PREAMBLE TO POST-WAR FOOD EDUCATION

BY

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We have made during the war a far more systematic attempt than ever before to influence the public in the choice and preparation of their food. The scope and plan of the wartime campaign will be briefly examined below. The question that naturally arises at the present stage in our affairs is this: What are our prospects of continuing this wholesome work in more normal times, and what are the conditions for its success?

But, first, how far will this leaven of teaching and persuasion be necessary after the war? We can argue for it in this wise. A sound dietary is part of the broad basis of social stamina and good health; and we may assume that a fair proportion of our annual expenditure on ill-health is indirectly attributable to poor feeding. The exact proportion could scarcely be demonstrated; but the evidence is sufficiently good to make it worth our while to see whether we can effect a saving. This, however, is still a matter of persuading the public to eat the right food, even where wage-levels and prices are so adjusted as to allow a reasonable standard of consumption; the food may be available, but it does not follow that it will be consumed. The truth is that when a civilized community has a very wide choice of foods there is nothing in Nature to prevent it from adopting the most lamentable pattern of food habits; and within that pattern of food habits it will live and die for all time unless some effort is made to change the pattern. It is useless to hope that tastes and habits of this kind possess some internal power of effecting their own improvement. Man is an omnivorous animal, a fact to which, no doubt, he in some measure owes his survival; but he is ill supplied with instincts in the choice of food; and he has to pay for his survival by gradually shifting the choice of his foods on to a rational level. He will otherwise, since he is obviously not protected by instinct, be subject merely to a mass of whims, traditions, customs, and cravings.

In that case the work might as well be undertaken. There is no chance that a brief campaign will have any effect whatsoever; this is a job for a lifetime. It is one, moreover, that needs strict scientific method and an appreciation of the anthropological material with which we are dealing. The technique is that of the leaven and not that of the textbook. Provided we understand this and admit the premisses, there seems good reason for continuing our campaign of food education, even if we have to adapt our style and our methods to the conditions of peace.

Food Advice Centre

The structure assumed by the present campaign is somewhat after this manner. Most of the work is fostered by the Ministry of Food, in the sense that considerable funds are required and that the Ministry is naturally felt by a people at war to be the well-head of sound advice in the matter of food. The other Departments and the voluntary organizations, that all have their part in the work, acquire a peculiar virtue in the mind of the public through their association with the Ministry. The Ministry of Food may properly deny that it is more than an equal partner in this campaign with the Ministries of Education and Health; but the fact is that "food" to the public means the Ministry of Food.

The immediate contact the Ministry has with the public lies, of course, through the Press, the radio, the leaflet, and the poster. Its more pervasive influence is exerted through two special devices—that of the "food advice centres" and that of the "food leaders' schemes." These are perhaps the most interesting aspects of the whole campaign. All else that the Ministry has done by providing itself with experimental and practical kitchens and developing an effective news-letter and bulletin service is merely what any serious organization of the kind would do if it had the funds.

The method of the food advice centre is that of renting a shop in a good thoroughfare, equipping it for cookery demonstrations, and staffing it with two or three qualified

women. Centres of this nature were first opened by the Ministry in 1940, and there are now some 40 of them. It is, of course, obvious that the direct influence they can have reaches a very small percentage of the public. As often in cases of this kind, a centre or a shop window may vaguely affect the public mind by its mere existence; it impresses upon the shopping women of an area that food and cooking are matters of national interest, even if no more than 10% of them enter the premises or pause to study the window display. But it would be almost impossible to assess the extent of this influence. As time went on, the centre became rather the office of the organizer, from which she might arrange for the delivering of lectures or demonstrations in factories, village halls, and so forth. The ability of two or three qualified women to permeate a large area was really the factor that counted; and the technique of the travelling van, of the news-letter, of the shop display, and of the poster have all been tried.

Food Leaders' Scheme

But by 1942 it was evident that a very large proportion of housewives were still uninfluenced to any calculable extent. Some new device was needed for the dissemination of elementary teaching. The earliest of the food leaders' schemes was initiated in Birmingham, and they have since spread rather unevenly through the West Midlands and the Home Counties, with a gradual but perceptible growth elsewhere. It must be noted that here the Ministry of Food assumes no direct responsibility, though in practice a fair amount of the basic work has usually to be undertaken by the food advice organizers. The idea of street or village "food leaders," who would transmit advice and information to their neighbours, was soon realized to be insufficient unless it were associated with some kind of elementary classes for the prospective leaders. This not only brought the schemes within the sphere of what is known as "adult education" but it might imply that premises would at times be needed for the holding of classes. Now, it is the Ministry of Education that is responsible for adult education; and, so far as the Ministry of Food is concerned, almost the only available premises in any area are the schools. In practice, however, what has often happened is that the women's organizations, prompted by the Ministry of Food, have gone ahead with the selection of their prospective food leaders and, on making formal application to their local education authority, found it too short-staffed to undertake more than a fraction of the lectures that were needed. But the Ministry of Education remains ultimately the responsible department; and in theory the education authority of each area transmits to the local food advice organizer most of its functions in the training of the food leaders.

