

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-07668-5 - A Third Pot-Pourri
 C.W. Earle
 Excerpt
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A THIRD POT-POURRI



HEALTH

Reasons for more about health—A stranger's letter—Encouragement from Dr. Haig—Details of my diet—Reason for early breakfast—Asparagus poison—Arguments of opponents—Dulness of diet—Reason of benefit felt in going back to mixed foods—Test of underfeeding—Dentist story—Opposition of medical profession—Their indifference to diet—The ordinary man at his breakfast-table—Doctors to be educated by the public—Uses of Plasmon—Necessity for mothers and children to learn physiology—Definition of uric acid—Instincts not safe guides—Difficulties of hospitality—Lord Roberts on 'treating'—List of useful books—Home education of girls: two methods—Hindoo love story.

I MUST apologise to the public for the apparent poor-ness of idea in again repeating my somewhat tiresome title. I heard Mr. Motley, the historian, once say, a title should be 'telling and selling.' A 'Third Pot-Pourri' will very likely turn out to be neither of these, but it seemed to me the most honest title I could think of towards those who were kind enough, not only to read, but to like, my former books. They may find the matter in this book better or worse; the manner is exactly the same as before, and it could hardly be otherwise at my age.

I must, perhaps, also apologise for putting the Health chapters prominently forward at the beginning of this book, and I can only ask those who have no interest in

the subject to skip them altogether. They are written for those who asked for them. The chapter headed 'March' in my second book, 'More Pot-Pourri,' which contained my personal confessions about diet, brought me such a number of touching and appealing letters from people of all sorts in every part of the world, that I cannot help thinking it almost a duty I owe to the readers of that book, to tell them as plainly as I can what I have learnt further about the subject, which for want of a better title we may call Diet, or Food, and its effects on the health of all classes of the community.

A great many people will merely laugh and think it very conceited and ridiculous that I should set up my opinion in matters of health against the great majority of the medical profession; but to anyone who has acquired good health, even late in life, the blessing is so inestimable, that it is only natural to try to help others to attain it. A note received the other day from a complete stranger stimulated me, perhaps, more than any other to feel that the knowledge and experience I have gained in the last three years might really be of some use to a few human beings. In this last of several letters, my unknown correspondent says, 'I am not likely to forget to associate your name with my improvement, and you, on your side, will have the satisfaction of knowing you have been the means of brightening and bettering our family's existence.'

Now, it seems to me that, however ridiculous it may appear to be very much absorbed in any one subject, if taking the trouble to publish a book upon it can call forth such an expression as this, and benefit, say, half-a-dozen families, I am well rewarded. As a further justification of my action in this matter, I should like to quote what T. E. Brown says in one of his delightful 'Letters': 'I believe that Jowett, like so many Englishmen, carried

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the principle of not “pinning his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at,” so far as to forget that, besides the pecking daws, there are the craving hearts of others . . . craving for the food which, God help us, is not too abundantly spread upon the tables of this world.’ Sympathy comes naturally to those who have prosperous circumstances, and I, who enjoy life so abundantly, in spite of age and sorrows, on account of my health, cannot help responding to appeals, from those who suffer, for further information as to the means by which I obtained it.

I am always being asked what I do myself. So far as I can, I will tell this exactly, first briefly stating that my health, which was good three years ago, has been distinctly improving both as regards endurance and nerve-power, and this in spite of heavy trials and sorrows borne a great deal alone, which to a nature like mine, after a life spent as mine has been, is no small additional suffering. Added to this, late in life I have had thrown upon me the entire management of house, garden, servants, stables, hospitality, which means a great strain on memory, especially after a lifetime with a man who shared all this with me, taking on himself the sole responsibility of much of it, and financially directing the whole.

My own conviction is, that though I started by myself on what I consider the right road as regards diet and health, yet without the assistance and support of Dr. Haig I should never have had courage to persevere against all opposition, and so have reached a level of health which has enabled me to withstand all this, and be so much better and stronger than either my mother or most of my aunts and uncles, who, with constitutions strong enough to live to a great old age, did so with much suffering from constant ailments—loss of hearing, sight, and brain-power.

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A great many people may think that my improved health is a matter of imagination, and I am the last to deny that the mental attitude has an immense effect on the success of diet; but with due allowance for this, my present increased mental and physical power is a somewhat unusual record, considering my family history, which is one of strong constitution and bad health.

To come now to the details of my diet: At breakfast, 8 A.M., I eat a thick slice of home-made brown bread of the kind known as 'Graham,' made without yeast [see receipts in August] (to be bought from Heywood, 42 Queen Anne Street, London, W., but better made at home), with butter and marmalade, and a cup of hot separated milk tinged with coffee. I have reserved to myself the right to continue this self-indulgence of a small amount of coffee in my milk, in spite of Dr. Haig's warnings: first, because I so dislike the taste of milk, and secondly, because it leaves me something tangible to leave off in case advancing years should make me less well. But I have a nephew who looks with horror at an aunt whom he used to think of as a kind of prophetess, who sits down at 8 in the morning in front of a coffee-pot. People often ask me why I breakfast at 8. My general answer is that I like it, and that it gives me a nice long morning; but the real reason why I recommend it to others is, that if food is taken at all in the morning, it must be taken five hours before the luncheon time, as I think piling on another meal before the previous one is digested is one of the many causes of ill-health in the present day.

