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EDITORIAL.

A QUESTION OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE.

Everything which tends to raise the standard of national health is of paramount importance, and nurses engaged both in preventive and curative work should make the acquisition of knowledge in this respect a matter of conscience. Ignorance may be excusable in members of the public, but it is inexcusable in those who are pledged to conserve and promote the health of the people.

Amongst the methods by which this may be achieved proper feeding is of vital importance, in sickness and in health, from the cradle to the grave.

Indeed before the infant arrives the foundations of its health have been laid, for better or worse. The Spartans, some of the most virile people the world has known, were wise in surrounding their women-with-child, who were bred to become the efficient mothers of soldiers, with every care and honour, for the influence of the pre-natal existence of the infant remains with it throughout life, and the adequate nourishment of the mother in the ante-natal period is of the utmost importance. It is true that Nature, prodigal in her care for the future race, often protects the health of the infant at the expense of the mother, yet it cannot be gainsaid that many infants are born susceptible to rickets, susceptible to dental caries, and other diseases, because of malnutrition of their mothers while child-bearing.

It is here that district-nurse-midwives can exercise a most useful and important influence. They have usually the confidence of the mothers-to-be, and in the pre-natal visits can explain to them the importance of suitable diet. Their instructions usually fall upon willing ears, and they have their reward when healthy babies with stable nervous systems are born into the world.

The value of breast feeding is another point which needs emphasising, first because a mother's milk is the food most suited to her child, and the risk entailed by feeding an infant with milk contaminated, or improperly modified, is eliminated. If it be said that some mothers are unable to feed their infants it can be pointed out that Sir F. Truby King has triumphantly proved that this difficulty may be overcome in the majority of cases, both as to the quantity and quality of the mother's milk by suitable dieting. In the cases which remain, the safest method is undoubtedly to use a suitable dried milk which is clean and sterile while maintaining intact the essential vitamins.

When we come to consider the food of older children whether at home or in schools, institutions, and hospitals, it is necessary to study the value and composition of food stuffs and the purity of supplies, and, in relation to institutions, to remember that the lowest tenders are not always the cheapest, and that, apart from patriotic reasons, there is wisdom in paying a higher price for home grown meat, and for fish and vegetables of which the freshness is guaranteed, because their nutritive value is greater than that of the imported varieties.

Because good and sufficient food is of the utmost importance for growing children, especial attention should be given to this point for school children of all classes. The best educational results cannot be attained where the scholars are underfed, and this needs emphasis not only in regard to lower grade schools, but also to our great public schools.

For adults, whether brain or manual workers, good wholesome, well-cooked food is necessary. It is little use if the supplies obtained are of good quality if meals are negligently prepared and ill cooked. The dearest foods are not necessarily those of the greatest nutritive value, and the homekeeper should daily study current prices, and take pride in presenting a variety of meals prepared with due regard to economy, as well as to nutrition, attractively served, so as to produce a sense of well being and content in the workers, and actually to maintain their health.

Everyone will realise that high quality in the food provided for the sick is essential. Medical treatment must be allied with careful feeding if the strength of the patient is to be supported as it should be. The feeding, if left to the nurse, as not unfrequently happens, must be intelligent, and with due regard to the invalid's power of assimilation. It is worse than useless, if the patient is coaxed to take food which remains in the stomach undigested.

Lastly, it is important that nurses themselves should be well and carefully fed so that their resistance to infection may be fortified.

Nurses at the present day have some instruction in sickroom cookery as part of their preparation for the State Examination in Nursing, but remembering that the maintenance of an A.1. Nation, which is of supreme importance, largely depends upon the way it is fed, they can hardly know too much concerning food and its preparation, and will do well after they have obtained their State Certificate to continue their study of this vital question.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)