There was probably a further doubt that for a time affected the judgment of the Ministry of Food. The schemes had not been originated by the Ministry of Food, but by an education authority. The women they were intended to organize were almost entirely unqualified lay women, whose advice and counsel would presumably be sought and absorbed by an indeterminate mass of housewives. If there were in the recesses of the Ministry a few tolerant minds prepared to take the risk of something going wrong, several of the practising dietitians were more dubious. It was accepted, of course, that the food leaders were not to teach or lecture; they were to be no more than a leaven of right thinking in the urban streets and in the countryside. But the distinction could not readily be drawn; no one could forbid them to lay down the laws of correct feeding. In effect, the trained dietitians have not always been enthusiastic in their dealings with the local food leaders, even if they have done their duty by them: the two modes of teaching and persuasion have never quite fused into a single instrument.

Style of Wartime Food Education

But when we come to examine the literature of the movement, embodied in its pamphlets and news-letters, it occurs to us at once that, however enduring may be the knowledge imparted, the form and style of the teaching have almost invariably a wartime flavour. The reason given for the proffered advice is the scarcity of many foods; and the appeal is for housewives to play their part in maintaining the fitness

of a people at war. The assumption behind it all is that there will come a time when these motives will no longer operate. It is, in brief, a wartime movement only, and there can be no unbroken transition from the forms of war to those of peace. The fact is that the campaign is devised to catch the largest and least-organized section of our adult population, the housewives, and to draw it functionally into the total war economy. In its "food leader" aspect it meets a need, in that it attempts to resolve the self-contained lives of an increasing number of housewives into the common effort; it gives them the *raison d'être* for their many discomforts and supplies them with the first requisite of every trade or calling—a specialized and easily accessible literature. There is no question that the news-letters and pamphlets distributed from the local centres of instruction have a very unifying and stabilizing effect upon the communities they reach.

After the war we shall have a different and a somewhat more complex problem to face. Much of the way in which we re-orientate our campaign will depend upon the extent of the final rupture between war and peace. If all the forms and phrases of war lapse with the transition, the process of re-orientation will be far more tedious and debatable. Because of the prestige it has earned, and the common admission that if anyone has a right to talk about food it is a Ministry of Food, the survival of the Ministry even in a very modified form is a matter of some importance to us. It is an elementary fact that the teaching of other Ministries on the subject of food is suspect to many members of the public, and they would be well advised, perhaps, to leave most of it either to a reconstituted Ministry of Food or to some body contrived for the purpose, that will have to earn its reputation by its work.

No small part of the relative success of the Ministry of Food has been due to the fact that it has never announced any intention of *educating* the public; it has merely "advised" and "informed." We must recognize that the average adult woman in this country has no wish to be further *educated*, least of all in matters of diet; but she is quite prepared to assimilate learning about subjects that seem to her interesting or useful. If we want the post-war woman to absorb into her daily life the knowledge of food values we must make our matter both digestible and palatable. One lesson from our wartime experience seems clear; and that is that probably 90% of housewives will not come to formal classes and demonstrations. They may be led to do so in the future; for the moment they do not. The only obvious method of reaching them is through the technique of the social leaven, the stall in the market-place, the village expert, the informal parlour gossip, the flower-show quiz. We shall have to take our chance that from time to time some curious doctrine or twisted interpretation will gain credence; the risk has always to be taken by those who set themselves the slow task of changing the daily habits and the ingrained patterns of taste of a population. But we must recognize from the start the distinction made in the public mind between *health* teaching on such matters as venereal disease, diphtheria immunization, or dental treatment, and *food* teaching that has reference to a positive and daily satisfaction. The clinics, the medical practitioners, and the societies established for health propaganda can all play their part; but if the movement is to be effective it must mean by food precisely what the public means by food—that is, far more than a physiological basis for sound metabolism.

Changed Conditions of Peace

To what extent, then, may we assume that our wartime methods will have to be modified to meet the requirements of peace? Our main public is the community of housewives; and much will depend on our ability to maintain in the mind of the average housewife the sense of her social function. There is a risk that this sense will be lost when the close of hostilities relaxes the cohesive bonds that unite us in some measure towards a common task. It seems likely that the joint consultative committees of the women's organizations that have emerged in the course of the war will survive it and will provide a starting-point for the period of new construction. They account between them, it is true, for only a relatively small proportion of the housewives of the country; but they

are a pervasive influence, and a joint committee of this nature can often take on a vitality of its own that transcends in influence the sum of its component parts.

