KIDNEY.

By the Jews the kidneys were supposed to locate the affections; and hence the phrase "A man of another kidney."

The main function of the human kidney, broadly stated, is to carry off used up products, especially in the form of urea from the blood, as waste after muscular effects, and as functional *débris*, flushed with water, from the body. But physiologists now know that the kidneys also secrete some important matters which they pour from themselves into the blood, and which are essential for keeping up the balance of health; so that, although the kidneys may remain well able to carry off the excreted urine, yet if their other particular secretive powers fail through impairment, then a speedy wasting of the blood ensues. Moreover, unless arrested, it leads to a fatal issue.

Under these circumstances, however, we have learnt from modern medical science, that the administration of kidney substance got from a healthy animal recently killed, will serve to restore the sum of vitality; quite small doses at infrequent times seeming to be sufficiently effectual. For which highly important purposes our leading manufacturing chemists now supply the renal (kidney) substance of animals, whether in dry powder, or in tabloid form, most carefully and reliably prepared. Some of the earliest mediciners, in their merely empirical way, gave the donkey's kidneys for diseases of the same organs in their patients. Recently, in thirty-five sick persons suffering from various diseased conditions of the kidneys, an administration of fresh, healthy animal kidney, or of an extract prepared from it, has proved of much authentically recorded value.

Hot kidney puddings used to be a favourite commodity

at stalls in the New Cut; whilst early South African travellers have related that among the Bushmen, when a sheep is killed for a feast, the bones are crushed, and, together with the raw kidneys, are distributed amongst the children, who seemed at the time to enjoy the delicacy as much as ours do cakes.

KINGFISHER.

THE Kingfisher is the *Alcedo hispida*, or *Halkuōn*. This handsome, diminutive bird, of gorgeous plumage, blue and white, orange and green, frequents (or did frequent, for it is becoming scarce throughout England, except in Oxfordshire) our many rivulets with woody banks, darting rapidly up stream beneath the branches, whilst snatching insects or feeding on fish. The marvellous Halcyon of the ancients is believed to have been identical with this Kingfisher of modern times. It was supposed that the waters were becalmed by the kingfishers whilst building their nests on the surface of the sea. Hence a halcyon time came to signify happy, tranquil days. The parent bird was represented as brooding for seven days over its floating cradle, which was thought to possess valuable medicinal properties. Likewise, up to the present time, the bird has been regarded, whether living or dead, as exercising remarkable powers.

Marlow, in his *Jew of Malta* (1633), says:—

> "But how now stands the wind?
> Into what corner peers my halcyon's bill?"

A rustic superstitious belief has long prevailed that a Kingfisher suspended within doors by a thread will distinguish the quarter from which the wind blows, and will point towards the same with its bill turned thitherward.

Shakespeare (1 *Henry VI.*, Act i., Sc. 1), recognizes this notion when making Kent say about time-servers:—

> "And turn their halcyon beaks
> With every gale, and vary of their masters,
> As knowing nought, like dogs, but following."

Its technical name is from the Greek words "*als*," "sea," and "*kuo*," "to conceive," in allusion to the hatching of her eggs by the female birds on the quiet waters. The seven days before and the seven days after the shortest day were called by the ancients the "Halcyon days," those of the winter solstice. Dryden spoke to this effect when he said :—

> "Amidst our arms as quiet you shall be
> As halcyons brooding on a winter's sea."

In confirmation of the idea that this bird told the way of the wind, we read in Southey's *Commonplace Book*, from du Pratz: "It is well known the Kingfisher goes always against the wind; but perhaps few people are aware that it preserves the same property when it is dead. I myself hung a dead one by a silk thread directly over a sea compass, and I can declare it is a fact that the bill was always turned towards the wind."

To the Kingfisher was also ascribed the power of enriching its owner, of preserving peace and harmony in families, and of imparting to a lady who should wear its feathers additional grace and beauty. When De Quincey was a lad, the sight of a Kingfisher with a broken wing put him into a passion of poignant grief.

Robert Lovell (1661) wrote: "Some affirme that being rosted and eaten the flesh (of the Kingfisher) helps those that are demoniack, which seemeth to be fabulous."

Dr. Salmon, in the *London Pharmacopœia* (1695), notes: "The flesh roasted and eaten is affirmed by some to help those that are possessed; the heart dried and hung about the neck of a child cures the epilepsie."

Kingfishers possess the faculty of reproducing the contents of the stomach at will and pleasure, so as to reject the indigestible parts of what they eat. Their nests are found in slimy holes of banks near water, and are composed of ejected fish bones. Having this resemblance in character to the modern medicinal remedy Ichthyol, (which *see*), the nests probably were justly credited of old with some of the same remedial virtues. The round eggs are of a deep pink colour until the yolk has been blown out. The dried body stuffed with spices was placed in former times with woollen clothing as a protection from moths. A kingfisher's bill is remarkably long, and formed like a pair of pincers for catching small fish and reptiles. "The bird," says Wood, "is greatly susceptible of music, provided that it be played in a slow and solemn strain, like the old ecclesiastical chants." When viewed against fallen snow it strangely loses all the gorgeous appearance of its brilliant plumage.

LADYBIRD.

THE small familiar Ladybird is the *Coccionella septempunctata.* This well-known and favourite little red-coated insect, with its black spots and friendly habits, is associated in all our minds with fine weather and thoughts of good luck. It goes by various popular names: "Mary's beetle," "Lady calf," "Cushy cow," "Dowdy cow," "Lady clock," "Fly golding," "Golden bug," and (in Germany) "Mary fowl." In Suffolk it is known as "Bishop's Burnaby," and in Norfolk "Burnabee" or "Burney bee."

> "Beeshy, Beeshy, Burnaby,
> Tell me when your wedding will be;
> If to be to-morrow day
> Take your wings, and fly away."