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A DISCUSSION OF THE MERITS OF THE DIFFERENT ARTICLES OF INFANT DIETARY.*

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In introducing this subject to you I need offer no apology. In infants and young children diseases of the digestive tract are much more frequent than of any other part of the body. Especially during the hot season is this the case, when the child's food is so apt to sour either before or after ingestion, owing to the presence of micro-organisms.

Again, an infant is too often given improper food, which it is unable to digest.

These facts make the subject a very important one, for from infants men and women grow, and if we have not healthy thriving infants how can we expect to have healthy, vigorous, intellectual men? The future of a child depends to a great extent on its physical development during the first few years of life.

The subject is of special interest at the present time also, owing to the constant advance of the purely scientific aspect of medicine and the better methods of utilizing these facts. It is not my intention to discuss now the amount of food which it is right to give a child at different ages, nor to refer to the proper intervals of feeding. Both of them are very important questions, but which the limits of this paper will not allow me to deal with. Assuming then that we have all necessary knowledge on these points, let us endeavor to enquire into the merits of the different articles of food which are given to infants and young children.

An infant suckled at the breast by its mother

starts in life under the best possible auspices. It starts with a natural advantage, and if the suckling can be continued for nine months or a year nothing more can be desired, under average conditions. But, unfortunately, many events may occur to deprive the child of this natural advantage, and it is then that the respective merits of wet nursing, prepared foods, and cow's milk are discussed. It is then that the physician should be able to give advice. Under such circumstances, how often the guidance of the child's food is based on an advertisement read somewhere, or a pamphlet received either by the friends or the physician. We are all inundated by showers of documents, calling our attention to all sorts of proprietary medicines, and to infant foods.

Henri Nestlé will tell you that his food is better for the child than the mother's milk, or cow's milk. I ask how often are we deceived by these bold statements, and without knowledge or investigation believe the word of the man who has every incentive to push his commercial article on our notice, and order the advertised article for our patient.

All authorities (excepting the manufacturers of some of the infant foods) agree that the mother's milk is the most suitable food for the child. Starting out with this hypothesis, any substitute for mother's milk should approach it as nearly as possible in constitution. This presupposes a knowledge of its chemical constituents. Analyses made at different times have not agreed, varying in their statement of the amount of fat and casein present. The explanation is that the constituents of the milk vary at the different periods of lactation; also with the condition of the mother's health, and with the period of milking. That is, the foremilk, mid-milk, and strippings are very different in the relative proportion of their constituents. The analysis which is generally accepted at the present time, and one made with a full knowledge of all modifying circumstances is as follows:

Reaction.	Faintly Alkaline.
Spec. gravity	1028 to 1034
Fat	3 to 4%
Casein	1 to 2%
Sugar	6 to 7%
Salts	1.5 to 1½%
Total solids	12 to 13%
Water	87 to 88%

* Read before the Ontario Med. Association, June, 1891.