What we have to seek is some method of creating a ferment of change in the views and practices of women in the kitchen. The concept of "food leaders" is the most satisfactory one that has so far emerged from our wartime experience. But there are two or three comments that must be made on the scheme as it might in theory be applied in a post-war economy. (1) We shall have, in my opinion, to discard the phrase "food leaders" and contrive a more suitable one. The term is accepted in war, when a nation takes on the semblance of an army; but it is only just accepted. There are even now some doubts whether the title and the badge may not arouse more resistance than respect among a woman's neighbours. (2) The flow of news-letters seems an essential feature of such a movement: it is both its pulse-beat and its organic unity. (3) The movement will have to be associated, both in the mind of the average housewife and in that of the dispersed body of women who have to do the work, with a source of authority that enjoys high prestige. What that source will be it is not for me to suggest: the practice in this country is often to establish a council with a certain degree of independence, which is known to possess the confidence of a State Department. (4) If there are a number of qualified women employed in the campaign, as at present, they will have to be selected not merely for their dietetic training but for their appreciation of the techniques that will be in use.

There are, no doubt, many among them who begin to comprehend their business as a branch of applied anthropology; but the merging of expert and inexpert functions should be more complete and durable than it has so far proved.

Basis of Post-war Food Education

There are two further aspects of a post-war campaign on which we may comment. It is a principle of educational theory that teaching in mature life is best associated with a practical job that concerns the learner; the confusion lies in our tendency to label this kind of teaching as merely *technical*, whereas it implies no more than that the job is the obvious point upon which we should concentrate. Now, a housewife's job is the buying, storage, and final preparation of the food; and the kitchen is her workshop. If the Ministry of Food survives the war in some form it might do worse than present itself to the public as essentially the housewives' Ministry; and the basic substance of our story should be the shopping basket and the kitchen stove. But we must by all means avoid concentrating our teaching either at the extreme of the "food values" kind of discourse or at the extreme of the "cooking and bottling demonstration." They both have their place; but they must be related to our central duty of realizing housewifery as a social function with its tools of work, its raw materials, and its body of consumers.

The other aspect that is worth mention is this. A movement of this nature should have its local habitation, the permanent sign of its existence, the source from which its influence is diffused. It might be suggested briefly that there are three types of establishment we could use for our purpose. One is the obvious shop premises adapted as now for the "food advice centre" service. On the assumption that some of these centres are maintained after the war, it will be necessary to review their work and decide how far they are really worth the cost. The second is the school kitchen, with which a large proportion of our primary schools are apparently to be provided; these kitchens are the concern of the mothers whose children will be fed from them, and they may well become the natural gathering-place, on selected evenings, of many of the housewives of a neighbourhood. The third establishment we might seek to use is the grocer's shop and the dairy. It is true that some educationists would prefer to have their food-teaching uncontaminated by the flavours of commercially retailed bacon and butter. But shops are still a part of our national life; and they are a significant part of the experience of every housewife. If we are to influence popular tastes we must some time begin with the distributive trades, for it is obvious that if we do not draw them into collaboration we may find ourselves competing with them.

Some such course as this will have to be adopted if the wartime experiment in dietetic teaching is not to lapse when the phase of reconstruction is upon us. We have suggested a few reasons for maintaining it in a suitably modified form; and these reasons could theoretically be expressed in financial terms, even though it might be impossible precisely to weigh the saving in hospitalization against the expenditure on public teaching. It is not the business of this essay to decide who shall meet the bill or what the annual dimensions of the bill might be. We are for the moment solely concerned with the conditions necessary for a successful peacetime campaign, for if we do not determine the right conditions before we start we shall spend whatever money we spend to no useful purpose.

A NATIONAL DENTAL SERVICE

TEVIOT COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The White Paper on a National Health Service said that there must be some temporary exceptions to the comprehensiveness of the service, and dentistry was mentioned as the first of these, owing to the insufficient numbers of dentists to serve the whole population. The Interdepartmental Committee on Dentistry, which has been dealing with the question of adequacy among other matters, has now issued an interim report.¹ The committee was set up in the early part of 1943 under the chairmanship of Lord Teviot, and consists of twenty members, one-half of whom hold a dental qualification. Its outstanding recommendations are:

- (1) The setting up of a comprehensive dental service to form an integral part of, and to operate simultaneously with, the National Health Service.
- (2) A general dental practitioner service analogous to the proposed general medical practitioner service in the Government scheme.
- (3) Experimental dental health centres in suitable areas.
- (4) A special effort to improve the teeth of expectant and nursing mothers, children, and adolescents.