At my second meal, 1.30, I eat potatoes and vegetables that are in season, experiencing no harm from *young* peas or beans, but finding asparagus quite a poison to me. Three years ago I wrote to Dr. Haig, saying that I had been less well, and asking if it could be from asparagus, as I had been eating it twice a day for ten days during my

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full spring supply. He answered that, as far as he knew, asparagus was quite harmless, and that he thought I must have taken a chill. Last year, on the same symptoms reappearing, I wrote again. Dr. Haig replied as follows: 'I write a line at once to tell you what I know will interest you—that the asparagus *is* the cause of all your troubles.' This did not surprise me very much, as I knew that thirty years ago Dr. Garrod, the great gout specialist of that time, used to forbid asparagus to his patients. In winter, for the sake of change, I sometimes eat some well-cooked lentils. At this meal I generally eat salad, with about an ounce of cheese and a good big slice of home-made white bread with butter. If I still feel hungry I eat a milky pudding and some stewed fruit. This is unwise for those who are dyspeptics, as fruit and vegetables are best kept for separate meals (see Dr. Kellogg's 'Science in the Kitchen'); fortunately, I have had a good digestion all my life. My great object has always been, within certain health conditions, to keep my feeding as nearly as possible that which will fit in with the non-dietists who surround me. For instance, I always serve potatoes with fish, that I may take something and so save the depressing effect of a person sitting so long at table without eating anything; and once or twice a month I have been known to take a little bit of fish if I fancied it, especially if I have been lunching or dining out, though I have proved conclusively that so simple a food (according to ordinary ideas) as plain boiled fish, if I eat it two or three days running, has a distinctly injurious effect on the rheumatic pain in my hip.

This sensitiveness to change of food is one of the strongest arguments used by the opponents of diet, and I confess it has some disadvantages; but this applies to all forms of abstinence, and I would rather suffer occasionally than submit to an habitually low standard of health. The

enemies of dieting—and most doctors to whom I have spoken about it are of the number—declare that the great objection to strict dieting is that it weakens the digestion. This, I think, is quite true of the Salisbury diet—namely, meat and hot water, as that gives the digestion next to nothing to do, and dilutes the gastric juices with quantities of hot water; but Dr. Haig's diet of cereals, cheese, milk, salad, raw fruit, and vegetables, is by no means easy of digestion, and the quickness with which I am now made aware of the harmfulness of many things that I used to take with apparent impunity, is in my opinion due, not to a weakened digestion, but to a return of healthy sensitiveness, induced by living for a long time on the natural food of man. I am quite sure if meat were given to horses, cows, or monkeys, though starvation might force them to eat it, they would be made very ill by such a diet. Rightly or wrongly, this seems to me the attitude to take towards the objection raised against what is called the 'weak digestion' of the vegetarian.

We have always been told that dyspeptics live for ever—this only means that nature is severely kind and sets pain as a sentinel to warn them when they have eaten something which they are unable to assimilate, and experience teaches them what to take and what to avoid; whereas the person of strong digestion, warned by no suffering, swallows everything and thinks he may do so with impunity. We all know how healthy children and healthy animals show when anything disagrees with them, and some of us well remember how the old nurses used to say, 'The sick baby always thrives,' meaning the baby whose stomach refused to be overloaded.

At 5 o'clock, for the meal which I still call 'Tea,' with the same truthfulness that I say 'The sun sets' though I know it doesn't, I drink one or two teacups of separated milk and hot water in equal proportions, and eat two or

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three pieces of toast made from home-made white bread, with butter, jam or honey, or watercress.

The meal at night when I am alone I own I seldom enjoy. I sometimes, besides home-made bread, have melted cheese (see receipts), or macaroni, sometimes rice and onions or other vegetable, with bread and butter and a little dried or fresh fruit, or both. At meals I drink very little indeed, milk being counted as nourishment rather than drink, but if I feel thirsty I take a little water—great thirst I should look upon as a sign of bad health, unless produced by excessive exercise. It is not a necessity, but I constantly drink a tumbler, or half a tumbler, of either moderately hot or cold water on getting up in the morning or on going to bed, or perhaps both.

Many people would say, 'So strict a way of diet would make life unbearable,' but after a time this strictness so changes the taste that the simpler foods are really enjoyed, and I distinctly think, that when people have dieted for several years, the amount of harm done by an occasional relapse is so small that the social convenience of it makes it worth while, so long as it is acknowledged as a concession to weakness and not a thing to be continued. It is what is done every day that matters.

