



HEALTH IN THE KITCHEN-GARDEN.

By MEDICUS.



F the thousand and one ills—the word “one” signifying “all the rest”—that afflict humanity, young and old, by far the larger proportion are what may be called chronic troubles. And I do not refer to any particular

or decided form of illness, but when I say “chronic,” I mean the term to relate to people who are seldom overwell, who are easily tired, subject to fits of low spirits, have but small inclination for the exercise which they know they need, who have at times no pleasure in other folks’ society, and none in their own, whose stomachs are easily put out of order, who do not always sleep as well as they would wish to, whose systems are dry and irregular generally, who suffer at times from headache, at times from backache, and at times from aches all over.

What a tremendously long sentence I have just written! It almost frightens me to look back at it. Well, this class of complainers—for if they do not complain to others they do so to themselves quietly, and have fancies that all the world is heartless and cold, and a dozen other things that “it didn’t houghter to be,” as the old charwoman said—this class, I say, are nearly always work-a-day girls; I do not refer altogether to manual labour, but to businesses that necessitate a good deal of mental thought and calculation. But many belong also to this class, who have nothing at all to do, and whose minds might be said to be preying on their constitutions.

Well, at all events, there they are, these chronically poorly people. They will not admit that there is anything very much the matter with them, but at the same time no class of sufferers have a sharper eye for the advertisement of some infallible nostrum, that is going to banish sickness from this world entirely, or a sharper ear to listen to any suggested remedy, no matter who it is that recommends it. It may be an old wife’s cure. That does not signify; they simply console themselves with the belief that old wives often know a deal more than doctors, and swallow the compound.

Now let me tell this class of invalids: I. That medicines are probably not wanted at all in such complaints as theirs. II. That medicine of any kind often does more harm than good. III. That it is folly to think or believe that a complaint which has lasted perhaps months, can be charmed away in a day or two by the best doctor in life. For the time a cure takes must bear some proportion to the time the complaint has lasted. I wish you to pin your faith on those facts, and bear them in mind.

If it be true that in nearly all cases of the chronic debility I refer to—and I sincerely believe it is true—the blood-making process is primarily at fault, then, before we can remove the symptoms, it is evident we must attend to the cause. And to do so we must go to the fountain-head from which all the evil flows, and this will be found to be the stomach. In other words, these chronic complaints—with all their aches and rheums and pains, bad sleep, lowness of spirits, fluttering at the heart, palpitations, and what are termed “indescribable feelings”—may be due to a kind of dyspepsia. The system is wholly too sluggish; the liver is inactive, and consequently the heart itself is weak, and being unable to supply the brain and nervous system generally with good, honest, life-giving blood, all kinds of symptoms may occur. These are often called imaginary, but they are real enough, for all that.

I have said that the taking of medicine may

do actual harm. Have we any substitute? Yes; and we find it in the use of vegetables and fruit, both of which are very much neglected.

These supply the blood with certain salts of a cooling nature, and without which the principal internal vital organs are unable to secrete material to keep the system regular.

Very often these organs act with great irregularity, or by fits and starts, so that we may have a patient complaining of two different states of system in the same week.

Now, it is possible that the reader of these lines is not to be ranked among the rich, who keep one, two, three, or more gardeners, but that still she lives in the country, and is in possession of a patch of kitchen-garden. If so, I seriously advise that it should be turned to the very best account. I do not wish this to be thought a gardening article, but, nevertheless, I ought, for health’s sake, to throw out a hint or two about the vegetables that ought to be grown for health’s sake, and I will leave it for others to say how this green food is to be cooked.

Ladies are fond of doing a bit of flower-gardening, but, as a rule, they abjure the cultivation of vegetables, or they know nothing really about it. It is a pity this should be so, for the kitchen-garden, if not a large one, certainly does not entail a deal of hard work, and the work is of a sort most conducive to health.

I shall suppose that you have secured the services of some “male creature,” in say, the month of February or March, to do the first or rough work—the turning over of the ground with the spade—and that he has secured sufficient richness of the soil, and done his work well, and left it level, and that you yourself are to sow the seeds.

Under your own superintendence, then, the beds are mapped out, the width of each being exactly the same (say six feet), and their length equal to the breadth of the plot of ground to be under cultivation. Between each bed there is formed a hollow division or path about a foot wide, and the beds are not to encroach upon the borders round, which are sacred to gooseberry bushes, rose-trees, flowers, and currants, black and red.

Choose a fine, sunny day to sow your seeds. First rake your beds most levelly and carefully, not leaving a ball of earth even an inch in diameter. When well raked they should be as level as a dining-room table, not all in little heaps, as if the Cochins had been scraping them.

Make the drills—by aid of a garden line and foot rule—with the back of the rake, and not more than an inch and a half deep, each drill to be nine inches apart; put peas in two rows, only six inches apart, and a foot and a half between each double row. This foot and a half may seem a waste of ground, but it need not be so, as in the centres you can put a drill of summer spinach.

