

FABLES ON LABELS

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. MURIEL BELL, Nutritionist to the Health Department).

WE are all familiar with the type of advertising that skillfully plays on our ignorance as well as our knowledge; that credits our liver with functions unknown to the physiologist, or uses such meaningless phrases as "tones up the system," "shakes up the kidney"—when it would be better if it were our brains or critical powers that were toned or shaken up.

I recently listened to an address by one of the staff of the Department of Home Science on the subject of "Consumer Economics." On the table was a packet of a well-known food, and during the course of her talk, the lecturer used this as an illustration of what the consumer wants to know—she read out the analysis on the label.

A short time after that, the chemist working for a commercial firm came in with a new product on which a similar analysis was inscribed. I commended him for his courage in persuading his firm into this innovation; for, once a statement is put on a label, it has to be able to stand up to an investigation and conform to what it declares itself to contain. He said that his firm had been nervous about the risk that they are taking in this new departure, for they were well aware that, for no known reason, foodstuffs vary in their value—probably according to season, soil and climate. From the consumer's point of view, it is certainly a step in the right direction to be able to read on the jar the actual contents in quantitative terms; much better than all the advertising jargon that is too frequently employed.

Things We Want To Know

We know that cereal foods contain carbohydrate, but we usually want to know also how much of the vitamin B1 is present after the manufacturer has finished his processing methods. Both for the sake of those who need roughage, and for the sake of those who cannot tolerate the branny particles in a cereal food, we also would like to know how much "crude fibre" is present. Ideally, then, a cereal food should let us know these points as well as its protein, carbohydrate, calories and minerals.

The American Medical Association has a good scheme for letting its members know what is the food value of proprietary preparations of foods on the market. Its Food and Nutrition Council examines the analysis that has been submitted by an accredited chemist, and if they think that it comes up to a good standard, they publish it in their journal under the heading "Accepted Foods"; these have been collected into a volume bearing that title.



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