People often tell me they feel so much better when they leave off the diet. This would only be a proof to me that they had not strictly dieted long enough, or had been under-nourished, and that the return to stimulating food does for them what alcohol does for those who already have too much in their system, and is merely a putting back of ultimate cure. I think all who have tried the diet for some time can always regulate it according to their varying requirements, if they will read the books and give the matter a little consideration. I, for instance, am always being told that I underfeed, and Dr. Haig never sees me without expressing his surprise that I am as well

as I am, considering that I live a good deal on vegetables and certainly, as a rule, take much below the correct amount of proteids for my age and weight. My under-feeding cannot be serious, for I sleep my six or seven hours, have not lost or gained flesh, and feel perfectly well. I often have tried to add food of a more nourishing kind, such as curd cheese, Plasmon biscuits, milk, &c., but after a few days I generally find it has a tendency to bring on a slight return of rheumatic stiffness. I am inclined to think that the doctors who preach great moderation, whatever the diet, such as Dr. Keith and Dr. Dewey, have a good deal of truth on their side, as, though the proper standard of *strength* will never be attained by the under-fed, still the full allowance of food may go to feed the particular weakness or ailment which people of a certain age are almost sure to have, and will thus prevent them reaching the level of *health* they might have on a lower standard. People seem to assimilate food so differently that, given there is no permanent pallor, especially no very white gums, or sense of fatigue, each one must judge a little for himself what he requires. Did I not suffer less from fatigue than I have ever done in my life, I should try harder to live up to the standard settled by physiologists as necessary to health, and which would doubtless be essential were I younger. I tried some Grape-nuts in the winter and felt a hot Hercules for a few days, but I believe them to be distinctly a gout-making food.

Two or three years ago I had occasion to go to an oculist to see if my spectacles required strengthening. I begged him to test my eyes thoroughly. At the end of the interview I asked him if in every respect they were up to a good average standard for my age. He said most certainly they were, and in a most healthy condition. I then asked whether he would be surprised to hear that I had for some years been what is called a vegetarian. He

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immediately assumed a serious medical manner and said, 'Up to now it seems to have done you no harm, but, *please*, don't go on with it too long!' the manner implying that terrible things might happen. I smilingly replied that I promised I would give it up the moment I was less well. I mention this to encourage people to meet the opposition which they must expect from all doctors, nurses, aurists, oculists, and dentists—in fact, all the minds trained on the lines of the regular accepted medical teaching. The study of food in relation to health is a branch of medical science as yet in its infancy, for the best authorities, as may be seen in the standard text-books on *Materia Medica*, own that they know next to nothing of metabolism, or the changes undergone by food in the body.

A great many people tell me that diet involves so deep a knowledge of physiology that they cannot possibly undertake it. They cannot risk the responsibility of going against their doctor. They say to me, 'How can I fight a man who has given his lifetime to the study of these things, and who must know so much more about them than I can, even if I give my best attention to studying them?' But is this the truth? Has not the doctor been taught to study drugs for the cure of disease rather than food as the basis of health? He never gives diet much consideration except in the case of over-eating in severe illness. In giving a mother rules for the health of her children, doctors will constantly recommend fresh air, exercise, and above all sufficient nourishment; but they rarely give any details as to the best *kind* of nourishment. I have heard of a doctor who recommended a non-flesh diet to one of his patients, and on expressing his surprise at finding he had really followed it, said, 'There are at least 120 of my patients who would be benefited by it, but not one of them would do it.' I think this is only natural, as the moment the patient was

better he would say, 'Does Dr. — practise this diet himself and in his own family? If not, why am I to do it now I am better?' Can anyone think that vaccination would be so universally accepted if doctors and their children were not themselves vaccinated?

Only those people who have strength of character enough to take responsibility against public opinion should attempt the simpler food diet. To begin it haphazard with no knowledge and little faith is almost bound to end in failure. The undeniable success of the diet upon myself has caused many people to say, 'There is no doubt this diet suits *you*,' with an emphasis on the 'you,' intended to convey 'what suits you, would be fatal to me.' With these I go no further. The real fact is an immense number of people are very fairly well, and much enjoy the good things of life, including food, between their attacks of illness. They entirely forget the expense of time, strength, and money entailed by these little attacks of colds, bilious headaches, feverishness, &c., the mornings spent in bed, the afternoons on a sofa in a darkened room, the days lost at business from bronchitis and influenza.

If people could once be persuaded that the reduction of luxurious food does mean improved health, I think I should hear less about the extreme self-denial involved in my diet. The man who comes down in the morning and grumbles because he likes neither of the two hot dishes provided for breakfast, would be the last to consider himself either a luxurious liver or an invalid; but, having been convinced by the preaching of years that he must 'keep himself up' by eating well, any change from a three-meal a day meat diet, without considering sandwiches at 5 o'clock tea, strikes him with horror as a low diet which will result in 'running down' and losing the strength of mind and body so necessary for work.