Having sown your seeds, rake the ground gingerly and tenderly, filling up the little drills, and making each bed a thing of beauty. About two weeks or less after this, it really will be a thing of beauty, for I know of few prettier sights in a garden on a lovely spring day than rows of green seedlings that have just burst through the earth. You can watch them grow day by day, and listen to the birds singing at the same time. If the weather is propitious they will soon want thinning, and for a week or two your work will be cut out for you. Do not say you can ill spare the time. It will be time saved and health gained. Rise in the morning and work an hour before breakfast, and do a little more in the evening. In thinning the plants, leave in the best and biggest, and let there be six to nine inches between each. Pluck all the weeds out at the same time, and put weedings

and thinnings all in a small basket; I say small basket, because there is no room for a big one between the beds, and no mark must be left of foot or anything else on the bed itself.

I can assure readers that work like this may be done by the most dainty fingers, and that it will restore the bloom to lips and cheeks, however pale these were before. You may wear what you like and look as charming as you please when gardening; thus, so long as you do the work honestly, you may wear the most dainty hats and gloves, and have a mahogany handle to your hoe if so minded, though, between you and me, six-button kid gloves are not the best suited for weeding onions in.

The great advantage in growing one’s own vegetables is that one can always have them fresh. Lettuces cool, green, and tender; potatoes laughing from the mould, and peas with the drops of morning dew still lingering inside their pods.

That is all I mean to say about gardening; if you wish to learn more, buy a book, and study it, only I can promise you health if you adopt gardening as an exercise and a hobby.

But you must partake of the fruits of your labour; and this leads me to say a few words about the benefits to the health of a partly vegetable diet. Remember, I am not a vegetarian, but I can tell you as a fact that you could live far longer on vegetables alone than you could upon meat alone.

Potatoes come first. No dinner—or to my thinking, no luncheon either—is complete without them.

Some interesting papers in the early part of this volume gave hints as to the cooking of potatoes. Let me add another. To the delicate no vegetable is more difficult of complete digestion if not boiled to a nicety, but they ought to be mashed as well, and I do not think I ever saw them properly mashed at an English table. They ought to be as smooth and white as custard, though not so thin, otherwise little lumps remain, which, even if no bigger than a pea, are most indigestible, and never fail to create unpleasantness afterwards.

Done as the French do them, namely, fried in oil, they are also indigestible.

Potatoes are not only most nutritious, but are calmative to the nerves, and to some extent, narcotic, especially new potatoes.

A potato salad—lettuces included—is a most valuable adjunct to a supper dish.

We have to learn from the Scotch how to serve potatoes, and we must also cross the Border to find out the most delicious and digestible form in which to serve ordinary green vegetables. These include cabbages, curly greens, sprouting broccoli, savoy, turnip-tops, spinach, and kale of all kinds; and all these should be mashed for the delicate, the strongest portions of midribs being taken out, and a little butter and salt well mixed with them in the mashing. They should be served hot, and eaten off a hot plate with a little bread, as a dish, before any meat has been partaken of.

In this way we not only get their full flavour, but the greatest benefit to the blood from their use.

Next in point of value to the delicate come cauliflowers and Brussels sprouts. These need not be mashed, but ought to be used as a dish, with a little bread and butter. The same may be said of seakale.

No one should omit having half-a-dozen times at least during the early spring months a dish of nicely-cooked nettle-tops.

Nettle-tops should be very young and tender. Only those of a light spring-green colour are to be culled. They possess the same properties—of a blood-purifying order—that asparagus does.

Watercresses may usually be had all the year round, and are far more valuable than most people would imagine; but I desire to warn my readers against eating them unless very well washed indeed, as the eggs of certain parasites sometimes cling to their leaves.

Parsley is not over-digestible, but if it agrees it will do the blood good, and help to cool and sweeten the system.

Beetroot is invaluable to all who suffer from indigestion, with a dry condition of the body.

As to roots, besides the potato, which ought to go with everything, we have turnips,

parsnips, and carrots. On these we can ring the changes. But the same rule as to serving applies to them as to ordinary green vegetables. Let them be carefully boiled, then well mashed, butter and salt being mixed.

There are many other vegetables that I have not space here to say a word about; but as, with the Editor's kind permission, I may have an autumn or late summer paper on garden herbs and their dietary and medicinal values, I can then mention those I have here omitted.

I have not said what I wanted to about fruit either; but the delicate should not let a

day pass without using it in some form. Especially is it of great value before breakfast.

As to onions and all vegetables of that sort, while I admit their great value and efficacy in chronic complaints, I must bid you beware. Use them only if they can be easily digested and leave no dryness in the throat or taste in the mouth next day.

Now from this paper I hope many will adopt valuable hints. If they do, they will be rewarded with obtaining purer blood in their veins, stronger nerves, and a happier frame of body and mind altogether.

MERLE'S CRUSADE.

By ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY, Author of "Aunt Diana," "For Lillias," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

ROLF'S PENITENCE.



