Spencer Digby photograph

BETTY STAPLE
War gave her the chance

usually lunch-hour or at any rate daytime and they were packed with appreciative audiences. Let me give you an example of how much a concert means to an average audience. On one occasion Dame Myra Hess (who, by the way, was largely instrumental in organising lunch-hour concerts) was playing when the Air Raid siren started. Dame Myra just raised her hands from the piano. 'I hope the All Clear will wait until the end of the programme,' she said, and went on playing. No one stirred."

"Who attended these concerts?"

"All sorts of people came and all sorts of people played. Young musicians in the Forces got leave to come up to give concerts in London or another centre from time to time, and I always had the feeling that the audiences were truly appreciative. You might see anyone there—not just the highbrows, but office workers, mothers with their children, school teachers. . . ."

" . . . And Miss Betty Staple?"

"And Miss Betty Staple."

And I think we New Zealanders will also see Miss Betty Staple now, not as a distant representative of the Dominions Office, but as a real and live person interested in most of the things that we ourselves are doing.

—S.S.

Advice on Health (No. 263)

THE MAGIC OF LIFE

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

A FAMOUS physiologist, Rubner, has said that "protein contains the magic of life." It is a fact that all of the functions of living things depend on the presence of proteins, a word which, appropriately, comes from the Greek word meaning "first." One has only to recall that proteins play a fundamental part in such things as muscular contraction, in the development of immunity to disease, and in the formation of enzymes, to realise their importance. The medical literature at the moment contains even more about proteins than about vitamins, which is saying a good deal! This re-emphasis on the outstanding role of proteins has arisen from recent studies on the effect of illness on the need for protein, and conversely, of the effect of protein in facilitating recovery from illness.

We have always said that protein is required for growth and for repair. The part played by protein in repair has taken on an added significance since it has been discovered that any sort of injury (for example, burns, or fractures, or an operation), or any sort of infection is accompanied by destruction and elimination of a surprisingly large amount of the body's protein. As yet this process is not fully understood and meantime it is referred to as the "toxic destruction of protein."

Milk Is Outstanding

Its significance from the practical point of view is that no one can expect to undergo rapid convalescence unless plenty of protein of good quality, such as is contained in milk (liquid or dried or dried skim), eggs, lean meat, or cheese, is taken by the patient, to make amends for that which was destroyed during the disease or injury. Physicians are writing testimonies to the increased speed of recovery when the patient is given plenty of protein of animal origin. Among these, milk has shown itself to be outstanding; for example, two pints of milk per day has been the only concession allowed to patients with tuberculosis in Britain under rationing—they get no extra meat or butter or cream—and yet their recovery rate has proved satisfactory. Milk has also been outstanding in its usefulness in helping recovery from epidemic jaundice, in which condition it is essential for helping the liver to recover.

We know that protein is required for the formation of antibodies, those substances that confer immunity to disease-causing organisms. We know too that when there are carbuncles or abscesses, there is much protein lost through the pus that is drained away; or when there are burns, the fluid that exudes is full of protein. All of this has to be made good, and it may take a long time if the patient has, as is only natural in a person who is ill, something of a repugnance for food. The need for making foods appetising is therefore doubly emphasised, in order to hasten the process of repair.

So important is this aid to recovery that, where there is any difficulty about getting the proteins digested by the patient, physicians are making use of pre-digested proteins, mixtures of amino-acids, the component parts of protein, and even injecting them. This type of treatment is still in its infancy (and, as yet, satisfactory preparations are not available in any great quantity), but probably it will be only a matter of time before it is brought to a greater state of efficiency.