

WAR TIME DIET AND HEALTH

At a time when the problem of domestic food supply is peculiarly pressing and when dietetic habits are undergoing enforced changes, the question must be frequently asked whether there is any widespread danger to health in these conditions. Any one attempting to answer it must recognize at once that an economic consideration has to be admitted. Rising prices, unless offset by rising wages, must make for malnutrition among the poor. The purpose of the present inquiry is to attend more particularly to those in better circumstances who are able to pay the cost of the staple foods but who are making unwonted substitutions.

When a new dietary is adopted in opposition to the dictates of appetite and pursued under protest, an unconscious reduction of intake may be expected. Some loss of weight may follow, but equilibrium at a new level will ordinarily be established. Few of us have discerned the simple principle to which Doctor Lusk has lately called attention; that we can be large people, maintained on large rations, or much smaller people with a much lighter requirement. Whether the reduction is to be desired or not depends on the original condition. For a considerable fraction of the adult population, weight reduction is calculated to add to the expectation of life.

Our food serves a constructive purpose, but this is the function of but a small part of the total income. A far greater proportion is utilized as fuel to support muscular activity. The maintenance of the body temperature is secured by the oxidation of food material, and it may be suggested that the sedentary individual conserves food when he avoids exposure to cold. If it becomes necessary to save food and coal at the same time the importance of dressing warmly is obvious.

To keep the living tissues in good condition certain chemical compounds—amino-acids, "vitamines," and mineral salts—are indispensable. These specific needs are more surely met when the diet is varied and inclusive than when it is monotonous. This is a teaching which has been greatly emphasized in the past few years. Without questioning the principle, we may still rest assured that the average citizen is in little danger of wrecking his health by the omission of particular "building-stones" from his daily supply.

Among the fuel foods a great deal of substitution seems practicable. To do without cane-sugar is a galling annoyance; more because it deprives us of so many attractive dishes than by reason of any peculiar merit in sugar itself. It is only in recent times that this product has