ROM a child, that story of Casabianca had fascinated me, and I could see it fascinated Rolf.

"How I do like that fellow Cassy—what do you call him?" he exclaimed, enthusiastically, when I had finished. "I call that plucky, and no mistake, to stick to the burning ship. What a brave man he would have made if he had lived!"

"Yes, indeed; but he lived long enough to do a man's work in the world—faithful until death. 'Faithful in little, faithful in much,' Rolf. Casabianca would never have disobeyed his mother, or thought he knew best, would he?"

"No, Fenny," in a contrite voice, and sidling up to me again.

"I am afraid you can never be a soldier, dear!"

"What do you mean?"—sitting up erect in bed, with his beautiful eyes quite glaring at me in the twilight. "I mean to be a soldier, I tell you, and use father's sword! I shall be Colonel Markham, too, one of these days, unless I am killed in battle."

"You cannot be a soldier unless you learn to obey, Rolf; you cannot rule your men until you have submitted to rule yourself. Officers are gentlemen, and gentlemen are never cowards; and I call it cowardly, Rolf—quite a mean trick—to creep into the nursery in my absence. Honour should have kept you from crossing the threshold."

Now Rolf could not endure to be called a coward, so he lost his temper, and, I am sorry to say, called me a nasty, spiteful old cat, "which you are Fenny, you know you are, and a great deal worse!" And the next moment he had thrown a rough pair of arms round my neck, his penitence inflicting on me excruciating pain.

"There, there, never mind"—hugging me—"I don't mean it. You are a dear

old thing, Fenny, and I mean to marry you when I grow up. You are such a plain young woman, as mother says, that no one else would ask you, so I will."

"Do you think I could marry a coward, Rolf?"

"There you go again"—in a vexed voice—"but I shall never be a coward any more; I mean to be a brave boy, like Cassy—what do you call him? I mean to mind mother, and not forget; and I will throw my cannon into the sea to-morrow, though I am so fond of it, and Mr. Rossiter (Walter I call him, but he does not mind) gave it to me. It cost a lot—indeed, it did, Fenny—but, all the same, it shall be drowned dead."

"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." I think there was something very real in that childish sacrifice. It was his treasured plaything, but it had tempted him to disobedience; he would fling it away with both hands. How few of us repent in that way! *Mea culpa*, we say, but we hug our darling sin close to us; it is not, like Rolf's cannon, "drowned dead." Brave, poor little faulty Rolf, I begin to have better hopes of you!

So I kissed and comforted Rolf, and he clung to me quite affectionately. I asked him if he had said his prayers, and he said no, he had been too unhappy, because no one would forgive him; so we said them together, and afterwards we had a little more talk. I was just going to leave him when a light crossed the threshold, and there stood Mrs. Markham, with a lamp in her hand. She looked very ill and unhappy, and I am sure she had been shedding tears.

Rolf sprang up in bed. "Oh, mother, do forgive me!" he cried. "I am sure I have been miserable long enough. Fenny has been telling me about Cassy—you know the fellow; and I mean to be like him. I will drown my dear little cannon, and I will never, never, never disobey you again!"

I think Mrs. Markham was longing in her heart to forgive him. She had suffered as much as the child. She said nothing, but sat down on the bed and held out her arms, and Rolf nestled into

them. She kissed him almost passionately, but a tear rolled down her face.

"I think you will break my heart one day, Rolf, as your—" She checked herself, and did not finish her sentence. Did she mean Rolf's father? Colonel Markham had been a brave officer, I knew, and had died in battle; but he had not made his wife happy.

"Oh no, mother," returned Rolf, "I am going to be a brave man, like father, and fight for everybody. I mean to take care of you when you are an old, old woman. Won't that be nice? You won't mind my marrying Fenny when I am quite grown up, will you, mother? Because she is such an old dear—no really old, you know, but so nice."

Mrs. Markham smiled faintly at the boy's nonsense, but she looked at me very pleasantly.

"Thank you for talking to Rolf, Miss Fenton, and helping him to be good. He is sorry, I think, and I hope this painful lesson will teach him to be less mischievous. But now you look very unfit to be up. You have done us all good service to-day, and we are all extremely grateful. Let me help you back to your room."

I was very much astonished at this civility, but I declined her assistance and wished Rolf good-night. I was still more surprised when she held out her hand.

"You must be careful of yourself, Miss Fenton, for my sister's sake," she said, so kindly that I could hardly believe it was Mrs. Markham's voice.

I marvelled at her manner greatly as I retraced my steps to the night nursery. She was really grateful to me, I could see that. Probably she realised that my prompt action had saved her and her boy a lifetime of regret. To extinguish life accidentally must be a bitter and sore retrospect to any human mind. Rolf's boyhood would have been shadowed if his little cousin's death had laid at his door.

I tried to cheer myself with these thoughts as I laid awake through the greater part of that long summer's night. I could only sleep by snatches, and my dreams were full of pain. I imagined myself a martyr at Smithfield, and that the faggots were lighted about