

done, though I have merely worked out his suggestion. His only revolutionary proposal is to displace the wind star by the "rathe primrose" for Forsaken, on the strength of a quotation familiar to every reader of Mason's little text-book on the English language. For the rest he followed his authorities, and has followed them now to the remote recesses of the literary lumber-room and into the twopenny book-box. From that receptacle one copy of him was disinterred only a day or so ago; a hundred and seventy pages of prose, chiefly alliterative, several coloured plates, enthusiastic pencil-marking of a vanished somebody, and, besides, an early Victorian flavour of dust and a dim vision of a silent conversation in a sunlit flower garden--altogether I think very cheap at twopence. The fashion has changed altogether now. In these days we season our love-making with talk about heredity, philanthropy, and sanitation, and present one another with Fabian publications instead of wild flowers. But in the end, I fancy, the business comes to very much the same thing.

## THE LITERARY REGIMEN

At the risk of offending the young beginner's illusions, he must be reminded of one or two homely but important facts bearing upon literary production. Homely as they are, they explain much that is at first

puzzling. This perplexing question of distinction; the quality of being somehow fresh--individual. Really it is a perfectly simple 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, 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 erethrism, of general mental alacrity, that followed on a dose. Again, champagne (followed perhaps by a soupçon 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. One might enlarge further upon this topic, on the brutalising influence of beer, the sedative quality of lettuce, 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.

I may remind the reader, in confirmation of this suggestion, of what is perhaps the most widely known fact about Carlyle, that on one memorable occasion he threw his breakfast out of the window. Why did he throw his breakfast out of the window? Surely his friends have cherished the story out of no petty love of depreciatory detail? There are, however, those who would have us believe it was mere childish petulance at a chilly

rasher or a hard-boiled egg. Such a supposition is absurd. On the other hand, what is more natural than an outburst of righteous indignation at the ruin of some carefully studied climax of feeding? The thoughtful literary beginner who is not altogether submerged in foolish theories of inspiration and natural genius will, we fancy, see pretty clearly that I am developing what is perhaps after all the fundamental secret of literary art.

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, suggests two chief ways of losing one's digestion and engendering literary capacity. 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 housekeeping. 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 is 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 spoilt by this fatal error, and he has saved his stomach 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. Stevenson fled to Samoa to hide his extremely elaborate methods, and to keep his kitchen servants out of the reach of bribery. Even Sir Walter Besant, though he is fairly communicative to the young aspirant, has dropped no hints of the plain, pure, and wholesome menu he follows. Sala professed to eat everything, but that was probably his badinage. Possibly he had one staple, and took the rest as condiment. Then what did Shakespeare live on? Bacon? And Mr. Barrie, though he has written a delightful book about his pipe 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 are very extensively followed, and nowadays every ambitious young pressman smokes in public at least one well-burnt briar with an eccentric stem--even at some personal inconvenience. But this jealous reticence on the part of successful men--you notice they never let even the interviewer see their

kitchens or the débris of a meal--necessarily throws one back upon rumour and hypothesis in this matter. Mr. Andrew Lang, for instance, is popularly associated with salmon, but that is probably a wilful delusion. Excessive salmon, far from engendering geniality, will be found in practice a vague and melancholy diet, tending more towards the magnificent despondency of Mr. Hall Caine.

Nor does Mr. Haggard feed entirely on raw meat. Indeed, for lurid and somewhat pessimistic narrative, 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 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 to 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 wakeful 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 to an aërated bread shop for a week or so, with the exception of an occasional tea in a literary household. All people fed mainly on scones become clever. And 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 result in an animated society satire.

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 an ordinary will, being blasphemous, and mentioning no property except his inside.) For short stories of the detective type, strong cold 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. "Jabber's Food for Authors," by the bye, well advertised, and with portraits of literary men, in their 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 among literary aspirants. A small but sufficient quantity of arsenic might with advantage be mixed in.