

THE LITERARY REGIMEN.

HINTS TO YOUNG WRITERS.



ONE of the most puzzling questions with which the literary beginner is confronted is how the more popular and successful of our writers get their ideas. The aspirant, as a rule, has no doubt about his technical capacity, but there is a something he feels, trivial, but necessary, that eludes him. 'Give me,' he will say, 'a subject, and I can write upon it as well, or better, than most people; but somehow he cannot get this subject. There is, too, a distinctive something about these distinguished writers, a flavour, what people call 'style of their own,' that is desirable, and yet singularly remote. A few suggestions to those entering this respectable, and, as we are told, by no means unremunerative profession, may therefore not be altogether out of place.

Now, AT THE RISK OF OFFENDING THE YOUNG BEGINNER'S ILLUSIONS,

we must remind him of one or two homely but important facts. Homely as they are, they explain the whole matter. It is common knowledge that, after a prolonged fast, the brain works in a feeble manner, the current of one's thoughts is pallid and shallow, and it is difficult to fix the attention, and impossible to mobilise the full forces of the mind. On the other hand, immediately after a sound meal the brain feels massive, but static. Tea is conducive to a gentle flow of pleasing thoughts, and anyone who has taken Easton's syrup of the hypophosphites will recall at once the state of cerebral erethism, of general mental alacrity, that followed on a dose. Again, champagne (followed, perhaps, by a *sourçon* of whisky) leads to a mood essentially humorous and playful, while about three dozen oysters taken fasting will, in most cases, produce a profound and even ominous melancholy. We might enlarge further upon this topic, on the brutalising influence of beer, the sedative quality of lettuce, and the stimulating consequences of curried chicken; but enough has been said to point our argument. It is that such facts as this can surely indicate only one conclusion, and that is the entire dependence of literary qualities upon the diet of the writer.

TO COME NOW TO MORE EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS.

It is imperative, if you wish to write with any power and freshness at all, that you should utterly ruin your digestion. Any literary person will confirm this statement. At any cost the thing must be done, even if you have to live on German sausage, onions, and cheese to do it. So long as you turn all your dietary to flesh and blood you will get no literature out of it. 'We learn in suffering what we teach in song.' This is why men who live at home with their mothers, or have their elder sisters to see after them, never by any chance however great their literary ambition may be, write anything but minor poetry. They get their meals at regular hours, and done to a turn, and that plays the very devil—if you will pardon the phrase—with one's imagination.

A careful study of

THE RECORDS OF LITERARY MEN IN THE PAST,

and a considerable knowledge of living authors, convinces us that there are two chief ways of losing one's digestion and engendering literary capacity in England. You go and live in humble lodgings—we could name dozens of prominent men who have fed a great ambition in this way—or you marry a nice girl who does not understand house-keeping. The former is the more efficacious method because, as a rule, the nice girl wants to come and sit on your knee all day, and that is a great impediment to literary composition. Belonging to a club—even a literary club—where you can dine in absolute ruin to the literary beginner. Many a bright young fellow, who has pushed his way, or has been pushed by indiscreet friends into the society of successful literary men, has been spoiled by this fatal error, and he has saved his stomach only to lose his reputation.

HAVING GOT RID OF YOUR DIGESTION,

then, the common condition of all good literature, the next

thing is to arrange your dietary for the particular literary effect you desire. And here we may point out the secrecy observed in such matters by literary men. Mr R. L. Stevenson, indeed, has fled to Samoa to hide his extremely elaborate methods, and to keep his kitchen servants out of the reach of bribery. Even Mr Walter Besant, though he is fairly communicative to the young aspirant, has dropped no hints of the plain, pure, and wholesome *menu* he presumably follows. Mr Sala professes to eat everything, but that is probably his badinage. Possibly he has one staple and takes all the rest as condiment. Then what did Shakespeare live on? Bacon? And Mr Barrie, though he has

*débris* of a meal—necessarily throws one back upon remoné and hypothesis in this matter. For instance, it is said that Mr Lang consumes nothing but salmon, and that Mr J. K. Jerome is most successful on well-boiled mutton and caper sauce, with rum and milk in the morning; but neither of these statements is probably correct. Nor does Mr Haggard feed entirely on raw meat. Indeed, for lurid and somewhat pessimistic narratives there is nothing like the ordinary currant bun eaten new and in quantity.

A LIGHT HUMOROUS STYLE IS BEST ATTAINED by soda water and dry biscuits, following *café noir*. The



W. J. Barrard amateur photo, Wellington.

A QUIET STREAM, UPPER HUTT.

written a delightful book about his pipes and tobacco, full of suggestion to the young humorist, lets out nothing or next to nothing of his meat and drink. His hints about pipes, by-the-by, are very extensively followed, and nowadays every ambitious pressman smokes in public at least one well-burnt briar with an eccentric stem—even at some personal inconvenience. But this jealous eulogium on the part of successful men—you notice they never let even the interviewer see their kitchens or the

soda water may be either Scotch or Irish, as the taste inclines. For a florid, tawdry style the beginner must take nothing but boiled water, stewed vegetables, and an interest in the movements against vivisection, opium, alcohol, tobacco, sarcophagy, and the male sex.

FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE LEADING REVIEWS,

boiled pork and cabbage may be eaten, with bottled beer, followed by apple dumpling. This effectually suppresses any tendency to facetiousness, or what respectable English people call *double entendre*, and brings you *en rapport* with the serious people who read these publications. So soon as you begin to feel wakened and restless discontinue writing. For what is vulgarly known as the *fin de siècle* type of publication, on the other hand, one should limit oneself entirely to an assorted bread shop for a week or so, with the exception of an occasional tea in a literary household. This, too, might be tried for a pseudonym. All people fed mainly on scones become clever. This regimen, with an occasional debauch upon macaroons, chocolate, and cheap champagne, and brisk daily walks from Oxford Circus, through Regent-street, Piccadilly, and the Green Park, to Westminster and back, should make one a serious rival to the authors of 'The Green Bay Tree.'

It is not known

WHAT MR KIPLING TAKES TO MAKE HIM SO PECULIAR.

Many of us would like to know. Possibly it is something he picked up in the jungle—berries or something. A friend who made a few tentative experiments to this end turned out nothing beyond a will, and that he dictated and left incomplete. (It was scarcely on the lines of a *crimé* story, being blasphemous, and mentioning no property except his inside.) For short stories of the detective type, cold strong tea and hard biscuits are fruitful eating; while for a social science novel one should take an abundance of boiled rice and toast and-water.

However,

THESE REMARKS ARE MAINLY BY WAY OF SUGGESTION.

Every writer in the end, so soon as his digestion is destroyed, must ascertain for himself the peculiar diet that suits him best—that is, which disagrees with him the most. If everything else fails he might try some chemical food. A small quantity of arsenic might perhaps with advantage be mixed in. 'Jabber's Food for Authors,' by the way, well advertised, and with portraits of literary men in their best drawing rooms. 'Fed entirely on Jabber's Food,' with medical certificates of its unwholesomeness, and favourable and expurgated reviews of works written on it, ought to be a brilliant success in this age of literary aspirants.



W. J. Barrard amateur photo, Wellington.

ON THE AIRTERE.