on the Great Plague. This will prove very interesting, for no one is more conversant with the history of old London than is Major Rigg, and we have asked him to refer specially to the somewhat quaint measures taken to combat infection, many of which still survive as part of the "ritual" of our civic and judicial procedure at the present time.

On Thursday, October 29th, at 3 p.m., Miss Macdonald will give a Talk on Holland, illustrated by lantern slides; she had the pleasure of visiting our friends Miss Meyboom and Miss Van Ditmar there during the summer.

On Thursday, November 5th, at 3 p.m., Dr. Browning Alexander is to lecture, but we have not yet been notified what his subject will be. Those who attended his lecture on the nursing of cases of pneumonia, last year, will look forward to gaining much useful information, whatever the subject he selects.

On Thursday, November 12th, at 8 p.m., we are arranging a whist drive as a commencement towards collecting the sum which we shall contribute to the expenses of the International Congress next year.

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