Dental Man-power

Some 15,000 dentists are at present on the *Register*, but owing to the large admission of bona-fide dentists at the time of the Act of 1921 the *Register* is at present heavily over-weighted in the higher age groups, and during the next few years there will be a rapid loss of names by retirement. The average annual admission to the profession in recent pre-war years was 340, but during the war years the annual student entry has fallen to below 300, and 10% of students, for one reason or another, do not become dentists. These figures are not nearly sufficient to maintain the *Register* even at its present strength. An actuarial table is appended to the report showing that if the number entering the profession annually were raised to 400 in the years immediately ahead, and later to 425, it would still be 30 years before the present effective total number of the profession would be increased. "This," says the committee, "is an alarming forecast."

At present the career of dentistry is relatively unattractive to young people in comparison with other professions, especially medicine. The work is apt to appear unpleasant and its scope restricted, at all events until the scientific interest of it begins to be appreciated, and there is not much opportunity for specialization. There are five dental schools in London, seven in the English Provinces, three in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, and four in Eire. Some of the schools, like the English provincial ones, are closely associated with universities; others, like the London schools, with hospitals.

Dental Needs and the Present Services

The report says bluntly that "the state of dental health of our population is bad, and its effect on their general health is bad." An average of 90% of the male recruits to the Army in the present war needed dental treatment on enlistment. Of a group of 10,000 Scottish five-year-old children, only 1,000 were found free from dental caries. One approved society in one year found that 12.2% of young persons between 16 and 19 who applied for treatment needed full upper and lower dentures.

In the last pre-war year about 3½ million elementary-school children in England and Wales were dentally inspected; some

2½ million were recorded as requiring treatment, and about 1,600,000 had some treatment. The majority of local authorities, as part of their maternity and child welfare services, make some provision—in most cases meagre—for dental attention. Dentistry is an additional benefit under National Health Insurance, and roughly two-thirds of insured persons are entitled to it, but only 800,000 (less than 7%) claim it on the average each year. "It is a common experience in insurance dentistry that people do not resort to treatment until a stage when the teeth are unsalvageable, and then there is gross oral sepsis."

The broad picture of the present position is of a number of public dental services not closely related, and each with shortcomings, and of a public ill educated and apathetic in regard to the care of the teeth. The committee believes that fear of pain and lack of understanding of the importance of dental health are more effective deterrents than the economic factor.

Steps towards an Adequate Service

In making its recommendations the Teviot Committee distinguishes between the *need* for treatment and the *demand* for treatment. If the demand for treatment rose to somewhere near equality with the need there would obviously be a shortage of dentists. It must be the object of policy to increase demand in this way, but the whole question of the shortage of dentists turns upon the probable pace of increase in demand and supply.

"If, for example, a total annual demand rate of the order of 10% to 20% were the experience in the next few years, and if vigorous measures were taken to make the career of dentistry attractive, we foresee no substantial shortage. If, on the other hand, the annual demand rate rose rapidly to 40% or 50% and the numbers of the profession showed no rapid increase, the shortage would be very serious."

The committee urges the acceptance of the principle of a comprehensive service, one which, while not wholly adequate, will be equally available to all who demand it, and will be paid for by the community as a whole. It regards dentistry as an integral part of the comprehensive health service, a fact which in itself, with the prospect of plenty of work, adequate pay, good conditions of service, and the knowledge that dentistry was making an essential contribution to national health, would encourage the recruitment of young men and women to the profession.

The sharpest point in the mobilization of dental forces should be the dental care of expectant and nursing mothers, children, and adolescents. The committee looks for a large expansion of dental services available to school-children (under Section 48 of the new Education Act) as one of the essential foundations of a comprehensive service. It also hopes that employers will give their workers, particularly adolescents, time off without loss of pay for dental treatment.

Fundamental points in any new comprehensive public dental service will include the following:

- (1) No compulsion on any dentist to enter the public service.
- (2) Any dentist should be free to engage, either whole-time or part-time, in the service or any branch of it in which there is opportunity to serve.
- (3) A patient must have free choice of dentist and liberty to alter his choice if he so desires.
- (4) The proposals are not intended to interfere with the free right of everybody to seek dental advice and care through private arrangements and by private fee.

Family Dentists: Health Centres

The idea of a general dental practitioner service, analogous to the general medical practitioner service, available to all who wish to use it, and set up on the basis of the family, is put forward in the report. The idea of the family dentist is as yet unfamiliar to a large part of the population; the committee thinks it should be developed and encouraged.

The setting up in suitable localities of dental health centres, providing facilities for team work, is recommended. These centres should be experimental, and the profession should be consulted as to their development, size, siting, internal arrangement, design, and equipment. There must be no compulsion on dentists to work in such centres or on patients to receive their dental treatment in them.

Finally, there are some recommendations on dental health education. The most important factor in such education will be the quality of the treatment given. The dental health centre

¹ London: H.M. Stationery Office. (6d.)